

Annual Report on the Activities of the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada, 2011–12

During the 2011–2012 academic year the Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the United States and Canada focused its efforts in three areas: (1) understanding and meeting its obligations to the MLA, (2) identifying the specific tools it will use to facilitate productive engagement with the literatures of people of color by K–12 educators nationwide, and (3) reaching consensus on a list of five priority areas that the committee will center on going forward, ensuring that the committee will be able to maintain a consistent and coherent focus from year to year, regardless of which members rotate on or off.

Understanding and Meeting Obligations to the MLA

2012 MLA Convention Sessions

259. 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

This session was well attended.

696. The Faces behind the Data: Humanizing the MLA Report *Data on Humanities Doctorate Recipients and Faculty Members by Race and Ethnicity*

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

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

This roundtable featured scholars of color discussing the report *Data on Humanities Doctorate Recipients and Faculty Members by Race and Ethnicity* and brainstorming the ways in which data per se can be useful to faculty members of color as they move through graduate school, look for jobs, and then pursue tenure and promotion. Attendance was lower than expected, perhaps due to scheduling. The panel was in the penultimate time slot on Sunday.

2013 MLA Convention Sessions

84. Publishing Indigeneity: Future, Fact, and Fiction

Presiding: Frederick H. White, Slippery Rock Univ.

1. “Why the Most Popular ‘Indigenous’ Writer in America Is Still Tony Hillerman,” Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez, Bradley Univ.

2. “Back to the Indigenous Future: Publishing Bones and Wind,” Rachela Permenter, Slippery Rock Univ.

487. Ethnic Studies in an Era of Retrenchment

Presiding: Richard T. Rodriguez, Univ of Illinois, Urbana

1. “(Re)Occupying the Civil: From White Settler Centrism to Antiracist Radicalism,” Cynthia Franklin, University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

2. “Thinking While Brown: Ethnic Studies and Arizona’s Culture Wars,” Sandra K. Soto, Univ. of Arizona

3. “Growing in the Era of Retrenchment,” Sandra K. Stanley, California State Univ., Northridge
Responding: Hiram Perez, Vassar Coll.

695. Race, Girlhood, and Social Justice in Children’s Literature
(Cosponsored with the Children’s Literature Association)

This panel examines intersections of race, girlhood, and social justice in children’s literature, nineteenth century to contemporary.

Committee Composition

During this year, the committee sought and received clarification regarding the MLA’s expectations for it. The 2010–11 annual report expressed the committee’s concern about the reduction in the number of members, as well as about the lack of advance warning. Although concerns about the latter remain, the committee appreciates Executive Director Feal’s written response (dated 12/5/11) to that aspect of the 2011 report, particularly her expressed willingness to discuss the matter further with the committee. The committee has high hopes for better communication from the MLA on any such significant changes in the future. The committee commits to doing all it can to ensure that each and every member has opportunities to put as many of his or her skill sets to work as possible in the service of the committee’s mission. We look forward to staying in communication with the MLA about how it might support the committee in this effort.

After missing all but one meeting since his initial appointment in 2011, one committee member formally resigned his position due to family obligations after being contacted by committee administration. The Executive Council has appointed a replacement for this individual.

Outreach to K–12 Educators

The committee has decided to begin consistently reaching out to K–12 educators in two ways: through summer institutes and seminars as well as through pre-convention workshops.

To this end, the committee is assisting one of its members with an application to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant to support a summer institute entitled “Sustainability in the U.S.A.: Ethnicity and Race in a Regional Culture.” The institute would take place in Durham or Chapel Hill, NC, and feature scholars, creative writers, and filmmakers from around the region and nation. The application is being prepared for submission in March 2013.

The committee is also committed to mounting preconvention workshops in MLA convention cities for interested teachers. The initial plan was to begin this effort with a workshop in Boston. As part of that vision, the committee researched potential grant opportunities and contacted potential partners and participants including Massachusetts Humanities and Project Zero. We also set up a Facebook page and began conversations with interested teachers and partners. Based on this communication, we discovered that the MLA preconvention workshop dates clashed with Boston teachers' required professional development events. Consequently, the committee has shifted its focus to preparing for a preconvention workshop in Chicago, with an awareness of the need either to select days that do not conflict with professional development for teachers or to get the workshop certified in advance as part of their professional development.

Five Priority Areas

It was our sense that creating a standing list of priority areas for the committee would help to bring coherence and consistency to the committee's work from year to year and help new committee members and cochairs be as clear as possible from the start about their charge, ensuring that they will be able to make the most productive use of the time they are able to dedicate to committee tasks. This will allow the committee to spend more time making solid progress on specific initiatives. While it does not negate the need for brainstorming time or preclude opportunities for innovation, it does provide a clear sense of the specific goals the committee should aim to meet.

The priority areas reflect the committee's continuing concern about the particular challenges facing faculty members of color as well as ethnic literature and ethnic studies programs in these "hard times" (to echo the theme of the first day of the 2011 convention). Certain challenges identified by committee members are those faced by many humanities faculty members today. These include the devaluation (and in some cases even the elimination) of literature programs at universities, inattention to the differences between coming up for associate and getting the second monograph done for promotion to full, and pressure to move to online teaching. Others are particular to faculty members of color and the fields that are within the committee's purview. These include the move toward "going global," resulting in ethnic literature being pitted against international literature; disproportionately high service burdens; and low numbers of students of color entering graduate programs.

- 1. NEH Summer Institute or Seminar**
One application currently in progress
- 2. Preconvention Workshop for K–12 Teachers**
Planning for Chicago workshop in progress
- 3. MLA Sessions on "Real World," Pedagogical, or Professional Dimensions of Studying the Literatures of People of Color**
2013 session "Ethnic Studies in the Era of Retrenchment"

4. Publications

- a. *PMLA* section on Theory and Methodologies (published)
Initial concern created *PMLA* board's decision to extend invitations to contributors of its choosing, despite the fact that the section was proposed by the CLPC.
- b. Special section of *Profession* on the MLA's recent report, *Data on Humanities Doctorate Recipients and Faculty Members by Race and Ethnicity* (in preparation for planned 1 March 2013 submission)
- c. Members have also agreed to explore other journals as publication venues (including *Academe*)

5. Revisiting and Humanizing the Data

- a. See 4a, above
- b. Discussions of key reports at committee meetings and brainstorming about whether and how they might serve as the basis for committee projects. Example: ACE Report on Minorities in Higher Education and memo on two reports debating the payoff to attending HBCUs discussed at the September 2011 meeting

Although mentoring does not yet appear as a discrete priority area, committee members view it as a fundamental part of their charge as individual scholars of color and, by extension, as part of their obligation as a member of this committee. Several members have proposed ideas for institutionalizing the committee's commitment, including a speakers' bureau, an intergenerational life narrative project, a directory of MLA members who are willing to be contacted by junior scholars seeking mentoring, a panel on mentoring, a regular mentorship session (formal or informal, workshop or panel) at the MLA convention. The committee will likely take up one (or more) of these in the near future. Discussions to date have been productive but have not yet led to a consensus on which idea to pursue.

Similarly, the committee remains committed to consistently sponsoring sessions on Native American publications. It has done so in both 2012 and 2013 and anticipates continuing to do so.

The committee moves forward in the capable hands of cochairs Richard T. Rodriguez and Anita Mannur, with a continuing commitment to balancing coherence, continuity, impact, and innovation.

Respectfully submitted,

Ifeoma C. K. Nwankwo
Cochair, 2010–12

18 September 2012