

# Phillis Wheatley to Margaret Walker and Beyond A Legacy of Black Women Writing

## Call for Proposals

Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convening  
November 1-4, 2023  
Jackson State University

In *On Being Female, Black, and Free*, Margaret Walker astutely acknowledges the impact of Black women writers and their unfortunate invisibility in the canon. Owing to an unwillingness to see their blackness and their womanness as anything other than a hindrance, the mainstream attempts to erase their contributions.

Even when Black women writers are acknowledged, such as in the case with Phillis Wheatley, the veracity of their influence is not told in whole. Thomas Jefferson was loath to acknowledge the genius of Wheatley's ability, attributing it to imitation and spiritual emoting, rather than the skill and talent that she demonstrated. To this end, it is incumbent upon not only the Black community but all those willing to recognize Black women's writing, to celebrate it, and to promote it and those who produce it.

In 1973, Margaret Walker understood and accepted this charge, organizing the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival at Jackson State College in Jackson, Mississippi. Marking the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Wheatley's book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, Walker invited prominent Black women writers to honor the poet and the legacy she began.

The Margaret Walker Center continues to celebrate that legacy today with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reconvening of the Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival to be held again at Jackson State University. We invite participants to submit proposals in recognition of the contributions of Phillis Wheatley and the African American women writers who proceed her. We are particularly interested in both creative writing and scholarly papers and panels that consider:

- The poetics of African American orality
- Margaret Walker as “the most famous poet no one ever knew”
- Mentorship and kinship among African American women writers
- Margaret Walker and the implementation of Black Studies Centers
- HBCUs at the center of African American writing
- African American or HBCU archival preservation
- The role of art or artistic expression of African American women
- Migration: exile, immigration, & homeplace
- Phillis Wheatley and the origins of Black women's poetry
- Art and economics for Black women
- Impacts of the inaugural Phillis Wheatley Conference in 1973
- The significance of Black women's literary salons, workshops, & writing retreats

Please submit abstracts of up to 300 words for papers or panels by April 15, 2023. Accepted participants will be notified in June 2023, and presentations may be considered for publication in the conference proceedings.



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