



UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF JAMES HASKINS

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James Haskins*

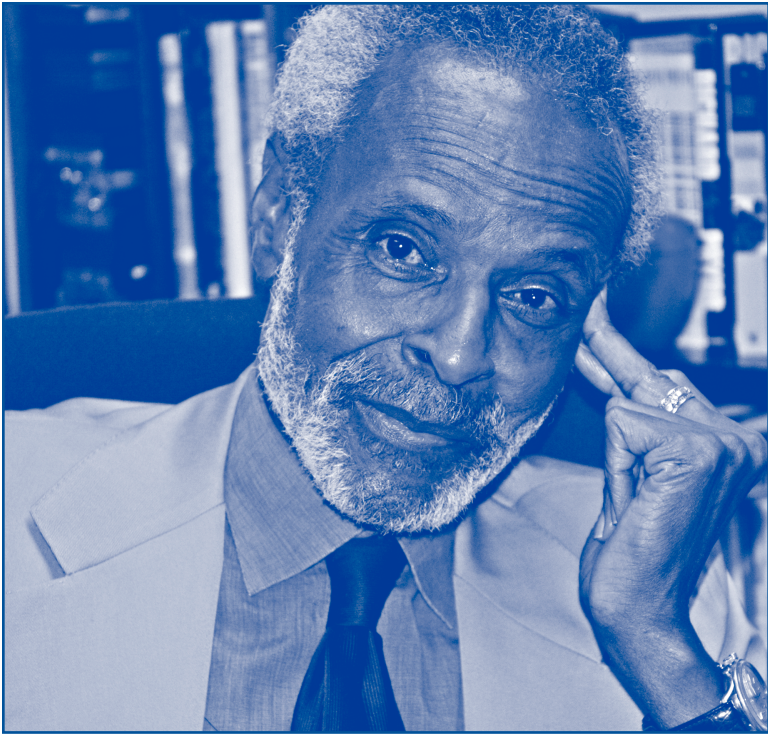
September 19, 2005

3:00 p.m.

University Auditorium

University of Florida

Gainesville, Florida



James Haskins
1941-2005

On behalf of Mrs. Kathleen Benson Haskins; his children, Michael, Elisa Beth, and Margaret Emily; and friends of James Haskins, we welcome and thank you for your presence at this memorial service in honor of the memory of Professor Haskins, who was born on this September day in 1941.

—*Memorial Service Planning Committee*

Monumentum

James (Jim) Haskins did not think he would leave this world so soon. The week before he passed away (July 6, 2005), he negotiated a contract with Ernie Banks on a book about his life. He was a teacher, a writer, a lover of fine wines and good music, especially jazz. His contribution to the world of American letters is immeasurable. As the author of more than 150 works of nonfiction, he was clearly one of the most published American writers of both the 20th and 21st centuries. Many interviews, and more recently the spate of obituaries, have made reference to Jim as a children's book author: Herb Boyd noted in his obituary in the *The Black World Today* (July 13, 2005) that Jim was "a trusted guide" for many young readers to the Black Experience. But Jim was much more than that. In truth, he was a trusted guide for all of us.

No matter what subject he undertook—biographies of Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron (1974), Shirley Chisholm (1975), Scott Joplin (1978), Lew Alcindor aka Kareem Abdul-Jabaar (1978), Winnie Mandela (1988), Toni Morrison (2002), Cecil Poole (2002), Richard Pryor (1984), and Stevie Wonder (1976), to name a few; or in his resurrection of our forgotten culture and history in books like *The Geography of Hope: Black Exodus from the South after Reconstruction* (1999), *Voodoo & Hoodoo* (1978), *One Nation Under a Groove: Rap Music and its Roots* (2000), *One Love, One Heart: A History of Reggae* (2002), *African Heroes* (2005), or *The Cotton Club* (1977), which served as the inspiration for the 1984 Francis Ford Coppola film of the same name and which made him the first African American author to have his work made into a major film—Jim treated his subjects like treasures...to be analyzed, understood, and shared with the world.

As a biographer, Jim professed disdain for writers who went looking for the "dirt" on their subjects; rather, he chose to illuminate his subjects' dignity and highlight their accomplishments, especially when they triumphed in the face of hostility and barriers. He was a biographer of champions, especially the ones who never stopped trying, even when they lost the fight.

Like an archaeologist, he enjoyed discovering the obscure details of the past that many of us neither knew about nor cared about—he made us care, and he provided us with insights that escaped the standard writer. For example, his biography of Scott Joplin was intentionally about what people didn't know about the brilliant

composer and musician, culled from fastidious research of archives around the world, as opposed to replicating what was known. Jim was a methodical and thorough scholar/writer, who delighted in revealing the obscure.

But he was not a writer who rested on his laurels. Even when his books were well received and won awards, he reflected on how he might do better the next time around. According to K. Alycia Allen, in a 1984 interview (*Applause*), his biography of Scott Joplin is a clear example of “Haskins’ persistence to solve unknowns and debunk myths.” Jim commented, “...all the things I wrote about Joplin are things that I didn’t know about him...I would like to think my book is the definitive work on him, because I spent five years tracking down little things that interest me.”

This eye for detail and the obscure, and his commitment to thoroughness are sensibilities he carried into his classroom where he demanded only the best from his students. Joining the faculty of the English Department of the University of Florida in 1977, he set the same high standards for his students as he had set for himself. He frequently commented that he had accomplished so much simply because he had learned early on “to do my homework.”

Many people have remarked that they wished they could have had an opportunity to know James Haskins. He was an intensely private person, and so even those of us who were friends and colleagues will have to wonder if we ever truly knew him. Regardless, his loss is immeasurable. True, his physical body has departed, but even truer, his spirit remains to guard his dreams and guide those of us willing to listen and willing to do our homework. His presence resides now at the University of Florida in the African American Studies Program’s James Haskins Visiting Scholar Fellowship and in the George A. Smathers Libraries’ James Haskins Collection in African American Literature. A strong legacy continues.

In miles, it is not that far between Demopolis, Alabama, and Gainesville, Florida, but in reality, Jim’s journey was a long one, punctuated by stopovers in New York, Mexico, Paris, and other places we have yet to learn about. We shall miss his presence, but his spirit and his legacy survive for all of us to marvel upon and learn from.

—Irma McClaurin, © 2005

Memorial Service

- Commencement**.....**Wes Montgomery**
“My One And Only Love”
and “Bumpin’ On Sunset”
- Official Greeting**.....**Dr. John Cech**
*Professor of English
and Children’s Literature*
- Special Live Music Performance****UF Jazz Ensemble**
- Official Remarks****Dr. Neil S. Sullivan**
Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
-**Dr. John Leavey**
Chair, Department of English
- Proclamation of
Professor James Haskins
Day in Alachua County****Dr. Cynthia M. Chestnut**
Chair, Alachua County Commission
- Recorded Musical Interlude****Duke Ellington**
“Creole Blues”
- Remembrance****Dr. Irma McClaurin**
Associate Professor of Anthropology
- Recorded Musical Interlude**.....**Miles Davis**
“Miles Ahead”
- Special Remarks**.....**Bruce Chappell**
Archivist, George E. Smathers Libraries
-**Joel Buchanan**
*Special Projects Coordinator for
African American History,
George E. Smathers Libraries*

Announcements

The vision for the
James Haskins Endowment Fund**Kathleen Benson Haskins**

The James Haskins Visiting Scholar
Fellowship in African American
Studies at the University of Florida**Dr. Marilyn Thomas-Houston**
*Assistant Professor of Anthropology
and former Interim Director
for African American Studies*

The James Haskins Collection
in African American Literature
at the University of Florida**Dr. John Ingram**
*Director of Collections and
Deputy Director,
George A. Smathers Libraries*

Personal Remarks from Guests in Audience

Please use aisle microphones

Recorded Musical Interlude.....**Art Blakely & the
Jazz Messengers**
“Ill Wind”

Recognition of Distinguished Scholarship and Service

Awarding of the UF Presidential Medallion.....**Dr. Neil S. Sullivan**

Selected Readings from the works of

Professor James Haskins**Dr. Harry Shaw**
*Associate Dean, Emeritus,
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences*

Recorded Musical Finale.....**Stevie Wonder**
“For Once in my Life”

Reception.....**The Friends of Music Room**
*Following the Memorial Service,
all are invited to a reception
in the Friends of Music Room*

Selected Recent Books

Delivering Justice: W. W. Law and the Fight for Civil Rights

by Jim Haskins, Benny Andrews (Illustrator)

Lee & Low, 2005

Black Stars: African Heroes

by James Haskins

John Wiley & Sons, 2004

Cecil Poole: A Life in the Law

by James Haskins

Ninth Judicial Circuit Court Historical Society, 2002

Toni Morrison: Telling a Tale Untold

by James Haskins

Millbrook Press, 2002

One Love, One Heart: A History of Reggae

by James Haskins

Hyperion Books for Children, 2002

Champion: The Story of Muhammad Ali

by James Haskins, Eric Velasquez (Illustrator)

Walker & Company, 2002

Keeping the Faith: African-American Sermons of Liberation

by James Haskins (Editor)

Welcome Rain, 2001

Building a New Land: African Americans in Colonial America

by James Haskins, Kathleen Benson

HarperCollins Publishers, 2001

Conjure Times: Black Magicians in America

by James Haskins, Kathleen Benson

Walker & Company, 2001

Following Freedom's Star: The Story of the Underground Railroad

by James Haskins, Kathleen Benson

Marshall Cavendish 2001

One Nation Under a Groove: Rap Music and Its Roots

by James Haskins

Hyperion Books for Children, 2000

Carter G. Woodson: The Man Who Put "Black" in American History

by James Haskins, Kathleen Benson, Melanie Reim (Illustrator)

Millbrook Press, 2000

Out of the Darkness: The Story of Blacks Moving North, 1890-1940

by James Haskins, Kathleen Benson

Marshall Cavendish, 1999

The Geography of Hope: Black Exodus from the South After Reconstruction

by James Haskins

Millbrook Press, 1999

Bricktop

By Bricktop, James Haskins

(Paperback) Welcome Rain, 1999

Mr. Bojangles: The Biography of Bill Robinson

by James Haskins, N.R. Mitgang

(Paperback) Welcome Rain, 1999

Distinguished African American Political and Governmental Leaders

by James Haskins

Oryx Press, 1999

Bound for America: The Forced Migration of Africans to the New World

by James Haskins, Kathleen Benson, Floyd Cooper (Illustrator)

HarperCollins Publishers, 1999

Black Stars: African American Military Heroes

by James Haskins

John Wiley & Sons, 1998

Black Stars: African American Entrepreneurs

by James Haskins

John Wiley & Sons, 1998

Black, Blue & Gray: African Americans in the Civil War

by James Haskins

Simon & Schuster 1998

In Appreciation

Memorial Service Planning Committee

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University Auditorium Staff

Tom McMorrow, *Manager of Public Functions*
Meredith Beaupre

UF Bands Director

Dr. David Waybright

UF Jazz Ensemble

Under the direction of Professor Gary Langley

Spinal Tech Audio-Visual Services

**Contributions to support
the James Haskins Visiting Scholar Fellowship
and the James Haskins Collection in African
American Literature may be mailed to:**

The James Haskins Endowment
University of Florida Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 14425
Gainesville, FL 32605

Keep the spirit and legacy of James Haskins
alive at the University of Florida.

