



NABS "IN THE TRADITION..."
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF BLACK STORYTELLERS

W SPREAD THE O R D

National Association of Black Storytellers

P.O. Box 67722

Baltimore, Maryland 21215

www.nabsinc.org

Spring 2008

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“HOLD FAST TO DREAMS AND WISHES”

Dear NABS Family,

Amani! Peace & Blessings! I hope that you and your family and friends are enjoying life and telling beautiful stories to one another.

As we continue to celebrate the life, wisdom and stories of our beloved co-founder Mama Mary Carter Smith, I want to share with you a “wish list” she and I created for NABS.

In 1992, shortly after the 10th annual “In the Tradition...” National Black Storytelling Festival was held in Baltimore, MD, Mama Mary telephoned me and suggested the two of us create a “wish list” - six components that we would like to always have present within the organization and the festival after both of us have made transition. Whoever made transition first was assured the surviving co-founder would share the “WISH LIST” with the NABS family. Honoring our agreement, and with Mama Mary’s instruction, I have already shared the “wish list” with the NABS Board of Directors and now I will share it with all of you.



CO-FOUNDERS’ “WISH LIST”

“It is our hopes, desires and wishes that the following six components always be present within NABS and the festival:

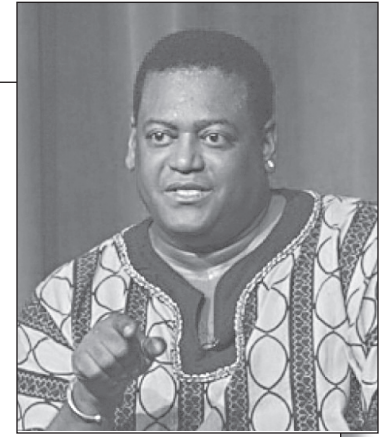
1. We hope that the name of the festival will always be “In the Tradition...” National Black Storytelling Festival & Conference. The word “Black” should always remain in the title.
2. We hope there will always be a Love Circle and drums played at every festival.
3. We hope the NABS festival will always be a storytelling festival with emphasis on oral storytelling as well as the various ways our stories are told and the vast collection of our stories preserved.
4. It is our wish that NABS will always be the primary producer and sponsor of the National Black Storytelling Festival & Conference “In the Tradition...”
5. We hope the NABS festival will always be family oriented and family friendly. Children should always feel welcome!
6. It is our wish that NABS and the festival be inclusive. Everyone should feel welcome regardless of their race, religion, sex or ethnic background. The festival is a celebration of Black storytelling, it’s rich heritage and influence. No one should feel left out. Black music has traveled around the world, the globe, and so have our stories.”



I deeply thank you for your continued support!

Asante Sana! Asante Sana!! Asante Sana!!!

Linda Goss
 Co-Founder



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

For 25 years, our co-founders' dreams are still being realized! We are so blessed to have the visions of Linda Goss and our recent ancestor Mother Mary Carter Smith still relevant, trendsetting and vibrant. Creating a platform for storytellers who "Spread the Word" of Blackstorytelling is, now, something we all know the value of and are dedicated to keeping alive!

What a time we had in Atlanta celebrating our 25th anniversary of the National Black Storytelling Festival! Asante Sana to KUUMBA for their gracious and tireless dedication as co-hosts; those storytellers, workshop leaders and volunteers who gave of their talent, time and resources; Vanora Legaux and Akbar Imhotep for their leadership as Festival co-directors; and, most importantly, to you who supported NABS with your attendance, laughs, hugs, tears, and reflective honor evoking the spirit of Mother Mary Carter Smith. We did, as she would have wanted, 'Keep it lively!'

Several things are in the works. The newsletter is taking a more modern approach. Strategies are being developing to increase membership and keep communication flowing. Our website presence continues to grow. Plans are forthcoming in defining NABS' leadership, and for Mama Linda Goss' enshrinement in the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum. Grant opportunities and fundraising efforts are being decided. Your help is crucial in making these happen. Let us know your thoughts.

There are some other things we must strive to accomplish, if we are to continue reaching the world and increase our presence. We need to expand our membership within the nation and beyond. We need to heighten our efforts and place more focus toward youth participation and programming among our affiliate communities. We also need to strategically plan for funding sources to expand our organizational opportunities beyond our festival and conference. Our continued existence hinges on accomplishing these immediate needs, as we move forward keeping our ancestors proud!

As we plan to descend upon Cincinnati, Ohio, for our 26th annual pilgrimage, let us be recognizant of the symbolic nature of where we will be. Our ancestors risked life and limb to cross the Ohio River to stand on the banks of Cincinnati. Imagine the true joy that filled their hearts, the tears they shed, and the strength they embodied. We may not be able to fully understand their true inner thoughts that our space and time have somehow washed away. But, we can surely pay homage to the strength, story, power, hopes, dreams and path to the many freedoms those ancestors placed in our psyche.

Start your journey now! Gather up your family, friends and children. Check the stars. Make sure you got enough to cross the river. Bundle up a few clothes. Don't forget yo' instruments. The journey to Cincinnati will prove to mirror what's germane as a people, NABS family, our inherited indomitable spirit and power of Black storytelling, and how crucial it is for us to further our mission, purpose and obligation to carry the flame!

Peace & Blessings!

Dylan Pritchett

KEEPING THE AFRICAN ORAL TRADITION ALIVE SINCE 1993 – NABS AFFILIATES

Baba Jamal Koram, Ed.S.

During 1993-1994 an initiative to establish NABS Affiliate organizations was activated, it was called the Affiliate Development Program (AFDP). Its purpose has been to increase membership in the network of, “In the Tradition...” Blackstorytelling organizations and to maintain standards of organization and performance in the storytelling world. The National Affiliate Director’s position was established in 1995.

How Does the AFDP Work?

Autonomous storytelling organizations apply for affiliate status which requires them to meet certain criteria and have procedures for acceptance. For example, each applicant must establish a track record of storytelling activities and community involvement before making application to NABS. The National Director’s office assists in preparing organizations for the application process.

How Does NABS Support Affiliates?

NABS is a membership based organization and relies on its members for programming and fiscal support. It is run by a volunteer board of directors and is bound by its mission: to perpetuate and sustain the art of Blackstorytelling through its initiatives, programs and events. To this end, NABS assists Affiliate members with technical assistance; maintains a national presence; sustains an international network for storytellers; supports a national forum for affiliate members; publishes a national newsletter; maintains an internet presence; and sponsors an annual national storytelling festival and conference.

In 2008, there are now twelve NABS affiliate organizations with at least five other locations that have shown an interest in affiliating with the national Blackstorytelling community. Following is a listing of organizations:

African Folk Heritage Circle – NYC/NY
 Ase: The Chicago Association of Black Storytellers – IL
 Black Storytelling Alliance – MN
 Blackstorytelling League of Rochester – NY
 Black Storytellers of San Diego – CA
 Cleveland Association of Black Storytellers – OH
 Detroit Association of Black Storytellers – MI
 Griots’ Circle of Maryland – Balt/MD
 Keepers of the Culture – Phil/PA
 Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia – ATL/GA
 North Carolina Association of Black Storytellers – Ral/NC
 Rhode Island Black Storytellers – Prov/RI

To find more information about affiliates, contact Baba Jamal Koram, Ed.S., National Affiliate Director at storyman@rcn.com, or connect Affiliate links at www.nabsinc.org

JOAN STEVENSON *Always Answering the Call!*

Joan Simmons Stevenson has spent her life stepping forward! As her two terms of service on the NABS Board of Directors and Office of Treasurer expired January 1, 2008, I want you to know a little about Joan's dedication and service.

Joan received her Bachelor of Science degree from Coppin State Teachers College, where she was recently honored, and her Master of Education degree in Administration and Supervision from Johns Hopkins University. Professionally, she became an elementary school teacher, Chapter I/Title I specialist, assistant principal, principal of three elementary schools mainly in the Baltimore City Public Schools. Joan capped her career during the 1994-5 school year by living and working in Kawasaki, Japan, where she taught English at Tachibana High School and Arima Junior High School.

Joan regularly supports and contributes to arts and humanities organizations. She is a member of the Joshua Johnson Council of the Baltimore Museum of Art, one of the oldest African-American support groups; an active member of Douglas Memorial Community Church for 48 years as a Sunday school teacher, vacation bible school teacher, director, a trustee and usher. Joan has also given back to her community from volunteering as hotline operator at the Sexual Assault Recovery Center in Baltimore to supporting her church's camp for inner city youths.

Joan has been a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha since 1988 and takes great pleasure in the camaraderie of her sorors and in participating in the national sorority's service and social activities. She is a life member of the NAACP, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, member of the Alumni Association of her alma maters, and is a dedicated, active member of the Griots' Circle of Maryland. Joan is the widow of Donald George Stevenson, a Baltimore city firefighter, and the mother of two sons, Donald (deceased) and Douglas.



Joan's love of storytelling led her to join and later become a NABS Life Member. She was recently honored by induction into the Circle of Elders in 2007. She was elected as a Board of Directors' member in 2000 and served two terms, plus an extended year in the Office of Treasurer, serving professionally and graciously during a time of challenging organizational change and growth. Also, during her term on the Board, Joan went way beyond the call of duty. She served as Festival and Conference Treasurer, received and distributed mail, worked with CPA to prepare annual financial

reports, and was one of NABS' major donors for our 2007 Festival & Conference and our Mary Carter Smith appeal challenge! Her perspective and committee work during Board meetings and Strategic Planning Retreat have proved invaluable in helping NABS blossom.

Our love for Joan runs deep! Her unselfishness toward the care of her cousin, our beloved co-founder Mother Mary Carter Smith, during her illness and transition, commands our eternal respect and gratitude! The care she lovingly provided will never be forgotten. We are grateful and acknowledge the dignity and respect she exhibits toward NABS and the honoring of Mother Mary's life and work.

We will miss Joan's presence from the NABS Board of Directors, but not from her presence at festivals or programs. She'll be there. Joan will always be there to help Baltimore's youth, her church and community. That's what Joan does. That's the way Joan lives her life! A full life, indeed. Always willing....always able....always answering the call!

ASANTE SANA! WE LOVE YOU, JOAN!!

Dylan Pritchett
NABS President

HONORING A PAST THAT SPEAKS TO OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE

by Rex Ellis

Horace “Spoon” Williams was a storyteller, poet, and revolutionary long before the Civil Rights movement began. His deeply felt and masterfully crafted epic poems told of the hardships, ironies, frustrations, and dangers of being black in America. He spent most of his life in Philadelphia and I’m sure he filled the streets of ‘Phillie’ with sounds of his spoons, and that raspy baritone voice, railing at man’s inhumanity to man in ways that still ring with authenticity, audacity and passion. Thankfully some of his works have been collected by the National Storytelling Association and resides in their audio archives now housed at the Library of Congress. Here is one of his masterpieces:

A Black Man's Prayer

by Horace “Spoon” Williams

*Father God, we are down here in a part of your world where all men are supposed to be free.
But Father God torture is being used by the steel toes on shoes
and a noose is swaying in the breeze.
Here father God, where it's dangerous to walk in the daytime or night,
because the shadow of death is near by.
And ropes in the trees keep swaying in the breeze because a black man will surely soon die.
Here father God where shots in the night fill many with fright,
And the baying of hounds is sure death.
Yes it's a lynching mob to do a job, but first they'll amuse themselves.
So with the wives and the daughters they'll get their fill,
while the husbands are tied to the bed;
To be found the next day in a very crude way;
The husbands and their families are dead.
And father God we long for just a little knowledge
but our ignorance they try to prolong
and it just ain't no justice here for the black man;
How then can he help but go wrong?
They just don't want us educated;
But they will sell us whiskey, wine, beer and Gin.
And they will destroy our families,
and treat our women just like men.
But, Father God, you just let one white woman say she's been insulted,
don't you know they will hang the first black man they see?
And they will cut off his fingers for trophies and drag his dead body through the streets.
They'll hang any old innocent black man
and they will laugh at his mother's tears;
And only because he's been accused of a crime
that the white man committed for years.
We work in their fields from dawn until dusk
and when our working day is over, no thanks is given us.*

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A Black Man's Prayer con't

*But they will tie us to stakes down here,
and they will tear our flesh with their whips
and we are fed like hogs and shot down like dogs
and they will dare us to part our lips.*

*We fought in all their wars, they taught us to shoot their guns,
but don't you know when we helped bring home the victory,
our wars have just begun.*

*And Father God those same ones we fought beside to bring home the victory,
are the same damned ones who hide behind sheets and destroy our families.
They seem to forget those days and nights when bullets zoomed about our heads
and we all smoked from the same cigarette and ate off the same piece of bread.
Father God our churches are being bombed and our people are being harmed,
And high debts with dogs are being paid;
to use Blackjacks and lead, on our people's head
and for this no arrest will be made.*

*Oh if so what's the use? They'll just turn them loose
And they will pin golden metals on their chest;*

*Or they'll hire those colored others because you know those brave brothers
have been sent out of town arrest.*

*I tell you Father God, the grass has grown red from the people who are dead;
And their bodies can get no rest.*

*Until the Vultures have gone, leaving only the bones, and the hurt in black mothers' breasts.
But Father God, listen... you know that I believe in you
but I just don't think its fair*

*For us to go through hell down here, and then go through the same thing up there.
So Father God please listen to this black man's prayer.*

Build a high neon sign in heaven stating that you will have no discrimination up there.

Announcement!

**93rd Annual ASALH Convention
October 1-5, 2008 Birmingham, Alabama**

Convention Theme:

Carter G. Woodson and the History of Multiculturalism

Interested in presenting? Visit www.asalh.org

Click 2008 Conference tab. Go to Call for Papers link

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc. 202-865-0053

A GLORIOUS 25TH "IN THE TRADITION..." FESTIVAL AND CONFERENCE!

*More than a family reunion, festival or conference!
For many, a life changing experience!!*

by Vanora Franklin Legaux, President - Elect
2007 Festival Director



From the North, South, East and West, we answered the call for the 25th Anniversary Celebration "In the Tradition..." Annual National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference, November 14-18, 2007 in Atlanta, Georgia. This celebration of "OUR ROOTS, OUR STORY, OUR DREAMS, OUR GLORY" at the Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel will forever be embedded in our memory.

Excitement filled the air as early, enthusiastic NABS' members assembled for the Heritage Tour of Atlanta on Wednesday, November 14th. The time had finally arrived as Black Atlanta's historic heritage was visited. The shared vision of Kuumba and NABS was about to spring forth fruit from two years of planning and hard work done by both the national and local committees.



On Wednesday evening, Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia hosted a rousing and energetic display of its members and community talent at the Central Library in downtown Atlanta. After a delicious reception, we were treated to a wonderful program presented by Kuumba's storytellers and community artists. Those in attendance will never forget Martha Dudley's ribbon dancing performance.

Thursday morning, we began our popular conference component. Nine educational workshops were presented, and an illuminating panel of scholars set the stage for the conference. Their combination of intrigue and knowledge often caused the audience to search the deep recesses of their minds during the presentations and sharing of information.

This year the Opening Gala Reception, Storytelling Concert, and Love Circle were held at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. The facility was transformed into a place where our Ancestors could freely meet and guide us during this celebration hosted by Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

Exhilaration filled the air as the drummers led the procession of the present and past leadership of NABS adorned in an array of beautiful white apparel. As the procession moved forward, the room appeared to move to the call of the drums as the audience joined in the celebration. The Ancestors even appeared to join us in the call and the march. co-founder Mama Linda Goss, in memory of our beloved co-founder Mother Mary Carter Smith, placed NABS' symbol, the cowtail switch, on the stage at every event to symbolize her spirit and presence with us.

What great talent we witnessed! The call went out to past-year's featured tellers who joyously answered our call and so willingly volunteered their artistic talents. We are forever grateful for their support.

There were truly unforgettable concerts! One of our most cherished events, the Youth Concert was exceptional. Youth tellers gave a command performance which left no doubt about their talent, skill and commitment to the African oral tradition. We will never forget the song given to us by Victoria Burnett, "Our Roots, Our Story, Our Dreams, Our Glory...will give us strength to go on!"; the testimony

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25th Annual & Festival Conference



25th Annual & Festival Conference



NABS "IN THE TRADITION..."
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF BLACK STORYTELLERS



A GLORIOUS 25TH "IN THE TRADITION..." con't

of Opalanga Pugh at the Spiritual Storytelling Breakfast; the Unity Circle, hearing the recorded voice of Mother Mary Carter Smith's version of "Go Down Death" by James Weldon Johnson; and the song that will bring us back to culture if we are ever lost, "Yea, yea bongea, Ah Ah yea yea bongea." What great memories we have!

We listened in awe to our Zora Neale Hurston Award recipients Linda Jenkins Brown, John O'Neal, and Sonia Sanchez; and Circle of Elders' inductees Eleanor Randall Anderson, Andrea Fain, June McAbee, Deacon Alfred Mitchell, Kathryn L. Morgan and Fellisco Keeling who received the award on behalf of Joan Stevenson.

The Master Liars' contestants caused tears to roll down faces. After the laughter subsided, Sylvia Davis from Alexandria, Louisiana, was the winner.

Our Youth workshops were dynamic. In addition to workshops on storytelling, arts, crafts, and dancing, there was a group of third grade reporters, accompanied by their personal photographers, who interviewed storytellers for their school newspaper.

Our popular African American Market Place consisted of twenty-three vendors. The Karamu Corner featured quilting instructors, flutist, story swaps and Affiliate exhibits where we were afforded opportunities to network, renew acquaintances and make new ones.



Community involvement was evident with first-time Village Telling being held throughout Atlanta's community. Our Adopt-A-Teller Program continued to be a big hit as we visited nineteen venues. We are so proud of the work that was done by Kuumba and our Adopt-A-Teller staff in continued excellence in "Spreading the Word!"

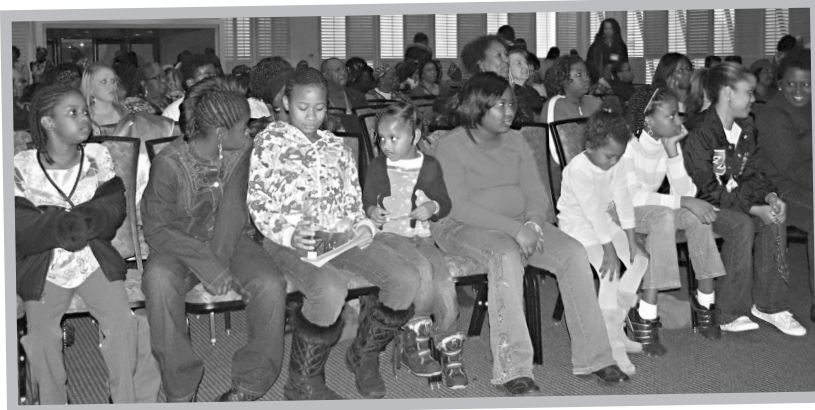
We are indebted to our sponsors, donors, those who placed an ad or patron in the journal, workshop presenters, scholars, featured tellers, affiliates and members for their unwavering support.

Words cannot express our gratitude to Kuumba Storytellers of Georgia, Festival Co-Director and Kuumba President Akbar Imhotep, the youth who participated, youth contributors and all committee members for a job well done. Thank you for your welcoming and warm hospitality, hard work and your many long hours, so generously giving of your time and talent.

The 25th Anniversary "In the Tradition..." National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference was TRULY memorable beyond measure.

NABS YOUTH SHOW UP AND SHOW OUT IN HOT 'LANTA FOR 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

by Elisha T. Minter



Many came and enjoyed the wonderful 25th year celebration for the National Association of Black Storytellers. Our youth were in the house! We registered over 100 youth this year, thanks to the efforts of our Kuumba Affiliate and their youth component under the direction of Sis. Yomi and Sis. Esther Culver.

The warm reception from the Atlanta community was so inviting. Our youth presenters did “show up and show out” sharing wonderful stories and tremendous talent. Presenting youth were Autumn Joy Saskill, Misty Saskill Onam Lansana and three tellers from the Kuumba Youth Storytellers, Blessid Ogedegbe, William Smith and Orrin Culver.

NABS Youth Awards were presented to Miss Autumn Joy Kornreich Saskill and Yesseh Furaha-Ali, (accepted by his father, Nashid Ali) by our own Co-founder Mother Linda Goss and NABS President Dylan Pritchett.

From the first day of the conference, the halls were filled with sounds of youth attending workshops provided by Kuumba members. Every day of the festival was carefully planned so that registered youth from Atlanta and from abroad could enjoy the sounds of storytelling and learn by doing and hearing.

In addition, our Adopt-A-Teller Program provided storytellers for several venues, including four libraries and several schools throughout the city. This collaboration worked and worked well.

It is hoped that the examples of the last two years can only blossom and grow. As we move from city to city, affiliates realize that our future as an organization depends on how well we train our youth. It is imperative that we not take for granted that those of us who are elders and adults will be here forever or, more importantly, that our children will just want to be here with us.

We must provide for them the training and the exposure needed to hone their skills. We must also showcase those talents and instill in them, through hands-on sculpturing of their storytelling talents, a love for this art form, the oral tradition.

With this we send out a call to all of our wonderful affiliates to begin or continue to work with the youth in their communities. This assures a team of youth that is dedicated to preserving Black Storytelling, “In the Tradition...”

We challenge every affiliate to send at least one child to the conference this year. Help them get prepared and confident in their storytelling craft. Create an excitement that is contagious with the youth of your city and come to Cincinnati knowing that you have taken a step to insuring that Black storytelling will last forever.

We invite any and all who have items for our Youth Newsletter to send articles for a proposed electronic newsletter. We ask all affiliates to respond to the call and any who can volunteer to work with our National Youth Director to “Bring a Van or a Bus” and meet us in Cincinnati.

COUSINS

by Bunjo Butler

Cousins is a process that will look at the plots of two somewhat traditional stories in the African / African American oral tradition and analyze how they “stack up” relative to what I identify as a traditional use of the oral tradition amongst African peoples – Acculturation, Socialization, and Education.

Knowledge of the plots of stories help those of us who claim to tell from and perform in the honored tradition of Jeli, Jelimusow, Griot, Griottes, and Oral Artisans, of the Mande Diaspora, West Africa, to put those components of the oral tradition in our own voice and enables us to address contemporary “problems, issues, and realities which are social, spiritual, political, economic, technological, and cultural,” (Koram) and also for “entertainment purposes only.”

Both stories feature tricksters who also play a traditional role in a culture’s oral tradition. In the African Oral Tradition (AOT), these tricksters are members of a great family of cousins related by birth and tradition who may or may not know each other but they are related none the less.

Depending on where you live in the “motherland” one might call these cousins by different names like Anansi the Spider, also known as Gizo, Anansi, and Kwaku Anansi in various African traditions, i.e. Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo, Hausa, Yoruba, Congo, Angola and others; Ijapa, the turtle (Yoruba, West Africa); Sungura, the hare (East Africa); Cagn (South Africa); Chameleon, (West Africa); Legba (West Africa, Dahomean); or Monkey (East Africa) amongst others.

The trade in hue-man beings manifested the AOT in the personas of Miss Nancy (Georgia Sea Islands); Aunt Nancy (Gullah, Jamaica); Nanci (Caracas); Ti-Malice (Haiti); John or High John the Conqueror (Southern United States); and my main man Br’er Rabbit (Southern United States). These relatives, as happens in some families, may not have known that they were related but their cultural DNA links them undeniably.

All of these tricksters are examples of classic Tricksters in a culture’s folk tradition. A characteristic that they all share is that they were all “culture bringers.” Culture Bringers are the characters in stories that transform and create; manifest as cultural heroes; give food; teach hunting and gathering; demonstrate humor and morality; originate ceremony, taboo, and general behavior; and is capable of doing supernatural and magical deeds.

The trickster and culture bringer cousins that I’m going to deal with are Anansi (the elder) and Br’er Rabbit (the youngster) who are genealogically related to all of the African / African Diasporic tricksters and culture bringers already acknowledged.

Spider stories or “Anansem” are centuries old components of the AOT. Br’er Rabbit stories are as old as the Atlantic Slave Trade but each has a classic story amongst their collected tales that share a motif that binds them genealogically in my mind while at the same both are consistent to their place and time in the process and function of the AOT.

PLOT SYNOPSIS: *Anansi*

The classic Anansi story tells the tale of how the stories themselves – the myths that describe cosmology and creation, and define the social order were won from the SKY-God:

- ◆ Anansi wants to buy the stories of the Sky-God.
- ◆ Sky-God gives Anansi four seemingly impossible tasks to perform i.e., bring to him Onini, the python, Osebo, the leopard, Mmoboro, the hornets, and Mmoatia, the spirit.
- ◆ Anansi tricks and captures each of them by “using his head – coming up with a plan” and takes them to the Sky-God.
- ◆ The Sky-God was both amused and impressed and keeps his word and gives Anansi all the stories in the world. Anansi stories are now commonly told in Western Africa, the Caribbean, and North and South America.

The trick that Anansi uses to capture Mmoatia was to trick her into sticking herself to this “gum baby” that he had fashioned and it was this motif that crossed the Atlantic Ocean in the hearts, minds, and cultural memory of the captive Africans.

PLOT SYNOPSIS: *Br’er Rabbit*

Among the collected and oral presentations of the tales of Br’er Rabbit, the story of Br’er Rabbit and the “Tar Baby” is classic. The tale is about how Br’er Rabbit gains his freedom and escapes punishment from Br’er Bear:

- ◆ Br’er Bear was tired of Br’er Rabbit eating all of the vegetables in his garden and puts together a plan to catch him.
- ◆ Br’er Bear works his plan and Br’er Rabbit ends up being stuck to a “tar baby” that Br’er Bear had fashioned to catch Br’er Rabbit.
- ◆ Br’er Bear thinks of three different ways to kill off Br’er Rabbit.
- ◆ Br’er Rabbit “used his head – came up with a plan” and he not only evades all three methods but he also escapes from Br’er Bear until the next time.

For me, Mmoatia morphing into the Tar Baby and the fact that both Anansi and Br’er Rabbit used their heads to come up with a plan to overcome obstacles is the genealogical link that binds these cousins. However, Br’er Rabbit’s cultural role was much different from that of his cousin Anansi. Although it appears that Br’er Rabbit, like Anansi, uses his wits to overcome his more formidable animal companions, Br’er Rabbit’s role is that of the enslaved who matches wits with “old Massa” and generally wins. His is the role of the “oppressed controlling the oppressor thru justifiable trickery and deception.”(Livo /Rietz)

Because of the skill of the storyteller, both stories illuminate the process of Acculturation, Socialization, and Education relative to the time and purpose of its telling. Anansi’s story is so old it speaks of creation and how things came to be because this was a tale of an ancient culture and ancient hue-man. Br’er Rabbit’s story was a story of victory, the victory of a people’s ability to manifest components of an oral tradition and use it to aid the survival of its people and culture.

QUILTS AND STORYTELLING

by Steven H. Hobbs

Over the past twenty years the craft of quilting has enjoyed a revival not unlike the current storytelling revolution. Quilt shops, guilds, and shows have proliferated along with Internet sites and television programming that focus on teaching the art of quilting. The African-American quilters from Gee's Bend, Alabam, have established a national reputation and inspired a United States Postal Service stamp series as their work has gained recognition as works of art suitable for collecting.

Inspired by two of my aunts, Bessie Davis and Viola Hobbs, I began quilting about six years ago. Piecing fabric together proved to be therapeutic as tactile senses and creative engagement yielded an artful product. Moreover, the craft is very forgiving because perfection is not a prerequisite to successfully completing a quilt. The joy is found in the effort and the sharing of your work. Like storytelling, quilts have a way of touching the souls of both the crafter of quilts and those who enjoy the simple pleasure of wrapping up in the warmth of a colorfully designed quilt.

The quilt and the quilting process present opportunities for storytelling. What was the inspiration for the design of the quilt? From where did the fabric originate? For what purpose was the quilt made? Does the quilt record a person's history using the outgrown clothing of childhood or photographs transferred to fabric? Is it for a special occasion like a graduation, special birthday, or a wedding? Are the images imbedded in the quilt purposefully designed to convey a story such as the quest for civil rights or escapes on the Underground Railroad?

Exploring these issues provides fertile ground for growing stories and an opportunity to combine two traditional art forms. Quilts can provide a means to design a set visually complementary to a storytelling performance. The blocks, which usually make up the quilt top, can have special meaning that can be conveyed through a story. One can also use fabric design to tell a visual story about an historical or mythical event. I have worked with the West Alabama Quilters Guild to present stories about quilts to local public



schools as a part a reading initiative. The school children have responded by sharing their own stories about quilts.

In her book, *The Patchwork Quilt* (1985), Valerie Flournoy recounts how a grandmother teaches her granddaughter how to quilt using scraps from her family's worn out clothing. The grandmother in the story notes that, "A quilt won't forget. It can tell your life story." Many of us have family quilts that have been passed down from one generation to the next. There are powerful oral histories connected to these quilts and the persons who crafted them. Moreover, we have elders who can teach us the quilting art form. Certainly, we should make an effort to collect, preserve and pass on these stories "In the Tradition...."

Resources:

Raymond Dobard & Jacqueline Tobin, [Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad](#) (2000)

Kay England & Mary Elizabeth Johnson, [Quilt Inspirations from Africa: A Caravan of Ideas, Patterns, Motifs, and Techniques](#)

Rhonda Richards, [Memory Quilts in the Making](#) (1999)

Maude Southall Wahlman, [Signs & Symbols: African Images in African Quilts](#) (2001)

Janet Wickell, [Quilting \(A Teach Yourself Book\)](#) (2000)

Beth Ann Williams, [A World of Quilts: 10 Projects Using Ethnic Fabrics](#) (2003)

DONORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Denise Kimbrough has generously donated to NABS for several years. Her support comes from her heart in support of her mother, Valeria Richmond, a member of Detroit Association of Black Storytellers. Denise lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Alma Greer supported the Mary Carter Smith appeal because she said, "Mary Carter Smith impressed me with her energy and ability to tell stories. She motivated me to join the organization and is the reason I became a Life Member and a storyteller!" Alma is a founding member and past President of Detroit Association of Black Storytellers, a NABS Circle of Elder member, a retired Detroit School administrator and currently serves her community in many educational and literacy projects!

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*Linda Goss Enshrinement Appeal
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Contributions and pledges will be
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"IN THE TRADITION..."

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