

## **African Swedish Diaspora Seminar on African American Writers**

Location: JP FAKTA, Fredriksbergatan 7, Malmö

Malmö, 9 May, 2009, 14.00 – 17.00

Professor Anthony Grooms\* gave a brilliant and well-appreciated lecture today on the history and impact of African American Women Writers. The occasion was a seminar aimed at enlightening and instilling a sense of pride in members of the African Diaspora in Malmö, Sweden. About 60 persons of all ages and ethnic backgrounds attended.

The lecture, which was greatly enhanced with a power-point presentation, began with an introduction to the earliest recorded oral histories by African American women in the United States, some of whom had been captured in Africa, enslaved in the US, yet were able to tell their oral stories. Some of those stories were written for them by Joel Chandler Harris, a white man who wrote down what those enslaved women told him because they could not write it themselves.

We were told that the history of African American women as writers begins with writings by Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatly. Professor Grooms then guided us through several eras of African American writing: the era of slavery with writers such as Olaudah Equiano, Fredrick Douglas and the only woman to write about incidents in her life as a slave girl: Harriet Jacobs, a.k.a. Linda Brent; the Reconstruction era, which produced great essayists such as Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Dubois. This era was closely followed by the era of the first popular novelist, Charles Chesnutt, the first popular poet, Paul Larence Dunbar and the first woman to write anti-lynching material, Ida B. Wells. The audience was then informed about the writers of the era known as the Harlem Renaissance, which produced

Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and the main woman writer of the era, Zora Neale Hurston.

This was followed by Post WW2 era writers such as John Oliver Killens, John A. Williams, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. The major women writers of the era were Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorain Hansberry and Margaret Walker Alexander.

The next era, which also covered the years of the Civil Rights movement was identified as the Black Arts Movement, a period which produced Amiri Baraka (formerly known as Leroi Jones), Ernest Gaines, Alex Haley and to important women: poet Nikki Giovanni and Ntozake Shange. The final era that Professor Grooms presented us with contains the largest body of women writers since the history began: Alice Walker, Maya Angelo, Toni Morrison, Perl Cleaque, Tina McElroy Ansa, Terry MacMillan, Tayari Jones and ZZ Packer, Octavia Butler and Tananarive Due, all producing fiction and a broader range of popular items with their writings.

Two of these women, Tina McElroy Ansa and Terry MacMillan, publish their own books since they were not able to find a publisher. Terry MacMillan has even written a handbook on how to write a book for those who would like to write and be published.

During the questions and answer period that followed, Professor Grooms told the highly interested public about various ways to publish your own books, which were to apply to a major publishing house, use a small press house, or self publish. The latter idea was strongly supported by the only African Swedish Diaspora publisher in the audience, Mr. Andreas Stephens of Notis Forlag (Publications).

The seminar ended with a very loud applause for Professor Grooms, and a wonderful dinner that was catered by Kitos African Restaurant, Malmö, that served the popular Ghanaian meal, Red-Red.

*\*Professor Tony Grooms is a Professor of Creative Writing at the Dept. of English, Kennesaw State University, Georgia. He has written several books, one of which is Bombingham, about the infamous 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four innocent girls in Alabama.*

**The Seminar was planned and hosted by The English International Association of Lund/Malmö, JPFakta (African women as entrepreneurs), and Notis Forlag (Publishers). The seminar was sponsored by the Swedish National Council for Youth Affairs (Ungdomstyrelssen). We would also like to thank ABF Malmö for printing 100 flyers for this seminar.**