

A LITERARY MISSION ACCOMPLISHED:

Twenty Years of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES TURNBULL



BY L. TERESA CHURCH

In 1995, the timing was right for a new writers group to take root within the cultural landscape of North Carolina's Research Triangle area. Poet Lenard D. Moore, a native of Jacksonville, North Carolina, had long recognized the need for networking and support among black writers. He had already ventured to start the Carolina African American Writers' Collective (referenced hereafter as CAAWC or the Collective) three years earlier. Few had accepted his invitation to join back then, but he was not discouraged. Moore maintained a keen interest in the new voices and literary talents he encountered at local college and university campuses, professional conferences, festivals, readings hosted by bookstores, and programs held at other North Carolina venues.

Moore's second attempt to launch the CAAWC generated a robust response. Nearly a dozen members gathered at his home in Raleigh, North Carolina, for the kickoff meeting held on a hot Saturday in August of 1995. Every available seat was taken in the family room. The fireplace hearth served as overflow seating, and late arrivals were content to sit on the floor or the stairs. Among this gathering of emerging and beginning writers were graduate and undergraduate students, educators, journalists, freelance writers, and professionals from a variety of other fields. Moore's reputation as an established poet held great appeal for the individuals whom he reached out to. Many were impressed by the fact that he was willing to make time in his busy schedule for other writers while pursuing a Master of Arts degree in English and African American Literature at North Carolina A&T State University. Moore's literary career has flourished throughout the history of the Collective. In addition to more than four

ABOVE Carolina African American Writers' Collective members, circa 1997; left to right, Gina M. Streaty, Vickie T. Stanford, Victor E. Blue, Elizabeth Wellington, Lenard D. Moore, Taian Davis, Wendell W. Ottley III, Evie Shockley, Janice W. Hodges, Darrell Stover, and L. Teresa Church

ABOVE RIGHT CAAWC members, circa 2015; left to right, Sheila Smith McKoy, L. Teresa Church, Grace Ocasio, Diane Judge, and Lenard D. Moore