

## Annual Report on the Activities of the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, 2010–11

The special theme for the first day of the 2011 convention in Los Angeles was “The Academy in Hard Times.” This theme shaped many of the conversations that the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada (CLPC) engaged in throughout the 2010–11 academic year. CLPC members used the theme as a point of reflection, asking how scholars of color define hard times; more specifically, we asked, What are the specific ways in which scholars of color experience hard times differently?

Of late, the financial crisis is causing universities to rethink their curricula and programming; departments and programs are being reduced, combined, or eliminated altogether. Moreover, there is an increase of casual employment, and other measures are being used by universities to manage their budgets. Many budget cuts seem to target the humanities and ethnic studies programs, creating a profound shift of their place within the university. The CLPC discussed the ways in which these changes and displacements affect scholars of color, especially since interdisciplinary scholarship and programs—on which many scholars of color focus—are often less protected than more “established” fields of research. CLPC members expressed concern about the effects that the hard (economic) times will have on scholarship and on the presence in the academy of Latino, African American, Asian American, Native, and other scholars of color—including South Asian, Arab American, and other burgeoning communities.

This shifting context has propelled much of the activity of the CLPC. The committee has been very interested in a series of published reports (e.g., the Teagle Report) and data sets (published as *Data on Humanities Doctorate Recipients and Faculty Members by Race and Ethnicity*, April 2010). The conversations that followed led to the organization of panels for the 2011 convention in Los Angeles (to some extent) and the 2012 meeting in Seattle (to a greater extent).

For MLA 2011, two important panels were organized:

- 1) Native Pedagogies. Panelists discussed questions of Native curriculum and pedagogies. Importantly, they commented on how different cultural issues in Native communities are elided by superficial readings of key Native textualities.

### **262. Indigenous Knowing, Learning, and Teaching**

*12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Plaza II, J. W. Marriott*

Program arranged by the MLA Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada

*Presiding:* Frederick H. White, Slippery Rock Univ.

1. “Ethical Engagement? Strategies for Teaching Native American Poetry to Nonnative Readers,” Sandra Cox, Univ. of Kansas

2. “Remapping the Maps of Our Margins: *Black Elk Speaks* and Religious Knowledge as Vector of Intersectionality,” Khanh Ho, Grinnell Coll.

*Respondent:* Deborah A. Miranda, Washington and Lee Univ.

2) Literature before the Social Sciences. This panel explored the disciplinary debate between literary studies and the social sciences: How does each discipline articulate its own set of methodologies? And what kinds of prestige claims are made from each perspective?

**711. Literature before the Social Sciences**

*8:30–9:45 a.m., Diamond Salon 7, J. W. Marriott*

Program arranged by the MLA Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada

*Presiding:* Ifeoma C. K. Nwankwo, Vanderbilt Univ.

1. "Social Instrumentality and the Discordance of Chicana/o Literature," Rafael M. Pérez-Torres, Univ. of California, Los Angeles
2. "Race from the Social Sciences," Chandan Reddy, Univ. of Washington, Seattle
3. "Representations of Racialized Femininity: Embodying Interplay and Interdisciplinarity," Caroline A. Streeter, Univ. of California, Los Angeles
4. "The Spoken and Silent Word: Preserving Ancient Epistemology," Halifu Osumare, Univ. of California, Davis

The committee also proposed a collaborative session in 2011 with the Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, "Graduate Students of Color: Strategies for Success." This was an effort to mentor graduate students of color by discussing a wide range of questions related to professionalization.

**542. Graduate Students of Color: Strategies for Success**

*1:45–3:00 p.m., Olympic II, J. W. Marriott*

Program arranged by the MLA Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada and the MLA Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession

*Presiding:* Marissa K. López, Univ. of California, Los Angeles

*Speakers:* Giovanna Montenegro, Univ. of California, Davis; Rafael M. Pérez-Torres, Univ. of California, Los Angeles; Luziris Turi, Univ. of Houston; Dana Williams, Howard Univ.

For the Seattle meeting in 2012, the committee organized two panels—one entitled "Representation in the Shadow of New Media Technologies" and a second entitled "The Faces behind the Data: Humanizing the MLA Data Report on Race, Ethnicity, and Humanities Faculty." This panel will address very directly the MLA's *Data on Humanities Doctorate Recipients and Faculty Members by Race and Ethnicity*, April 2010. Also, for 2012, the committee collaborated with the Division on Ethnic Studies in Language and Literature on a panel on the state of ethnic studies at the K–12 and university levels; however this panel was not accepted. Information for the two committee-organized sessions is as follows:

### **Representation in the Shadow of New Media Technologies**

*Presiding:* Lan Dong, Univ. of Illinois Springfield

1. "Web Video and Ethnic Media: Linking Representation and Distribution," Aymar Jean Christian, Univ. of Pennsylvania
2. "Among 'Friends': Comparing Social Networking Functions in the *Baltimore Sun* and *Baltimore Afro-American* in 1904 and 1933," Daniel Greene, Univ. of Maryland, College Park
3. "Digital 'Trash Talk': The Rhetoric of Instrumental Racism as Procedural Strategy," Lisa Nakamura, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana

### **The Faces behind the Data: Humanizing the MLA Data Report on Race, Ethnicity, and Humanities Faculty**

*Presiding:* Deborah A. Miranda, Washington and Lee Univ.

*Speakers:* Debra Barker, Univ. of Wisconsin, Eau Claire; Chandan Reddy, Univ. of Washington, Seattle; Amelia Maria de la Luz Montes, Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln; Doug Steward, MLA; Thabiti Lewis, Washington State Univ., Vancouver

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Throughout the year, the CLPC discussed the question of outreach. Members became very interested in identifying the ethnic communities in the cities where the MLA holds its annual convention and organizing panels or workshops that would be free to the public in those cities. The idea is to use intellectual expertise in ethnic studies to arrange the kind of programming that will be responsive to local interests.

"The Academy in Hard Times" and this theme's relation to issues of race and ethnicity helped framed the publication of "Resources for Faculty Members of Color Wiki," which was spearheaded by CLPC member Deborah Miranda:

<[http://wiki.mla.org/index.php/Resources\\_for\\_Faculty\\_Members\\_of\\_Color\\_Wiki](http://wiki.mla.org/index.php/Resources_for_Faculty_Members_of_Color_Wiki)>. Another publication effort that has been in the works over the last two years and was accepted this year is the "Ethnic Archive" proposal from former CLPC members Marissa López and Dana Williams. They approached Patricia Yeager, editor of *PMLA*, with a proposal for a set of short essays for the Theories and Methodologies section of the *PMLA*.

This year the committee saw much progress on projects it had been working on for some time. Over the years, committee members have met many challenges with publications; this is particularly so because the group had many interests and faced the problem of geography and time. The MLA's theme helped consolidate some of the projects the CLPC has been developing. Interestingly, "The Academy in Hard Times" was a call to consider how *economic* problems affect the profession. However, many CLPC members agreed that economic problems only exacerbate the racial, ethnic, cultural, and social problems that this committee is charged to consider. A poor economy has only made it worse for scholars of color and has created increasingly urgent conditions for them to address.

Thus, it came as a complete shock to members of the CLPC to learn in January 2011 that the committee's membership would be reduced. The CLPC understands that financial pressures have required many institutions to make difficult cuts. Yet, the urgency of the concerns

addressed by the CLPC coupled with the change in the size and structure of the CLPC—as well as other MLA committees—brought up more concerns for the CLPC. Allow me to explain: The CLPC worked with the MLA Executive Council two years ago to update the CLPC's charge. One of the most important changes involved broadening its constituencies. No longer was the group to intervene in issues related to the traditionally recognized minority communities—African American, Chicano, Asian American, Puerto Rican, and Native American. Rather, the group wished to include new subjects of race, a more expansive understanding of racial communities in an ever-increasing global setting, e.g., Arab American, racial formation outside the United States and Europe, and other groups. The CLPC saw diversifying its membership as a way to recognize the very complex scholarship produced by MLA members and as a way to reflect the interdisciplinarity of cultural, social, and political bodies. Thus, even as the group was expanding its intellectual and political horizons, its membership was reduced from 10 to 7 members. Additionally, the CLPC was concerned about this change because there was no conversation between the Executive Council and CLPC as to the potential implications of this change. The news was delivered as a *fait accompli* without the kind of deliberative discussion that would allow for the CLPC to voice some concerns.

Members of the CLPC understand their work on the committee to be more than just administrative—deciding on panels and Web site sections, suggesting nominees, etc. Our work is an ongoing conversation about the academy: figuring out how to change a field, a profession, a university; how to ensure that the academy recognizes, hears, attends to, and engages the communities and artists we serve while continuing to be productive as a scholars. We hope that there might be a space to open up a conversation about restoring the committee's membership so that many of the promising activities and programming might be implemented in the years to come.

The CLPC has already discussed many exciting plans for 2011–12. Under the leadership of Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwanko and new cochair Richard Rodriguez, the committee will take on many new conversations and projects. The committee has expressed its commitment to expanding resources for and on Native American faculty members, thinking about K–12 educators and how the committee might become a resource to provide faculty development opportunities and support in ethnic studies, and mentoring for faculty members of color. We hope that these and many other ideas become a reality.

Respectfully submitted by  
Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui  
Cochair, 2010–11

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