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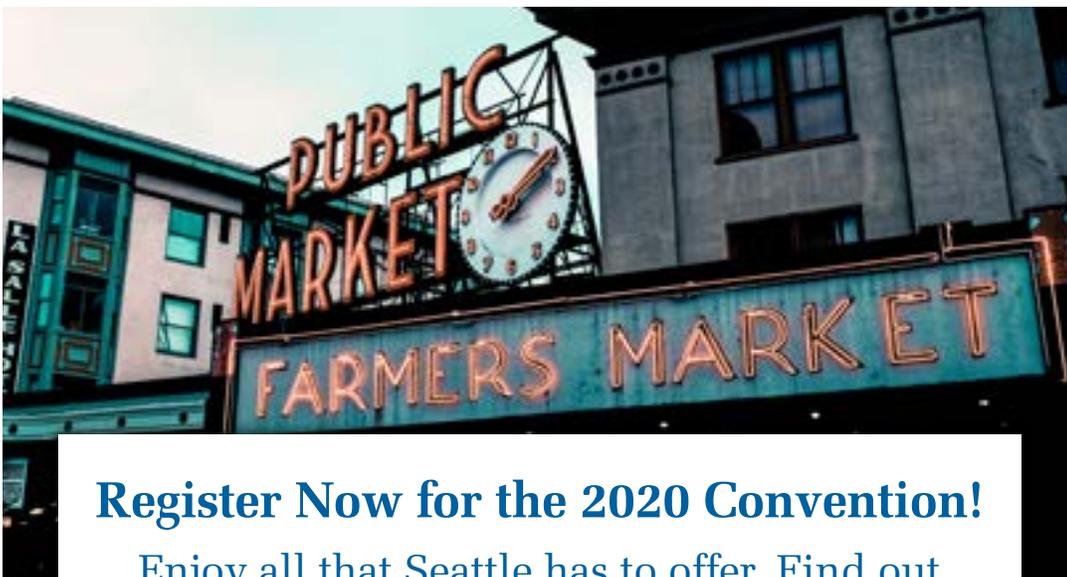
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Groundbreaking Cave Canem Foundation Recognized with Phyllis Franklin Award

There is no place on this planet, no ground, no air, no sanctuary, no wharf, no hermitage, no refuge, no time, like the one week each summer when Black poets descend on an unsuspecting space and it becomes Cave Canem.

—Nikky Finney, *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South*

This year's recipients of the Phyllis Franklin Award for Public Advocacy of the Humanities are Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady, founders of the Cave Canem Foundation, the preeminent home for African American poets, which has been profoundly transforming the world of contemporary literature since 1996. In choosing the Latin phrase *cave canem* (beware of dog), and the logo of a dog whose chain leash is broken, Derricotte and Eady hoped to symbolize their twofold mission: protecting poets of color so that they may write without fear and unleashing vital new voices into the literary world.

Cave Canem's flagship program is an annual writing retreat for thirty-six emerging African American poets who, once accepted, become fellows. Revered by its hundreds of past participants as transformative, the tuition-free residency offers unparalleled opportunities for writers of color to study with world-class poets and to join a community of peers. Since its first retreat more than twenty years ago, Cave Canem has grown into an influential movement with a renowned faculty and more than four hundred award-winning fellows nation-



Toi Derricotte



Cornelius Eady

wide. In addition to retreats, the foundation offers an array of programs that aim to support and promote the growth of African American poets. Cave Canem has published four anthologies; administers three prizes (the Cave Canem Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize, the Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady Chapbook Prize, and the Cave Canem Prize); curates two conversation series (Legacy Conversations and Poets on Craft); collaborates with eleven writing residencies; hosts a lecture series; facilitates the Poets Tour, which arranges readings and workshops for more than seventy fellows at museums, libraries, universities, festivals, and cultural organizations; and regularly offers low-cost or free writing workshops.

Cave Canem fellows have received numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Yale Younger Poets prize,

the Whiting Award, and the NAACP Image Award. Fellows have over 250 books in print and are represented in countless academic positions around the country. Notably, Cave Canem's model has inspired the genesis of several other organizations that foster the creation and cultivation of poets of color. In the words of the Cave Canem fellow and MLA member Geoffrey Davis, "for black writers, Cave Canem has intervened in a long and dangerous legacy of denying the worth of certain voices. For all writers, Cave Canem has offered a radical reminder that our greatest houses of literary influence are those built upon both a deep commitment to protecting the diversity of belonging and a deep commitment to celebrating the diversity of joy."

Toi Derricotte is professor emerita of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Toni Morrison and After

Comment on this column at
president.mla.hcommons.org.

ON THE MORNING OF 6 AUGUST 2019,

I was trying to find an appropriate topic for this column when the death of Toni Morrison was announced. In the hours that followed, I tracked the reaction to the passing of this icon of American letters across several time zones. On reading and reviewing the numerous tributes and obituaries, I was struck by three things.

First, there was the indisputable position Morrison had come to occupy in world literature and the influence she had on creative writing in the second half of the twentieth century. There was no tradition of writing—especially writing concerned with questions of historical memory, identity, and human dignity—left untouched by Morrison.

Second, Morrison's influence went beyond the world of scholars of literature and language; she touched the lives and experience of readers across languages and cultural geographies, including some with immense influence in the management of world affairs. I recall President Bill Clinton saying that Morrison's novels had taught him how to cope with life after a childhood and youth spent in "the trailer park." One of the first tributes to Morrison after her death was a piece in the London *Guardian* by Diana Abbott, a veteran of the fight for minority rights in Britain and the Shadow Home Secretary. Describing Morrison as "part of an extraordinary generation of African American women writers," Abbott underscored why she was "the most special": "She was the queen. To understand the impact she had on me you have to appreciate that I came of age in an era when there were very few black female role models."

Third, and perhaps more important for readers of this column, Morrison's works provided us with a handle to deal with the great moral problems of our time. In her novels and essays, she exposed the scab of racial violence, the haunting of a nation by its troubled past, and the abuse of the vulnerable by the powerful. Without planning to be so, Morrison had become the moral guardian of our times. Consider these words from *The Origins of Others*, one of what will now be described as Morrison's last works:

"In her novels and essays, she exposed the scab of racial violence, the haunting of a nation by its troubled past, and the abuse of the vulnerable by the powerful. Without planning to be so, Morrison had become the moral guardian of our times."

The spectacle of mass movement draws attention inevitably to the borders, the porous places, the vulnerable points where the concept of home is seen as being menaced by foreigners. Much of the alarm hovering at the borders, the gates, is stoked, it seems to me, by 1) both the threat and the promise of globalization; and 2) an uneasy relationship with our own foreignness, our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging. (94–95)

I first came across those words early this year when I was looking for a [presidential theme](#) for the 2020 MLA convention

in Seattle. That last phrase—"our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging"—confirmed my suspicion that we are living in a time like no other, a time when our sense of what it means to be human is disintegrating—and, with it, the whole world, its environment, and its species.

The presidential theme for the 2020 MLA convention is Being Human. I invite you to join me in Seattle to engage in debates and discussions about what it means to be human. As you will see

in the impressive convention Program, hundreds of sessions will approach this theme from a range of perspectives and formulations.

In Seattle, a city where the possibilities and limits of technology are a daily concern, we will engage in a rare conversation with Microsoft engineers who grapple with what the human means in the age of machine learning. Working together with the Being Human Festival, based at the University of London, we will be shown some of the ways the public humanities can be harnessed for the common good.

And, yes, at the convention there will be a tribute honoring Morrison, the writer who taught us the meaning of that other, hidden side of modern life.

Simon E. Gikandi

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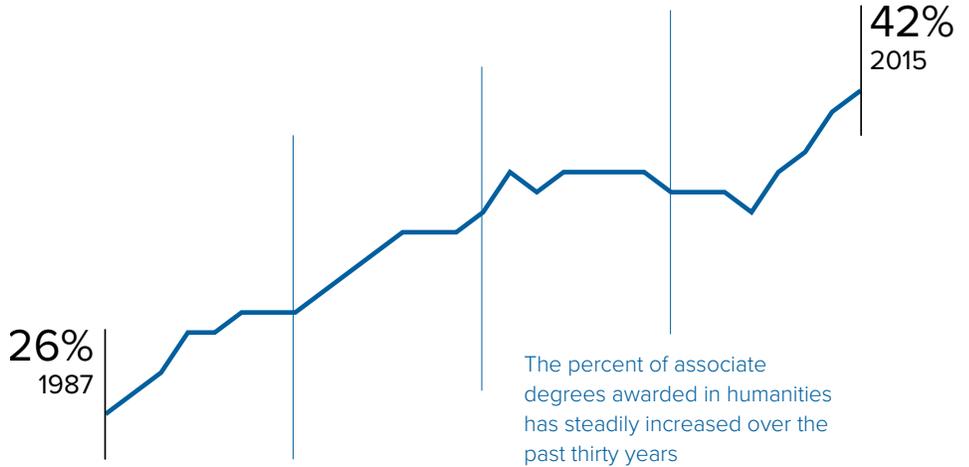
MLA Teaching Institutes Launched

How does a PhD from a research institution prepare you for a career at a community college? How do we ensure that a rich humanities curriculum is available to students at community colleges and other colleges that prioritize access over selectivity in admissions? Faced with these challenges, the MLA approached the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation with a proposal to strengthen the teaching of English at access-oriented institutions (AOIs), and this summer the first two MLA Teaching Institutes on Reading and Writing at Access-Oriented Institutions, sponsored by the foundation, were held in Seattle and Amherst.

The institutes are designed to

- provide new and future faculty members with an understanding of the needs and circumstances of students at AOIs, who are primarily first-generation college-goers, Pell Grant recipients, and students of color
- provide new and future faculty members with intensive training in pedagogical theory and practices for the teaching of writing and reading together to strengthen writing instruction at AOIs and to nurture the study of the humanities in vocationally oriented educational settings
- develop strategies for locally sustaining the collaborations started by the institutes
- renew conversation in the profession about relations among literature, composition, and the humanities and build stronger connections between introductory writing courses and upper-level humanities courses

The first institute was hosted from 25 to 30 June by the Simpson Center for the



5.9 million students

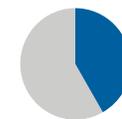
were enrolled in two-year institutions in fall 2017



35% of undergraduate students were enrolled in two-year institutions in fall 2017

363,491 associate degrees

were conferred in the humanities in 2015, the highest level recorded



41.8% of associate degrees were conferred in humanities subjects in 2015

Sources

- "Associate's Degrees in the Humanities." *Humanities Indicators*, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=10807.
- "Undergraduate Enrollment." *The Condition of Education*, National Center for Education Statistics, nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp.

Humanities at the University of Washington and was taught by Stacey Donohue (Central Oregon Community Coll.) and Nicole Wallack (Columbia Univ.). The second institute was hosted from 15 to 19 July by the Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts and was taught by Howard Tinberg (Bristol Community Coll., MA) and Wallack.

This year's thirty-two participants, a mix of faculty members at AOIs and advanced doctoral students at regional universities, received \$2,500 stipends to support their attendance at the five-day institutes. Pedagogical research projects, developed by participants

during the institutes, will be conducted in fall 2019 and presented at the MLA convention in January 2020. Participants' convention travel will be covered by the grant. Completion of the institute, the research project, and the convention presentation will qualify the participants to receive the MLA Certificate in Reading-Writing Pedagogy at Access-Oriented Institutions.

Three additional regional institutes are planned for 2020, and four more in 2021. To learn more about the institute participants, visit the News from the MLA page. And keep an eye out in winter for the 2020 application.



Your Quick Guide to MLA 2020

Registration is under way, the program is live, and Seattle awaits. Stay informed about the 2020 convention—visit our Web site to check out event highlights, housing, cultural excursions, and more.

INFORMATION FOR ATTENDEES

If you've got a question about the convention, you'll find your answer on this page (www.mla.org/Information-for-Attendees). It's the quickest way to get all the information you need to plan your convention.

EXHIBIT HALL

Check out our exhibitor list to locate your favorite presses and publishing houses ahead of time. Visit www.mla.org/2020-Exhibitors.

TRAVEL ASSISTANCE

Are you a graduate student or a non-tenure-track faculty member? Are you unemployed or living abroad? If so, you may be eligible to apply for one of our travel grants. These \$400 grants help cover travel expenses to our convention. For more information, visit www.mla.org/financial-assistance.

MLA CAREER FAIR

Meet with recruiters, discover new career paths, and explore everything you can do with an advanced humanities degree. Join us on Friday from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. in the Washington State Convention Center. Want more information? Go to outreach.mla.org/attendees.

PLANNING A CONVENTION SESSION

Need help preparing for or running your session? Visit www.mla.org/Planning-a-Session.

IMPORTANT DATES

7 OCTOBER

Deadline for early registration

4 DECEMBER

Regular convention registration deadline

6 DECEMBER

Convention hotel reservation deadline

17 DECEMBER

Postmark deadline for requesting convention registration refunds

(continued from p. 1)

Her books of poetry include *I: New and Selected Poems* and *Tender*, which won the 1998 Paterson Poetry Prize. Her memoir *The Black Notebooks* won the 1998 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for nonfiction, and she received the PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry in 2012.

Cornelius Eady is a professor of creative writing and literature at Stony Brook University, Southampton. He is the author

of several books of poetry, including *Brutal Imagination*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award in Poetry, and *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze*, recipient of the Academy of American Poets' Lamont Poetry Selection award. *Running Man*, an opera based on his poetry, was a finalist for the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

The Phyllis Franklin Award for Public Advocacy of the Humanities was established to honor Phyllis Franklin, who died

in August 2004. Franklin served as the MLA's director of English programs and then as executive director from 1985 until 2002. Previous winners of the award are Senator Edward M. Kennedy (2003), William G. Bowen (2005), Richard J. Franke (2007), Terry Gross (2010), John Sayles (2013), and Anna Deavere Smith (2016).

MLA President Simon Gikandi will present the award to Derricotte and Eady during the MLA Awards Ceremony on 11 January 2020.

Mentoring Event Offers Fresh Perspectives

The first-ever MLA Speed Mentoring event, held this past June, brought together about fifty graduate students and faculty members for brief, one-on-one conversations about professional development and mentorship opportunities. In a thirtieth-floor café above the MLA's New York City headquarters, student mentees were paired with faculty members from different institutions to gain new perspectives on topics that included navigating the academic job market, getting published, tenure reviews, and careers beyond the academy. Following the mentoring sessions, participants mingled over refreshments and continued their conversations. Mentors and mentees both expressed their enthusiasm for the event.

Graduate students said they appre-

ciated the chance to talk with scholars they might not have met otherwise, gaining new insights about their fields and expanding their professional networks. Some also found it helpful to be paired with mentors from institutions similar to their own, particularly those at public universities. By connecting with faculty members from different institutions, graduate students were able to see first-hand the importance and value of cultivating a team of advisers and mentors beyond their own departments and schools, now and throughout their careers. Faculty mentors were happy to share their expertise with students beyond their own institutions, especially if interacting with and advising students was not part of the scope of their current position.

In feedback, over 90% of the attendees said they would highly recommend this event to colleagues and would participate again—so look for future Speed Mentoring sessions, including one at the 2020 MLA convention in Seattle. Also in the works are Speed Mentoring events in different cities around the country. These regional events will provide graduate students with invaluable professional development and mentoring and will allow scholars and other humanities professionals to forge new professional connections and relationships. If you would like to help organize an MLA Speed Mentoring event in your city or region, please contact Brian DeGrazia, MLA assistant director of programs and career services coordinator (bdegrazia@mla.org).



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