

RECONVENING

**NOVEMBER
1-4, 2023**

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
+
WESTIN JACKSON
+
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX



1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

Presented by the Margaret Walker Center & Jackson State University

Mellon
Foundation is proud to support
Jackson State University's
Margaret Walker Center.
Congratulations on the
50th Anniversary of the
Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival.

W E L C O M E

Dear attendees,

It is my immense pleasure to welcome you to the 50th Anniversary Reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival. First organized by Margaret Walker in 1973, the original festival featured a host of Black women writers in a groundbreaking series of events, lectures, public readings, and receptions. This year's event will build on that historic moment and celebrate the powerful legacies of Phillis Wheatley, Margaret Walker, and Black women's writing.

We are thrilled to host conversations between original participants of the 1973 festival and the new vanguard of Black women writers who are preserving our cultures and communities with their words. As Margaret Walker might say, we will "let a second generation full of courage issue forth." This festival promises dynamic intergenerational engagement, electric creative performances, and innovative scholarly presentations. As a festival goer, you are in store for an iconic convening in an historic city. I hope you will not only enjoy the presentations, performances, and panels, but that you will take full advantage of all that Jackson has to offer. Enjoy our art, music, food, culture, and, most of all, our warm and talented people.

Welcome and thank you for being a part of history with us.

In the spirit of creativity and hospitality,



EBONY LUMUMBA, PH.D.
2023 FESTIVAL CHAIR

4	HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	10	THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2
5	WHEATLEY+WALKER	16	FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3
6	MAP	22	SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4
7	SCHEDULE	23	2023 SPONSORS
8	WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1	24	SPECIAL THANKS

The Margaret Walker Center proudly hosts the 50th Anniversary Reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival. The festival celebrates the legacy of Phillis Wheatley, Margaret Walker, and the artistic and intellectual excellence of Black women writers through three days of intergenerational conversations, scholarly analysis, and creative writing.

In 1973, Margaret Walker hosted a groundbreaking conference for Black women writers for the bicentennial of Phillis Wheatley's work, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. Hosted by her Black Studies Institute founded five years earlier at Jackson State, thirty of these leading women participated in a series of events on campus.

Fifty years later, attendees from the original festival, including the likes of Alice Walker and Sonia Sanchez, have returned for a reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival and intergenerational conversations with writers like Nikole Hannah-Jones, Jesmyn Ward, and Imani Perry.

In all, 21 women of color will participate in keynote events for the festival's 50th anniversary from November 1 to 4, 2023, and over 700 people from around the world will attend.



1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

W H E A T L E Y + W A L K E R



MARGARET WALKER WITH ELIZABETH CATLETT'S BUST OF PHILLIS WHEATLEY, 1973

In 1773, **PHILLIS WHEATLEY** published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, the first authored book of poetry by an African American woman. Before enslavers kidnapped and sold a young Wheatley in Boston, she spent her early life in West Africa. An avid learner, she began composing poetry as an enslaved girl, later publishing and reciting her work before a global audience. Wheatley became a renowned poet who inspired many Black women writers, including Margaret Walker.

MARGARET WALKER was raised in New Orleans and graduated from Northwestern University in Illinois. Originally her MA thesis at the University of Iowa, her collection of poetry, *For My People*, received the 1942 Yale University Younger Poets Award, and, in 1966, her dissertation became the classic novel *Jubilee*. On the English faculty at Jackson State for thirty years (1949-1979), she founded her Black Studies Institute in 1968. As Director, she organized several conferences, including the 1973 Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival.

M A P + S C H E D U L E

The Jackson Convention Complex will host this 50th Anniversary Reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival and facilitate the movement of our 700 registered attendees through our concurrent sessions, keynote conversations, and exhibitors alley.

All day-time programs are at the Jackson Convention Complex. Evening programs and receptions are at nearby venues – Wednesday at the Westin Jackson hotel, Thursday and Friday at Jackson State University – with shuttle service available. Weather permitting, the Thursday program will be held outdoors. Attire for the entire festival is “business casual.”

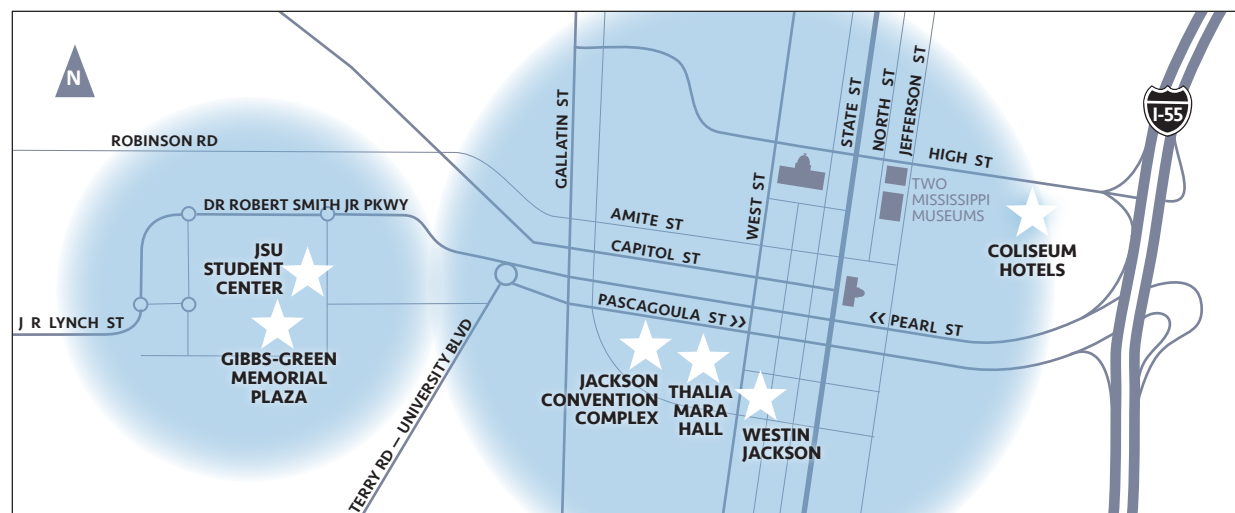
SHUTTLE SERVICE

A shuttle bus will be available on Wednesday through Friday to transport participants to festival destinations.

Pickup / drop off points include:

- Holiday Inn Express Coliseum (Coliseum hotel)
- Hampton Inn Coliseum (Coliseum hotel)
- Westin Jackson (Westin)
- Jackson Convention Complex (JCC)
- Jackson State University (JSU)

See full **SHUTTLE SCHEDULE** on next page.



WEDNESDAY NOV. 1

12:00 – 6:00 p.m.
General Registration
WESTIN JACKSON
HOTEL LOBBY

6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Honoring the
1973 Participants
WESTIN JACKSON
HOTEL BALLROOM

7:30 – 9:30 p.m.
Festival Welcome
WESTIN JACKSON
HOTEL FOYER

THURSDAY NOV. 2

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
General Registration
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Exhibitors Alley
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:30 – 9:45 a.m.
Concurrent Sessions I
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.
A Tribute to Phillis Wheatley
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
THEATER (3RD FLOOR)

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions II
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

12:30 – 2:15 p.m.
Banned Books
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
BALLROOM (1ST FLOOR)

2:30 – 3:45 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions III
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
From Africa to America
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
GIBBS-GREEN MEMORIAL PLAZA

7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
1973 Photography
by Roy Lewis
Reception and Exhibit
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
PLAZA & JOHNSON HALL

FRIDAY NOV. 3

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
General Registration
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Exhibitors Alley
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:30 – 9:45 a.m.
Concurrent Sessions IV
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.
Our People
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
THEATER (3RD FLOOR)

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions V
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

12:30 – 2:30 p.m.
Our Mothers' Gardens:
A Womanist Legacy
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
BALLROOM (1ST FLOOR)

2:45 – 4:00 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions VI
JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
A Tribute to
Margaret Walker
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER THEATER

7:00 – 10:00 p.m.
Festivities
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER BALLROOM

SATURDAY NOV. 4

7:30 – 9:00 p.m.
American Constellation Concert
TICKETED EVENT AT THALIA MARA HALL

SHUTTLE SCHEDULE

WED. NOV. 1

Coliseum Hotels to Westin
5:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Westin to Coliseum Hotels
7:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m., 9:30 p.m.

THU. NOV. 2

Coliseum Hotels to JCC
7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Westin to JCC
7:45 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

JCC to Coliseum Hotels
2:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Coliseum Hotels to JSU
5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Westin to JSU
5:15 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.

JSU to Coliseum Hotels
7:15 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

FRI. NOV. 3

Coliseum Hotels to JCC
7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Westin to JCC
7:45 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

JCC to Coliseum Hotels
2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Coliseum Hotels to JSU
5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Westin to JSU
5:15 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.

JSU to Coliseum Hotels
7:15 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Buses run on a loop
on Thursday and Friday.

Schedule updates
may be necessary
during the festival.



presented by



WEDNESDAY
6:30 P.M.

Honoring the 1973 Participants

OPENING PROGRAM

WESTIN JACKSON HOTEL BALLROOM

6:00 p.m. doors open
6:30 - 7:30 p.m. program

Tonea Stewart | Vinie Burrows | Carole Gregory

Salute three of the original participants in the 1973 Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival, and hear their perspectives. Playwrights Carole Gregory and Vinie Burrows will make presentations, and actress Tommie “Tonea” Stewart will offer reflections on the inaugural event.

Photographer Roy Lewis who captured the 1973 event on film will be on hand, and Carolyn Denard, founder of the Toni Morrison Society, will make a special presentation.

12:00 – 6:00 p.m.
General Registration

WESTIN JACKSON
HOTEL LOBBY

6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Honoring the
1973 Participants

WESTIN JACKSON
HOTEL BALLROOM

7:30 – 9:30 p.m.
Festival Welcome

WESTIN JACKSON
HOTEL FOYER



TONEA STEWART

A Jackson State graduate, Tommie “Tonea” Stewart is a professional actress, play director, tenured Professor, and retired Dean of the College of Visual & Performing Arts at Alabama State University. She was the first African American female to receive a doctorate from the Florida State School of Theatre.



VINIE BURROWS

Vinie Burrows is an award-winning Broadway actress, who has created her own plays and one-woman shows performed in over 6,000 theaters across four continents. She won the 1986 Paul Robeson Award and has been recognized by the International Communications Association for her Outstanding Contribution to the Arts and the Community.



CAROLE GREGORY

Carole Gregory has taught at New York University, Tufts, and CUNY. Her poems have been published in more than ten anthologies, and she has written eleven plays as a member of the Frank Silvera Writer’s Workshop. Her newest play is *Phillis Wheatley Speaks Through the Ages*.

“
Soon I settled on twenty prominent Black women
writing and publishing poetry.
Why not invite them to come and celebrate
Phillis Wheatley’s Bicentennial?
Thus was born the idea.”

— MARGARET WALKER 1974 —

WEDNESDAY
7:30 P.M.

Festival Welcome

RECEPTION

WESTIN JACKSON HOTEL FOYER
7:30 - 9:30 p.m.

After the opening program, take some time to meet your fellow festival-goers in the hotel foyer where you’ll find light hors d’oeuvres, beverages, and a few celebrities.



8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

General Registration

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Exhibitors Alley

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:30 – 9:45 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions I

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

A Tribute to Phillis Wheatley

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
THEATER (3RD FLOOR)

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions II

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

12:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Banned Books

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
BALLROOM (1ST FLOOR)

2:30 – 3:45 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions III

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

From Africa to America

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
GIBBS-GREEN MEMORIAL PLAZA

7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

1973 Photography

by Roy Lewis

Reception and Exhibit

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
PLAZA & JOHNSON HALL

THURSDAY
8:30 A.M.

Concurrent Sessions I

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

8:30 – 9:45 a.m.

Mentorship through Writing in the Black Female Intellectual Tradition

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX 201/202
April Caddell, Highlander Research and Education Center
Alison Caddell, Purdue University
Gabrielle Smith, Texas Woman's University
Chair: Danielle Littlefield, Jackson State University

Dear Sister: Black Literary Womanhood and Kinship

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 203/204
Ravá Shelyn Chapman, Emory University
Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper, Spelman College
Kemeshia Randle Swanson, Gardner-Webb University
Chair: Angela Stewart, Jackson State University

Creative Reflections on Phillis Wheatley

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 205/206
drea brown, Texas State University
Ming Joi Washington, Spelman College
Sullivan Summer, Brooklyn Poets
Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, University of Kansas
Chair: Kedra James, Tougaloo College

Interpreting Resistance and Ancestral Preservation of Afro-Latin Spiritual Systems through Visual Documentation

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 207/208
Vanessa Charlot, University of Mississippi
Charlene Desir, Nova Southeastern University
Marquita Smith, University of Mississippi
Chair: Jaylin Smith, University of Mississippi

THURSDAY
10:00 A.M.

A Tribute to Phillis Wheatley

POETRY READING AND CONVERSATION

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX THEATER

10:00 a.m.

Sonia Sanchez | Imani Perry | Joanne V. Gabbin

In a tribute to Phillis Wheatley,
poet Sonia Sanchez,
an original 1973 participant,
will be in conversation
with National Book Award winner Imani Perry
and Joanne Gabbin, founder of the
Furious Flower Poetry Center
at James Madison University.



SONIA SANCHEZ

Sonia Sanchez is the author of over twenty volumes of poetry as well as plays and children's books. She has lectured widely across the United States and abroad. In 1977, she began teaching at Temple University and held the Laura Carnell Chair in English there until her retirement in 1999.



IMANI PERRY

Imani Perry is the Hughes-Rogers Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and *Harper's*. Her latest book, *South to America*, won the National Book Award. She is a 2023 MacArthur "Genius Grant" recipient.



JOANNE V. GABBIN

Professor of English at James Madison University, Joanne V. Gabbin hosted the 1994 Furious Flower Poetry Conference and became executive director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center, the first academic center dedicated to Black poetry. She was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent.



1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

“
Instead of exploring the past
to understand the present,
we've examined the present, and
Ms. Phillis Wheatley stands out
in bold relief.”

— MARI EVANS 1973 —

THURSDAY
11:15 A.M.

Concurrent Sessions II

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Black Womxn Writing Communities

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 201/202
Tiffany Caesar, San Francisco State University
Desireé R. Melonas, University of California, Riverside
Charlotte C. Teague, Alabama A&M University
Chair: Charlotte C. Teague, Alabama A&M University

Autobiography, Storytelling, Archives, and Power

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 203/204
Latrice Johnson, University of Mississippi
Laura Miller, Jackson State University
Magana Kabugi, Fisk University
Chair: Kristina N. Phillips, Jackson State University

Texas Southern University Collective: African American Women Transforming the Houston Art Scene

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 205/206
Analisa Esther, Texas Southern University
Kaylene McCoy-Mosley, Texas Southern University
Rita Reyes, Texas Southern University
Chair: Alvia Wardlaw, Texas Southern University

50 Years Later: Reflections on the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 207/208
Marta Werbanowska, University of Vienna
Morgan McComb, University of Mississippi
Alexandria Russell, Harvard University
Chair: Preselfannie McDaniels, Jackson State University

THURSDAY
12:30 P.M.

Banned Books

LUNCHEON AND CONVERSATION

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX BALLROOM

12:30 p.m.

Angie Thomas | Paula J. Giddings | Nic Stone

At this seated luncheon, Mississippian Angie Thomas and Nic Stone, both acclaimed writers whose works have been “banned,” will discuss the power of Black women’s voices with original 1973 participant and African Studies scholar Paula J. Giddings, who will share thoughts on Margaret Walker and the 1973 Festival.



1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS



ANGIE THOMAS

Angie Thomas holds a BFA in Creative Writing. Her debut novel, *The Hate U Give*, debuted at #1 on the New York Times bestseller list and became a critically acclaimed film. Her second and third novels, *On the Come Up* and *Concrete Rose*, are also #1 New York Times bestsellers.



PAULA J. GIDDINGS

Paula J. Giddings is Elizabeth A. Woodson 1922 Professor Emerita of Africana Studies at Smith College. She is the author, most recently, of the biography of Ida B. Wells, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*. In 2017, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.



NIC STONE

A Spelman College graduate, Nic Stone is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Dear Martin*. Her books include *Dear Justyce*, *Blackout*, *Whiteout*, and middle-grade novels, *Clean Getaway* and *How to Be a (Young) Antiracist*, all New York Times bestsellers. Her most recent novel is *Chaos Theory*.

“
This afternoon we are going to experience life-giving, life-sustaining, a combination of the past and the present, the root and the flower, tradition and newest.”

— PAULA J. GIDDINGS 1973 —

THURSDAY
2:30 P.M.

Concurrent Sessions III

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

2:30 – 3:45 p.m.

“Wrong is Not my Name”: Practicing Archival Justice for Black Women and Girls in Creative Work and Scholarship

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 201/202
N’Kosi Oates, James Madison University
Chet’la Sebree, George Washington University
Courtney Faye Taylor, Agnes Scott College
Chair: L. Renée, Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University

Black Women’s Literary Friendships

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 203/204
Courtney Thorsson, University of Oregon
Shanna G. Benjamin, Wake Forest University
Soyica Colbert, Georgetown University
Dana A. Williams, Howard University
Chair: Brandi Newkirk-Turner, Jackson State University

Working through the Federal Writers’ Project: Margaret Walker and Beyond – Poetry, Place, Archive, and Representation in the Black Metropolis

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 205/206
Alphine Jefferson, Randolph-Macon College
Alan Harris Stein, Oral History Association
Seretha Williams, Augusta University
Chair: Alissa Rae Funderburk, Jackson State University

The Afterlive(s) of Phillis Wheatley

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 207/208
Alonge O. Clarkson, Temple University
Candis Pizzetta, Jackson State University
C. Sade Turnipseed, Jackson State University
Shanna Smith, Jackson State University
Chair: Diane Williams, Mississippi Arts Commission (retired)

THURSDAY
6:00 P.M.

From Africa to America

OUTDOOR CONVERSATION AND RECEPTION

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
GIBBS-GREEN MEMORIAL PLAZA

6:00 p.m.

Nikole Hannah-Jones | Eve L. Ewing | Dana A. Williams

Listen to award-winning scholars and writers – Nikole Hannah-Jones, Eve Ewing, and Dana Williams – pay homage to Phillis Wheatley’s cultural heritage and journey from Africa to America as well as her poetry that acknowledges that trajectory.

Stay to enjoy refreshments and the vibe at the heart of the JSU campus.



NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES

Nikole Hannah-Jones is the Pulitzer Prize-winning creator of *The 1619 Project*. Among her honors, she has received the MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship. She serves as the Knight Chair of Race and Journalism at Howard University. She is also the co-founder of the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting.



EVE L. EWING

Writer, scholar and cultural organizer, Eve L. Ewing is an associate professor in the Department of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity at the University of Chicago. She is the award-winning author of four books, and her work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New York Times*.



DANA A. WILLIAMS

Dana A. Williams is Professor of African American literature and Dean of the Graduate School at Howard University. Past president of the College Language Association, she has held faculty positions at Louisiana State University, Northwestern University, and Duke University. Her latest book, *Toni at Random*, will be published in 2024.

“
Things that are important to me,
I have decided will be done. One of the most
important in my life is Margaret Walker.
And I came back from Africa because Walker
asked me to come back home from Africa.”

— NIKKI GIOVANNI 1973 —

THURSDAY
7:00 P.M.

1973 Photography by Roy Lewis

RECEPTION AND EXHIBITION OPENING

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
GIBBS-GREEN MEMORIAL PLAZA & JOHNSON HALL

7:00 p.m.

After the evening’s gathering in the plaza, stroll to nearby Johnson Hall to see an exhibition of original photography by Roy Lewis from the 1973 Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival.



Photographer and filmmaker Roy Lewis was born in Natchez, Mississippi. His photo and film documentation of civil rights marches, landmark events, musicians, religious leaders, and sports legends has earned his work a place in the National Museum of African American History and Culture, as well as numerous awards.



1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

General Registration

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Exhibitors Alley

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
MAIN LOBBY (1ST FLOOR)

8:30 – 9:45 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions IV

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Our People

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
THEATER (3RD FLOOR)

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions V

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

12:30 – 2:30 p.m.

*Our Mothers' Gardens:
A Womanist Legacy*

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
BALLROOM (1ST FLOOR)

2:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions VI

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX
ROOMS 201-208 (2ND FLOOR)

6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

*A Tribute to
Margaret Walker*

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER THEATER

7:00 – 10:00 p.m.

Festivities

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER BALLROOM

FRIDAY
8:30 A.M.

Concurrent Sessions IV

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.

Remembering Phillis Wheatley: Mothering Literary Traditions

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 201/202

Stephanie Rambo, George Mason University

Nicole Carr, Texas A&M University – San Antonio

Wendy Raphael Roberts, University at Albany – SUNY

Laura Vrana, University of South Alabama

Chair: Miranda Freeman, Tougaloo College

My 'Tu' Lips Quip:

Critical Perspectives on Language in Black Women's Writing

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 203/204

Brandice P. Walker, Howard University

Victoria M. Washington, Texas Christian University

Kaelyn Conley, Jackson State University

Sarah Jenkins, Howard University

Paola Yuli, Howard University

Chair: Shanna Smith, Jackson State University

And the Beat Goes On: Young Writers Write the Future

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 205/206

Kaitlyn Taylor, Jackson State University

Treasure White, Jackson State University

Grace Ann Elinski, Jackson State University

Chair: RaShell Smith-Spears, Jackson State University

The Living Legacy of Margaret Walker

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 207/208

C. Liegh McInnis, Psychedelic Literature

Bria Paige, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Piper Huguley, Clark Atlanta University

Chair: Garrad Lee, Jackson State University

FRIDAY
10:00 A.M.

Our People

PLENARY READING AND CONVERSATION

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX THEATER

10:00 a.m.

Jesmyn Ward | Charlayne Hunter-Gault | Danielle Littlefield

Through the lens of Margaret Walker's poem
"For My People,"

Jesmyn Ward will examine Black women's
commitment to their communities

in conversation with

Charlayne Hunter-Gault, whose book,
My People, explores her five-decade career.

Writer and creative writing professor

Danielle Littlefield will moderate.



JESMYN WARD

MacArthur "Genius Grant" recipient Jesmyn Ward is a professor of creative writing at Tulane University. She is the first woman and first person of color to win two National Book Awards for her novels *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Her latest novel is *Let Us Descend*.



CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT

Charlayne Hunter-Gault desegregated the University of Georgia (1961). An award-winning journalist, she joined PBS's *McNeil-Lehrer Newshour* (1978). She became NPR's chief correspondent in Africa (1997), and CNN's Johannesburg bureau chief (1999). Her latest book is *My People: Five Decades of Writing about Black Lives*.



DANIELLE LITTLEFIELD

An Assistant Professor at Jackson State University, Danielle L. Littlefield writes narratives of Black women in a new, urban South. Her work appears in *New Voices*, *Trouble the Waters: Tales from the Deep Blue*, and *Illmatic Consequences*. She is Fiction Editor at *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora*.



1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

“
*We started to read Margaret Walker.
We used to start into any program with
'For My People.' If you understand
that we weren't just crazy people, we began
to talk about the history of our people.*”

— SONIA SANCHEZ 1973 —

FRIDAY
11:15 A.M.

Concurrent Sessions V

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Black Women Writers and Orators in the Nineteenth Century

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 201/202

Tikenya Foster-Singletary, Clark Atlanta University

Olivia Simoni, Duke University

Lauren Barnes, Penn State University

Chair: Christina Thomas, Jackson State University

For Their People:

21st Century Creative Reinterpretations of Phillis Wheatley and Margaret Walker

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 203/204

Ade Solanke, Spora Stories, University of Greenwich

Randy Klein, Composer/Pianist

Barbara Brewster Lewis, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Chair: Harry Mathurin-Cecil, Jackson State University

Original Poetry

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 205/206

Abhijit Sarmah, University of Georgia

Madison 'Mocha' Hunter, University of Memphis

Jasmine Stansberry, University of Alabama

Janeth R. Jackson, University of Mississippi

Chair: helen crump, Jackson State University

Phillis Wheatley Speaks Across the Ages: A Staged Reading

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 207/208

Written by Carole E. Gregory, City University of New York

Directed by Yolanda Williams, Jackson State University

Performed by Students of the Jackson State Department of Speech Communication and Theatre

Chair: Yolanda Williams, Jackson State University

FRIDAY
12:30 P.M.

Our Mothers' Gardens: A Womanist Legacy

LUNCHEON AND KEYNOTE CONVERSATION

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX BALLROOM

12:30 p.m.

Alice Walker | Ebony Lumumba

At the 1973 Festival, Alice Walker delivered the basis of her seminal collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, which recognized the intersectionality of Black women's experiences. Ebony Lumumba, 2023 festival chair and acclaimed scholar, will guide the conversation.

The seated luncheon will be preceded by a brief presentation of the Margaret Walker Center Feasibility Study.



ALICE WALKER

Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and the National Book Award for *The Color Purple* in 1983. Her books have sold more than fifteen million copies. She read the essay that became *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* at the 1973 Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival.



EBONY LUMUMBA

Ebony Lumumba is an associate professor of English at Jackson State University, where she chairs the department of English and Modern Languages. She received her PhD in English Literature from the University of Mississippi and graduated magna cum laude from Spelman College with a Bachelor of Arts in English.

FRIDAY
2:45 P.M.

Concurrent Sessions VI

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

2:45 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Black Radio at HBCUs: Engaging and Sustaining Communities

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 201/202
Jocelyn Robinson, WYSO/Miami Valley Public Media-HBCU Radio Preservation Project

Marquita Smith, University of Mississippi

Dorothy Bland, University of North Texas

Chair: Delila Nakaidinae, University of Mississippi

Teaching Wheatley in the University Classroom: A Conversation Among Poets and Scholars

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 203/204
drea brown, Texas State University

Kwoya Fagin Maples, University of Alabama

Sam Plasencia, Colby College

Caroline Wigginton, University of Mississippi

Chair: Derrick Harriell, University of Mississippi

Original Creative Writing

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 205/206
Yolanda Wisher and Trapeta B. Mayson, The Clearing Collective

Juhanna Rogers, Goddard College

Theron Wilkerson, Auburn University

Chair: Brittany Myburgh, Jackson State University

Writing In & Through the Legacy of Black Women Poets

JACKSON CONVENTION COMPLEX ROOM 207/208

Patricia Smith, Princeton University

Duriel E. Harris, Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora at Illinois State University

Arisa White, Colby College

Lauren K. Alleyne, Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University

Chair: Lauren K. Alleyne, Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University



“
It's called
'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens'
and it is a tribute
to the creativity
of the Black woman.”

— ALICE WALKER 1973 —

1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

FRIDAY
6:00 P.M.

A Tribute to Margaret Walker

READING AND CONVERSATION

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER THEATER

6:00 p.m.

Maryemma Graham | Shelly C. Lowe | Maria Rosario Jackson | Monique Davis

Enjoy insights from two of the nation's most prominent cultural leaders and Margaret Walker's biographer. National Endowment for the Arts Chair Maria Rosario Jackson, National Endowment for the Humanities Chair Shelly C. Lowe, and Maryemma Graham will discuss Walker's legacy, Black women's cultural contributions, and the role of federal agencies.

Moderator Monique Davis is Director of the Center for Art and Public Exchange at the Mississippi Museum of Art.



“
It started to get into
my mind how interesting,
how difficult and
how glorious it is
to be Black woman writer,
painter or whatever...”

— MARGARET WALKER 1973 —

1973 PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
ROY LEWIS



MARYEMMA GRAHAM

Maryemma Graham is University Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Kansas and Founding Director of the History of Black Writing (HBW). She is the author of twelve books, including *The House Where My Soul Lives: The Life of Margaret Walker*, published by Oxford University Press in 2022.



SHELLY C. LOWE

Shelly C. Lowe is Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is a citizen of the Navajo Nation and grew up on the Navajo Reservation in Ganado, Arizona. She has served as a trustee on the board for the National Museum of the American Indian.



MARIA ROSARIO JACKSON

In 2022, Maria Rosario Jackson became the first African American and Mexican American woman to serve as Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. With a doctorate in urban planning, she worked at the Urban Institute, where she was the founding director of the Culture, Creativity and Communities Program.



MONIQUE DAVIS

Monique Davis serves as the Director for the Center for Art and Public Exchange and the Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer at the Mississippi Museum of Art. She is a graduate of Howard University. She previously served as the Senior Program Manager for Parents for Public Schools of Jackson.

FRIDAY
7:00 P.M.

Festivities

RECEPTION

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT CENTER BALLROOM A

7:00 p.m.

Join us upstairs, after the evening's Tribute to Margaret Walker, for an opportunity to mingle with honored guests, savor refreshments and relive notable moments of the festival with old friends and new acquaintances.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge all Indigenous peoples who once occupied the territory now considered Mississippi as well as the enslaved people of African descent forced to work here. While we cannot undo the harm of a long history of systemic inequities, we hope that our words and actions during this festival honor and respect the legacy of the land we stand on today.



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S A T U R D A Y N O V . 4

SATURDAY
7:30 P.M.

American Constellation

Full-orchestra, 100+ voices!

MISSISSIPPI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONCERT

THALIA MARA HALL

Advance tickets \$29 & up at MSOrchestra.com

6:30 p.m. Box Office opens
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Randy Klein | Aurelia Williams | Amanda Furdge

Choirs of Jackson State University, Mississippi College, and Rust College

7:30 – 9:00 p.m.
American Constellation
Concert
TICKETED EVENT AT
THALIA MARA HALL

In collaboration with the 50th Anniversary Reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival, the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra presents an evening program which weds poetry, song, and twentieth-century American musical classics. Alice Walker’s “Remember Me?” and Sonia Sanchez’s “From a Black Feminist Conference: Reflections on Margaret Walker, Poet” will be read by local poet Amanda Furdge, side-by-side with musical settings of four Margaret Walker poems by award-winning composer/pianist Randy Klein, featuring the orchestra with Broadway and Off-Broadway singer/actress Aurelia Williams and the combined choirs of Jackson State University, Mississippi College, and Rust College.

Also on the program are Jessie Montgomery’s recent Black spiritual-based composition *Source Code*, George Gershwin’s jazzy *An American in Paris*, and Copland’s infectious *Rodeo*.

2 0 2 3 S P O N S O R S

The Margaret Walker Center is grateful for the support of all the sponsors of the 50th Anniversary Reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival. Without their generosity, this special celebration would not have been possible.



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Nearly two years ago, Margaret Walker Center staff hatched an idea to host a special event to mark the 50th anniversary of the iconic 1973 Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival. In partnership with the Department of English and Modern Languages at Jackson State, this reconvening was planned as a tribute to Wheatley, Walker, and the brilliance of Black women writers.

Identifying and reaching out to the original participants was the first step, and they were our first indication that the reconvening was going to be a popular proposal. Soon after, a wish list of more recent voices was created, and, as those women agreed to join the festival too, we began to solicit wide-ranging partnerships from individuals and organizations across the country.

For this event, we have over 700 registered attendees, close to 90 presenters from around the world, 24 concurrent sessions, and 21 women of color participating in seven keynote events.

We are grateful for the outpouring of support from everyone who contributed their ideas, time, and resources to making the 50th Anniversary Reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival a remarkable success.

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FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Dr. Rico D. Chapman
DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

50TH ANNIVERSARY RECONVENING OF THE PHILLIS WHEATLEY POETRY FESTIVAL

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CHAIR

Dr. Robert Lockett
PROJECT DIRECTOR

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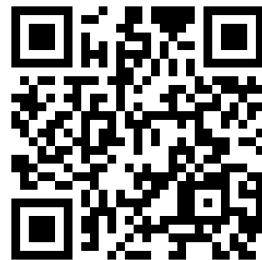


1973 PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROY LEWIS

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The 50th anniversary Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival
has been made possible in part
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Congratulations!

Best wishes to the Margaret Walker Center and Jackson State University on the 50th Anniversary of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival!

HBW
 HISTORY OF BLACK WRITING

This year, we're also happy to celebrate 250 years of Black Writing in the U.S., 55 years of the Margaret Walker Center, and 40 years of the History of Black Writing!

Connect with HBW at <http://hbw.ku.edu> or at the QR code here:

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MISSISSIPPI HUMANITIES

JACKSON NORTH COLLEGE

August 4, 1974

Dear Mrs. Norman:

We wish to again express our sincere thanks to you and the Phillis Wheatley Committee for the grant financial assistance for one of the support of our Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival. The \$1,000 grant made it possible for us to print the program for the festival which will be a historic event of this year's event.

Attached to this letter are three copies of the Chairman's report of the Phillis Wheatley Festival along with pictures and information of the festival activities. While you are awaiting the official report of the festival, we are so hoping that you will find this information of interest. We are so hoping that you will find this information of interest. We are so hoping that you will find this information of interest.

As soon as Dr. John Gregory has completed his work on the documentary film, I will forward this information to you. I do hope it will be of some help before we close out this project.

Again, many, many thanks for your kind assistance.

Very respectfully yours,
 Margaret W. Alexander
 Margaret Walker Alexander, Director

Below are names of poets on the original grant application

PHILLIS WHEATLEY POETRY FESTIVAL

POETS

1. Marion Alexander - Chicago, Illinois
2. Linda Brown Bragg - Greensboro, North Carolina
3. Carole Gregory Clemmons - New York City
4. Lucille Clifton - Baltimore, Maryland
5. Margaret Garner - Memphis, Tennessee
6. Mari Evans - Bloomington, Indiana
7. Sarah Webster Fabio - Oberlin, Ohio
8. Nikki Giovanni - New York City
9. June Jordan - East Hampton, New York
10. Audre Lorde - Staten Island, New York
11. Naomi Long Madgett - Ypsilanti, Michigan
12. Gloria C. Oden - Baltimore, Maryland
13. Carolyn M. Rodgers - Chicago, Illinois
14. Sonia Sanchez - Amherst, Massachusetts
15. Alice Walker - Jackson, Mississippi
16. Margaret Walker - Jackson, Mississippi
17. Malaika Ayo Wangara - Detroit, Michigan

We are proud to once again be a sponsor of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival

