

We Speak for Ourselves:

A Poet, A Prophet, and Voices for the 21st Century

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Professor Houston Baker is one of the foremost critics and scholars of African American literature today. He has served as editor of the prestigious journal *American Literature*, and as President of the Modern Language Association of America. Professor Baker has published or edited more than twenty books, most recently *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism*, *Re-Reading Booker T* and *I Don't Hate the South: Reflections on Faulkner, Family, and the South*. His latest book is *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era*. He is Distinguished University Professor of English at Vanderbilt University.

Professor Vanessa Beasley is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Vanderbilt University. She is a scholar of American rhetoric and presidential speeches, and has authored *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric, 1885-2000* and *Who Belongs in America? Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration*. Her current book project, tentatively titled *Special Interests: How Civil Rights Rhetoric has changed since the 1960s*, focuses on the public rhetoric of the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

Reverend Will Campbell is a Baptist minister, author, and civil rights activist. He has served as Director of Religious Life at the University of Mississippi, field officer for the National Council of Churches, and director of the Committee of Southern Churchmen, and was one of four people who escorted the students who integrated the Little Rock, Arkansas public schools. He is a noted author of over 15 books, including *Brother to a Dragonfly*, which earned him the Lillian Smith Prize, the Christopher Award, and a National Book Award nomination. Reverend Campbell was interviewed for Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*

Professor Angela Y. Davis is a radical activist, teacher and philosopher. In her many years as a political organizer she worked with SNCC, the Black Panthers, and the Communist Party. Professor Davis has been an outspoken advocate of women's rights and prison abolition. She is the author of several books of political philosophy, including *Are Prisons Obsolete?*; *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*; and the forthcoming *Prisons and Democracy*. Currently she is Professor of History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Dr. Frank E. Dobson, Jr. is the director of Vanderbilt's Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center. During his years in higher education, Dr. Dobson has taught and been an administrator at a number of institutions, including Indiana University, Bluffton; Bowling Green State University; and Wright State University, where he was Associate Professor of English and Director of the Bolinga Black Cultural Resources Center. In addition to his campus leadership roles, Dr. Dobson is a published novelist, poet, and essayist, and recently penned the plays *Black Messiahs Fly* and *Invisible Men*.

Lolis Elie is a New Orleans attorney and civil rights activist. He attended Howard and Dillard Universities in the 1950s, eventually earning his law degree from Loyola University. He opened a law practice in 1960 with Robert Collins and Nils Douglas, which served as the main firm for the Louisiana Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) for many years. Mr. Elie continues to live in New Orleans, and has been involved in activism surrounding the impact of Hurricane Katrina. Mr. Elie was interviewed for Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*

Lolis Eric Elie, son of Lolis Elie, is a nationally recognized journalist and author. He writes a regular column for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, and his writing on Katrina, racism, and civil rights has appeared in the Washington Post and on National Public Radio. He is the author of *Smokestack Lightning: Adventures In The Heart Of Barbecue Country* and *Cornbread Nation 2: The United States of Barbeque*. Mr. Elie is the writer and narrator of the film *Faubourg Tremé*, a documentary examining the history of black New Orleans through the lens of the historic Faubourg Tremé neighborhood.

Professor Vincent Harding has had a long history of involvement in movements for peace and justice around the world, including the Black Freedom struggle in the United States. He was the first director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center in Atlanta and served as director and chairperson of The Institute of the Black World. He was a consultant to the award-winning series, *Eyes on the Prize*, and has written numerous books, including *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero*. Dr. Harding is now Professor of Religion and Social Transformation and Chairperson of the Veterans of Hope Project at Illiff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado.

Professor Barbara A. Holmes is a scholar and academic leader in Memphis, TN. She holds a J.D. from Mercer University, a Ph.D. in Religion from Vanderbilt University, and an M.Div. from Columbia Theological Seminary. In addition to numerous papers and articles, Dr. Holmes has penned three books: *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently*, and *A Private Woman in Public Spaces: Barbara Jordan's Speeches on Ethics, Public Religion and Law*. She is currently the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean at Memphis Theological Seminary.

Professor Joy James is a scholar of political and feminist theory, critical race theory, and incarceration. She is the author of several works of philosophy on gender and race, including *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals*, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics and Memory*, *Shame and Rage: The Central Park Case, 1989-2002*. Professor James is currently the John B. and John T. McCoy Presidential Professor of the Humanities and College Professor in Political Science at Williams College.

Professor Richard King is Professor of American Intellectual History at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of several books on the South, racism, and the civil rights movement, including *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970*. He also recently co-edited the volume *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*. Professor King has published numerous scholarly articles in journals such as *Slavery and Abolition*, *Journal of Southern History*, and the *American Literary Review*. He was the 2001-2002 William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities.

Reverend James Lawson is a leading theoretician and tactician of nonviolence movements in the U.S., and has participated in many aspects of the civil rights movement, including the Freedom Rides. He served as Southern Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and was pastor of Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles for 25 years. He is currently a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Vanderbilt University. Reverend Lawson was interviewed for Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*

Reverend Irene Monroe is a religion columnist, public theologian, and speaker. She writes several regular columns for gay and religious publications, and her writings have also appeared in *The Advocate* and in the *Boston Globe*. Reverend Monroe is on the boards of several national faith and justice organizations, and has been honored with civic and religious awards for her activism. She is a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, and is currently a Ford Fellow and doctoral candidate at Harvard Divinity School.

Dr. Robert P. Moses was a pivotal organizer for the civil rights movement as field secretary for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and organizer of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). A MacArthur Foundation Fellow from 1982-87, Dr. Moses used his fellowship to develop and found the Algebra Project, which advocates mathematics literacy as essential to citizenship. Dr. Moses has received several honorary degrees and honors, including the Heinz Award for the Human Condition and the Nation/Puffin Prize for Creative Citizenship. Dr. Moses was interviewed for Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*

Antoine Perot, Jr. is an international marketing and trade specialist with over 30 years of experience in African, Asian and Caribbean nations. He has served as President and CEO of International Marketing and Trading Corporation, as well as CEO of Africa Biomass Corporation, a company established to integrate the utilization of renewable biomass resources to generate electric energy in developing nations. Mr. Perot previously served as Senior Research Associate and Project Director for the Urban Institute, and was an organizer in the civil rights movement as Field Secretary and National Program Director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

Ruth Turner Perot was the Executive Secretary of the Cleveland Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and a National Action Council member who first formulated a written black power philosophy. Mrs. Perot is currently the Executive Director of Summit Health Institute for Research and Education, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. which works to eradicate health disparities and aid vulnerable populations in attaining optimal health. Mrs. Perot was interviewed for Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*

Professor Sheila Peters serves as Associate Provost of Fisk University and Interim Director of the Fisk Race Relations Institute. As a clinical psychologist, Peters's work has championed social justice. She has long been involved in community activism, both as former president of the Nashville Branch of the NAACP and as former chair and commissioner with the Metro Nashville Human Relations Commission. Currently, she and the Race Relations Institute staff are studying gentrification in the local Nashville community.

Reverend Alexia Salvatierra is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, with over 20 years of experience in interfaith and community ministry, community organizing and legislative advocacy. She is the Executive Director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), an organization of religious leaders who support low-wage workers in their struggle for a living wage, health insurance, and fair working conditions.

Reverend Edwin C. Sanders, II founded Nashville's Metropolitan Interdenominational Church. He is currently the executive director of the church's health program, First Response Wellness Center, which provides counseling, emergency housing, financial assistance, spiritual nurturing, and other assistance too those who are affected by HIV and AIDS. He also serves at the national level on the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Formerly an active member of the Republican Party, Sanders ran as a progressive candidate for governor of Tennessee in 2002, espousing issues such as tax reform, education and economic opportunity.

Professor Daniel Sharfstein is an assistant professor of law at Vanderbilt University. Professor Sharfstein's scholarship focuses on the legal history of race in the United States. His most recent article, "Crossing the Color Line: Racial Migration and the One-Drop Rule, 1600-1860," appeared in the February 2007 issue of the *Minnesota Law Review*. His current book project, "Sun and Shade: Three American Families Journey from Black to White," is under contract with the Penguin Press. His writing has also appeared in the *New York Times*, *Economist*, *American Prospect*, *Legal Affairs*, *Yale Law Journal*, and *Africa Report*.

Reverend Charles Sherrod has been an activist in southwest Georgia for many years. He has served as director of the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, as well as o director of New Communities, Inc., a cooperative farming project. He was on the Albany City Commission, and in 1996 ran for Georgia State Senate. Reverend Sherrod now teaches at Albany State University.

Professor Melissa Snarr is Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society in Vanderbilt's Divinity School. Her writing, teaching, and community involvement centers on the intersection of religion, social change and social/political ethics. Her most recent book, *Social Selves and Political Reforms*, focuses on Christian views of moral formation and their affect on political engagement. Her current research and activist engagement explores the role of gender and religion in the U.S. living wage movement.

Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker was the first full-time Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Under his administration the SCLC grew to become one of the major forces of the movement of the 1960s. Taylor Branch in his prize-winning book *Parting the Waters* credits Walker with being the architect of the Birmingham campaign which led directly to the 1964 Public Accommodation Act. Her served as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Chief of Staff from 1960-64. Until his retirement in 2004, he was the Senior Pastor of Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem, New York since 1967. Reverend Walker was interviewed for Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?*