

HAKI R. MADHUBUTI & LASANA D. KAZEMBE

A New Music Screaming in the Sun:  
Haki R. Madhubuti and the Nationalization/  
Internationalization of Chicago's BAM

An interview by Lasana D. Kazembe

*This interview was first conducted with Haki R. Madhubuti in his home on May 16, 2017, and revised in March 2019. As one of the architects of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), Professor Madhubuti has, for several decades, distinguished himself through letters, publishing, teaching, and developing independent Black institutions in Chicago. This extensive interview locates and centralizes Madhubuti's national and international influence among generations of artists, scholars, and activists. The title of this interview is adapted from In the Mecca (1968), Gwendolyn Brooks's last publication with Harper & Row publishers. In the final line of her first poem about a young Don L. Lee (Haki R. Madhubuti), Miss Brooks describes him as wanting "a new music screaming in the sun."*

LK: Before we talk about Chicago BAM and your role, contributions, etc., describe who you were and what you were doing artistically during 1965–66.

HM: I was still Don L. Lee, and during 1965–66 I was volunteering at the DuSable Museum of African American History. I had gone there for the first time in 1962. I was working with Margaret Burroughs, who was one of the founders of the museum, along with her husband, Charlie Burroughs. Another cofounder was a man named Eugene Feldman. I worked [volunteered] there as an assistant curator, which meant that I did everything from mop floors to sweep to help out with exhibits; whatever was asked of me. I was also a student at Wilson Junior College [now Kennedy-King College]. And I was always writing poetry. In 1966 I published my first book, *Think Black*. I was getting involved with the whole arts movement, which had not yet become BAM. It kicked off, as you know, following the assassination of Malcolm X in

February 1965. I was still pretty much in the developmental stages of learning several things: how to write poetry, how to become a writer period, and how to really pay close attention to the development of independent Black institutions.

The DuSable Museum was the first Black museum in the country. It was first known as the Ebony Museum of Negro History and Art. But John H. Johnson did not agree with the museum being named “Ebony.” Eventually, he either took them to court or threatened to take them to court to get the name changed. Prior to connecting with the DuSable Museum, I had been in the military and was stationed at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. I was in the service and felt like I was going crazy in that very restricted environment where no one read anything other than local newspapers or magazines. But I was steadily reading anything Black I could get my hands on, and visiting used bookstores all over Chicago.

*So by 1962, you're back in Chicago and you enter the art scene here?*

Right. In 1962, I came to the Ebony Museum and worked there for the next few years. It's now 1965, and Malcolm has just been assassinated. The whole temperature in the country changed. Primarily among Black artists, and men and women who were involved in struggle. But BAM [as we understand it] had not kicked off yet. You had local Chicago artists doing their own stuff on various city corners. There was not any serious, coordinated move toward organizing artists. Artists are the most difficult people to organize because of the individuality of their work, and also because of the solitude in which they often work. Typically, artists are not accustomed to working with other artists, or other people period. Of course, I include myself in that. I never saw a lot of artists around Margaret Burroughs, even though she was deeply involved with artists in the city. She was always involved in trying to be a catalyst for the development of serious Black Art. My role at that time was to study and to write. As I mentioned earlier, I was in college. I was really just trying to be a sponge around these great men and women who were actually doing work that was not being done anyplace else in the country. Looking back, I recognize how fortunate I was. I had this great eagerness to learn about our people's history and our culture. What had brought me to that point

was reading, listening, being involved with Black musicians in the city, and reading poetry at different venues in Chicago. For me, Malcolm X had become a kind of mentor in that I really learned from him by listening to his many speeches and interviews. As I continued to mature [as an artist] while working at the museum, I was able to see how Margaret and Charlie Burroughs functioned as a couple, and also as builders of that very important Black institution. At that point, they had no real money coming in, and the museum was in their home at 3806 S. Michigan Ave. That's where the museum started and stayed for many years until it moved. For me, going back and forth between the museum and the South Side Community Arts Center (cofounded by Margaret Burroughs) and sitting in on discussions of art and politics was instrumental in my development. So between 1965 and 66, that's what I was doing. We must always remember that artists are the freest people in the world, if they are truly artists. Artists question everything, including their own art. And most certainly, the politics, culture, and history of their nation.

*When one considers the history of BAM, why don't Chicago's Black writers, poets, and artists come immediately to mind?*

Primarily because BAM's history is based upon the written word: literature, primarily poetry. And, of course, the music. At that time, the most revolutionary poetry and music was being created in New York and Chicago. With New York being the center of communication, it got the highest level of coverage. And, of course, that's where [Amiri] Baraka was. Chicago had already started developing [Black Arts] institutions before Malcolm's assassination. So had Detroit. But Detroit and Chicago did not have the communication network to nationalize or internationalize our struggle. However, in New York you had everything, and it got greater coverage. Deservedly so. For example, when Baraka moved his organization [BART/S, Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School] to Harlem, they started doing street theater and got funding from New York City. We never had that kind of funding here in Chicago. Harlem was the center of Black life. You had Lewis Michaux's bookstore there, which was a center. And Malcolm still had a very strong political presence throughout New York. So, in New York a climate had been created and when Malcolm was assassinated...it just

burst—all over the nation. What you had here is the *Chicago Defender*. Also, we had the most important publishing apparatus in the Black world: Johnson Publishing Company. They were not only publishing *Ebony* and *Jet*, but also a magazine called *Negro Digest*. *Negro Digest* at that time was copying the style of *Reader's Digest*. They'd take articles from Black periodicals and just reprint them monthly. But when John H. Johnson hired Hoyt W. Fuller all that changed. Hoyt was the first editor who had really traveled outside of the United States to Europe and Africa, and he knew Black writers all over the country.

*Did you immediately perceive what was going on in terms of the development of BAM? If not, at what point did you realize it and what impact did this have on your development?*

Well there was no proclamation saying “Boom! this is the Black Arts Movement.” You had (and I write about this in a number of places) BAM developing simultaneously all across the country. After Malcolm was assassinated, brothers and sisters all over the country began to rethink this whole question of what it means to be Black. We were asking ourselves serious questions. Why were we still answering to “negro”? How do we redefine ourselves at a level that works for us instead of against us? Why do we allow our art to always be defined as protest art, rather than art that is affirmative, or that questions the world? We wanted art that affirmed and put forth our ideas, which were proactive. One of the best thinkers to come out of BAM was Larry Neal, who worked very closely with Baraka. Here in Chicago, you had Fuller and, of course, Margaret Burroughs. You had young writers who were honing their skills at places like *Ebony* and *Negro Digest*. And one of the best editors and someone who has not nearly been given enough credit is Fuller. To me, Hoyt's work with *Negro Digest/Black World* is just as important as W. E. B. Du Bois and his development of *Crisis* magazine. My realization that I was playing a small part in developing the movement really came as a result of putting my money into creating and publishing my own work and then getting involved with the musicians and visual artists in terms of doing street stuff in Chicago. You know, reading at clubs and just wherever. Most certainly reading out there in Washington Park. All the time, you know, there was always activity going on.

*What were some of the sites for BAM activity in Chicago?*

The main public site was Washington Park. It was a public site, and, of course, when the police came you could easily get away. There was a lot of activity because you had forums out there where the elders would hold court—elders like Hammurabi [Frederic H. Robb]. They'd hold court around history and culture, and so forth. The poets would come in and read their work. The time was volatile because of what was happening nationally in terms of Black people fighting across the country for civil rights and so forth. I saw myself involved in that without question. At that time, I was doing day work. I was working on the docks in Chicago. I'm referring to the railroad docks. We were loading and unloading trains and being supervised by first- and second-generation Polish immigrants. At that time, the Irish had moved from those jobs to running the city and the state. The Irish used to be considered the niggers of their race, and had graduated to being white people. And of course, [Richard J.] Daley was the mayor at the time.

*Can we back up for a second? Those Black Chicago artists—that Washington Park crowd—outside of that, was there a lot of collective involvement between the artists?*

Not that I'm aware of. At least I wasn't. I didn't really get involved collectively until OBAC [the Organization of Black American Culture] was founded, which had to be around 1967. After 1967, there was the creation of AfriCOBRA [1968], the Art Ensemble of Chicago [1966], and the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble [1973].

*You were a founding member of OBAC?*

No. I was a founding member of the OBAC Writers' Workshop. Fuller was a founding member of OBAC, along with Abdul Alkalimat, who was Gerald McWorter at the time, and Jeff Donaldson, Bennett Johnson, and others. I had gone to some of the meetings when they'd meet at the South Side Community Art Center.



*What about the public libraries back then? Were you or any of the Black artists ever connected to the city's libraries?*

I'm not aware of anything like that. I used the Hall Branch library at 4801 S. Michigan. I'd go there a lot to study and work.

*Were there any annual Black writers' conferences or arts festivals in Chicago at the time?*

Yes. Alice Browning from *Story* magazine had sponsored several Black writers' conferences. In fact, I remember her bringing John Oliver Killens to one of them. The other annual writers' conferences that existed (we're now talking 1966 on up) were at Fisk University in Nashville, TN. That can be regarded as one of the main venues that helped to give a national platform to so many of the Black artists. Gwendolyn Brooks had gone down there in 1967.

Baraka was there. Ron Milner, the Detroit playwright, was there. The historian Lerone Bennett Jr. was there. And of course, the organizer was Killens. Arna Bontemps was on the faculty. And you had Robert Hayden, a person who never involved himself in BAM at all. In 1968, I was invited [to the Fisk conference] and that's when I met all of them. My poetry reading and lectures on Black literature put me on the national map and I received two job offers: one from Talladega College and the other from Cornell University.

*Can you share some of your specific contributions to the growth and development of BAM in Chicago?*

Well, being a cofounder of the OBAC Writers' Workshop. Out of that, I helped develop our first publication—the journal *Nommo*. That started around 1968 or 1969. It later became a book. The leader of the workshop was Fuller. We were the only workshop to come out of OBAC that had its own headquarters. We were located on 35th and Michigan Ave. where we had a storefront. We paid for the storefront out of our own dues. We would tax ourselves. It became a center for Black poets and writers. When Black writers would come in the area for whatever reason, we would bring them over to OBAC to interact with the local artists. My contributions also included working and

volunteering at the DuSable Museum. I stayed there until 1966. In 1967, I started Third World Press (TWP) in my basement apartment on the South Side of Chicago in Englewood, 63rd and Ada. I lived in a basement apartment about the size of a large conference table, which I shared with other unwanted animals. TWP was really built upon the founding of Broadside Press in Detroit. After Dudley Randall and Margaret Burroughs published *For Malcolm*, I sent Randall my second book, *Black Pride*. That was 1967. I asked him to consider publishing it with Broadside. And he did something unusual in that he got back to me within a week and agreed to publish me. Not only did he say yes, but he asked me if he could write the introduction to the book. Of course, I said yes because he was obviously one of the finest poets we had produced. *Black Pride* was one of the few early books that Broadside Press published. So by 1968, my own publishing record now was in motion. In terms of getting national attention, my work was being published in *Negro Digest/Black World* magazine. After Fisk, I started getting calls from universities, colleges, libraries, community centers, and Black bookstores. I was publishing poetry regularly. I had published primarily in smaller journals such as *Soulbook* and *Liberator*, even *Evergreen Review*. Eventually, I was published in the editorial pages of the *New York Times*. Then I was being invited to read all over the place. My two books (*Black Pride* and *Think Black*) were an underground success. For a time (after I left Chicago to teach at Cornell University), TWP was located in the DuSable Museum, before we moved to Ellis Bookstore at 64th and Cottage Grove.

*But you also made contributions as a musician, right. I mean, you cut a couple of albums?*

Oh yes. I released two albums with The African Liberation Ensemble. The first was titled *Rise Vision Comin* [1976] and the second was *Medasi* [1984]. They sold 30,000 and 10,000 copies respectively, which helped bring a lot of attention to creative work coming out of Chicago.

*Right. So, 1967 was the official year of TWP's founding?*

Yes. I founded TWP in 1967 with \$400 and a mimeograph machine. Eventually I got Carolyn Rodgers and Johari Amini involved. We

published their first books. Carolyn only stayed about six months. What really grounded my activity and defined my major contribution, other than my poetry, was the founding of TWP. It materialized out of my volunteering at the DuSable Museum and meeting Dudley Randall.

*I'm going to come back to TWP, but I'd like you to continue talking about your other contributions to Chicago's BAM. You mentioned self-publishing, and your growing reputation as a poet. Now we're talking about institution-building. Talk about other areas of your involvement.*

In 1969, I, along with Carol Easton, Johari Amini, Rochelle Ricks, and others, were the founders of the Institute of Positive Education (IPE), one of the first BAM organizations in the nation that is still operating today. We rented two storefronts at 78th and Ellis. One was for TWP, and the other for the IPE. Johari stayed for a few years working in all of our institutions (TWP, IPE, and New Concept School [NCS]). We also had a food co-op, typesetting business, and underground credit union. We eventually bought a farm in South Haven, Michigan, to get our children out of the city during summer and get them close to the earth. Eventually, in 1970, we became the Chicago chapter for the Congress of Afrikan People (CAP) and began to focus on not only Chicago work, but national and international struggles, especially the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

I was also involved in the street struggle working with Chicago CORE [Congress of Racial Equality]. When [Dr. Martin Luther] King came to Chicago, I was in all of his marches. I didn't believe in nonviolence, but I believed in King because he was a serious man and a preacher who loved his people. You could see that in his actions. He had moved to the West Side for a while. I got involved with the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]. I was involved in the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] with David Llorens. And so whenever there were political activities, I'd show up reading poetry. Also, this was the period of the development of the Wall of Respect, which became an international symbol for Chicago's BAM. The OBAC Visual Arts Workshop was responsible for the Wall of Respect. Gwendolyn Brooks and I wrote poems and read at the dedication of the Wall of Respect in 1967.



*When you were doing that stuff and even your later attendance at FESTAC [Second World African Festival of Arts and Culture]...*

That came much later. Abena Joan Brown (one of the founders of eta Theatre) and I were the co-conveners of the Midwest North American zone, from which we sent over 350 Black artists of all disciplines to Lagos, Nigeria. In fact, I had been invited to Algiers in 1969 to read poetry at the first Pan-African Arts Festival. It was there that I met Nina Simone, Archie Shepp, Ted Joans, and Emory Douglas (artist and Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party). The *Ebony* article that was published about me (March 1969) was instrumental in my getting invited to Algiers. On the strength of my trip over there, I began receiving other invitations from African nations that were doing arts programs. All of this international activity helped raise the profile of BAM in Chicago. It also contributed to my being invited to read poetry, and attend lectures and book signings in every state in the US, except Hawaii, Alaska, South Dakota, and North Dakota.

*But, regarding your attendance at the 1968 Fisk Writers Conference, were you thinking of yourself as a BAM artist from Chicago? That you were representing the Chicago faction, if you will, of BAM? Or did you consider there to be a Chicago BAM faction or collective?*

Well, not really because BAM had not been defined as BAM at that point. I did, however, define myself as a product of a new Black movement, and as having been mentored by Malcolm X, Charlie and Margaret Burroughs, Dudley Randall, Hoyt W. Fuller, Barbara Ann Sizemore, and Gwendolyn Brooks. I also was very clear that I had been prepared for this conference by a decade or more of serious study of the international Black struggle. By that time, I had read deeply into the works of W. E. B. Du Bois, William Monroe Trotter, Frederick Douglass, Carter G. Woodson, James Baldwin, John Oliver Killens, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, and many, many more. I must always reference that while in the military (between 1960–63), I read close to a book a day, and after completing each book, I wrote a 250–300-word summary of each book for my later reference. So, when I was brought to Fisk University at the age of twenty-six, I brought a knowledge base for a person who had received first-class

undergraduate and graduate education in Black World Studies. And this is why in all of my prose books there is a serious bibliography.

*So, was it at this point that BAM started to assume its definition?*

Oh, I see. Well, yes. We still, even now, never say I'm New York BAM or Chicago BAM or Los Angeles BAM. We just say BAM. There was never that kind of distinction. We talked about New York earlier. The other thing to recall is that we had major historians, such as John Henrik Clarke, Yosef Ben-Jochannan, Chancellor Williams, Vincent Harding, and Lerone Bennett Jr. They were in the midst of a lot of Black activism. Not only did they function as historians, but also as advisors to the much younger Black artists. Then we have to talk about theater, that was critical. You had Barbara Ann Teer [in New York]; Woodie King Jr. who migrated from Detroit to New York. So, all of the BAM identifications and us saying that we were BAM artists—that probably didn't take off until the scholars got involved. At that point, people had been trying to define everything. We saw ourselves as Black poets and Black artists. And to the degree that we named ourselves (e.g., OBAC), that's how we identified on one level—the AACM in terms of music and AfriCOBRA in visual art. There were BAM musicians. There were BAM visual artists. But they all had their own designations and their own identity in terms of their craft.

*In your view, what were some of the greatest achievements coming from BAM artists in Chicago?*

I think the publishing and music traditions were our strongest achievements. Because eventually what happened with *Negro Digest* is that we forced John H. Johnson to rename it *Black World*. You cannot underestimate the importance of *Black World* because the Johnson Publishing company published something like 50,000 copies per month. It was both national and international. Everybody wanted to publish in *Negro Digest/Black World*, especially after Fuller became editor. It was understood that if you got published in *Negro Digest/Black World* you'd have an international audience. So the OBAC Writers' Workshop took on another level of importance because Fuller was its sponsor and key member. I think you also have to look

at AACM—Muhal Richard Abrams and the other early musicians that came out of the Black Arts tradition. There were numerous folks who came out of AACM, and many of them wound up in New York. AACM is still alive and still going. Here in Chicago, you also had Kuumba Theater with Val Gray Ward. Kuumba Theater and Abena Joan Brown's eta Theatre were very important. They led to the later development of Black Ensemble Theater with Jackie Taylor. The early theaters (Kuumba and eta) were firebrands. Kuumba laid the early work because Val was just like a firehouse herself. Between 1970–78, I was on the faculty of Howard University as a Poet-in-Residence at its newly created Institute for the Arts and Humanities under the directorship of the cultural scientist Dr. Stephen E. Henderson. What was unique about my situation is that Howard University provided me with a stipend to travel between Washington D.C. and Chicago each week during my eight-year tenure there. Looking back, it was a unique arrangement for me to be able to teach and work in two cities simultaneously.

*What about Phil Cohran? Was his organization involved with theater, or strictly music?*

It was both. In many ways, Phil was a philosopher of the movement. He not only curated music at the Afro-Arts Theater, but he also offered theater, spoken word performances, and community lectures. When Baraka came into Chicago, he'd speak there. Phil, a master musician, composer, and bandleader, was always in the middle of arts and creative production in the city and in the nation. He was truly brilliantly ahead of his time.

*Where was his theater located?*

At 39th and Drexel. They tore it down. Phil Cohran was very instrumental in the whole music scene here in Chicago and throughout the nation. Most certainly African-centered music. Unfortunately, he made his transition in 2018. So, Afro-Arts, Kuumba, AACM, eta Theatre, and OBAC were all very critical to the Black Arts scene in Chicago. I'm sure there are others that I'm not mentioning. What came out of [that period], too, were numerous men and women, brothers and sisters

who were working the streets in various fields including education, psychology, and medicine. That BAM period inspired the growth of Black professional organizations: Black psychologists, psychiatrists, political scientists, and nurses. Most certainly, the largest group to come out of BAM were the social workers. They had one of the largest national movements and they stayed Black.

*What about Chicago BAM publications or authors? Do any, in your mind, stand the test of time?*

Gwendolyn Brooks. She was a precursor to BAM, as well as a BAM artist, which people often do not recognize or talk about enough. She set the example for me and other artists. She had her own publishing company called The David Company. And she published a magazine (which came out twice per year) titled *The Black Position*. In 1969, she left Harper & Row and switched to Broadside Press, and published *Riot*, which was one of the major BAM publications. Then TWP came along and we published Baraka and many other BAM writers. TWP published *Black Books Bulletin*. You also have Don L. Lee, who became Haki Madhubuti. We published just about every major Black writer, art historian, and poet right up until BAM's decline.

*Typically, when people discuss BAM, there's a tendency to concentrate on writers and on visual or performing artists. Strangely, BAM musicians are often left out of those broader conversations, or relegated under a separate consideration. How do Black Chicago musicians factor into BAM's history?*

I think AACM was the major collective to come out of Chicago. Obviously what Phil Cohran was doing at Afro-Arts was the center of it. AACM has created literally generations of musicians, and is still operating. Some of its current major players are Nikki Mitchell, Ernest Dawkins, and Mwata Bowden. But also, in terms of music, we can't leave out Muntu Dance Theatre. They consisted of musicians, percussionists, drummers, and dancers. Both organizations were and are critical. You can't do too much of anything in the Black world without music. Even though AACM was straight-ahead, progressive jazz—or Black classical music: more geared toward listening to than dancing

to. They made their name by playing in all of the Chicago clubs (both North and South side) that allowed jazz to come in.

*So, would it be safe to say that in terms of the African-centeredness, or level of political consciousness of BAM's music institutions, that they were on par with BAM writers and other artists?*

The musicians were pretty much ahead out of all of the BAM groups. Most certainly here in Chicago. Music has always been instrumental to Black survival. From our African roots, throughout enslavement, the Jane/Jim Crow era, we have been able to grow, develop, and create partially because of the encouragement and enlightened storytelling of our musicians. The major problem (at that time) with the musicians is they were not involved enough with the business side of creating Great Black Music.

*You mentioned that BAM musicians were ahead of the other BAM artists. How do you explain that?*

Primarily because music and poetry are the two indigenous forms of Black art. And both the music and the dance are more naturally lineage-derived in terms of coming from Africa and staying true to its core. The English language is naturally foreign to Black people. And Black writers and poets had to learn the language to play and write in it. Black musicians (for the most part) did not have to make that transition because our music came out of the spirituals and out of hard-core transmission from the continent to here. In many ways, the music became a language for us to stay alive. The music, most certainly the drum, was critical in terms of our maturation. We used the music for so much, not only in terms of joy or for burying our dead but for birth and for the transition into manhood and womanhood. Music was always involved. The words and language came a bit later because, as you know, in order for the enslavement process to work, we had to learn a new language of our oppressor. This was a part of the seasoning process. The music was always there. We didn't have to learn to interact with the music in the same sense [as language]. It was transmitted through culture, and transmitted through families. You grew up playing drums, playing piano. Remember Motown came out



of Detroit. Those Motown musicians were very influential and very critical in terms of our political maturation during the sixties—the Motown sound. And, of course, Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia sound. Memphis blues and, of course, Chicago blues were at the center of our struggle. So, yes, you had all those various forms of art. In visual art, there is the Wall of Respect, which is known internationally. In fact, last year there was an exhibit on the Wall down at the Chicago Cultural Center. There have been books on the Wall of Respect. The idea for the wall came out of OBAC's Visual Arts Workshop. Even at the dedication of the Wall of Respect, you had musicians out there, as well as poets. Gwendolyn Brooks and I each read individual compositions at the dedication.

*What did the existence of TWP mean for Chicago BAM writers?*

Well, at one level, I tend to think that TWP was as important as *Negro Digest/Black World*. TWP was organized and flourished as an alternative, or even a first-level publishing company that would not only honor the work and publish Black authors, but keep their works in print. We're now going into our fifty-third year. For over fifty years we've published some of the most revolutionary and progressive poets and writers in the US. And, for the most part, you can always talk to the editors, it's not like we're hiding anywhere. For forty-three years I've taught mainly at universities here in Chicago. Through Third World Press, I've been involved in creating writers' workshops, conferences, and so forth across the country and also internationally.

*How many writers would you say TWP and the Third World Press Foundation (TWPF) have published?*

Hundreds and hundreds. There are so many. Not only in terms of single-author books, but also in terms of anthologies and, of course, the numerous writers we published via *Black Books Bulletin*. It may be in the thousands. They published with us because they honor the tradition of what we're trying to do. It was never about making a lot of money. It was about getting our ideas out. Now, if we make money as a result of that, then that's one of the benefits. TWP (now TWPF) has been at the center of BAM and has helped to transform it and keep

it alive as we move into a new millennium. *Essence* is owned by white people now, BET is owned by white people, *Ebony* has been downsized and sold to some people in Texas. Johnson Publishing Company, as an entity, does not exist at the level that it used to. TWP/TWPF is the only Black publishing company in the country, if not the world, that owns its own headquarters, along with the IPE (Institute for Positive Education).

*TWP/TWPF could well be one of the last of the BAM institutions still in existence?*

Quite possibly. I think it might be. See, autonomy has always been very important—ideological, physical, and financial autonomy. All of that is still in place. We're not dependent upon (and never have been) grant or foundation money. Although, as we move forward into the new structure, we will be writing grants and seeking funding outside of our community. The 2008 economic meltdown hurt us very badly and we had to reorganize and reconstitute the press as a 501(c)3. But it has been a struggle. It has been a struggle financially, psychologically, and physically. To give one example, there was a time when I would not travel without my books, but also TWP's books to sell. We not only had the responsibility for payroll for TWP, but also for our schools. These were professional educators and they needed to be paid as such. I could not pay them with a poem. So it was urgent that we earned money wherever we could.

*Who would you describe as being among the influential, yet unsung, folks in Chicago BAM history?*

The major figure would be Hoyt W. Fuller, the Editor of *Negro Digest/Black World* magazine. He published his only book (*Journey to Africa*) with TWP. Fuller was a fine editor and writer and one of the few among us who had traveled widely and knew (we thought) everybody. Certainly all of the major Black poets and fiction writers. If you look at the indices of *Negro Digest/Black World*, you see the power that magazine held under Hoyt's editorship. His monthly publication numbers were about fifty thousand. No other Black intellectual magazine in the world touched those figures. He was not a man who felt that he needed to be at the center of anything, but he knew he was at the center. As an editor, he

had the ability to push or promote a particular artist. If you look at the magazine's indices, you'll see that they had special issues on music, poetry, fiction, drama. And, during that period, just about everybody who was anybody was published in *Negro Digest/Black World*.

*Anyone else?*

Then there's Useni Eugene Perkins, a fine poet and playwright whose work has received national attention. Also, he was a writer of children's books and a social scientist. His book *Home is a Dirty Street* was one of the first critical analyses of young people and the trials and tribulations that they faced daily. TWP published the book in 1975 based on a very favorable recommendation from [historian and author] Lerone Bennett Jr. Since Useni has been with TWP for many decades, we've published perhaps five or six of his books. We just published his magnum opus, *Rise of the Phoenix*, an anthology that looks at Black Chicago over the last five or six decades. Of course, I have to mention the late Sam Greenlee. Everyone knows Sam for *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. But he was also a very good short-story writer and poet. In fact, TWP published his only book of poetry. In later life, he made his living from selling tapes of *Spook*. That was one of the few pieces of fiction that came out of BAM and was made into a film.

*You mentioned David Llorens. Who was he?*

Llorens was a young writer who was on the staff at Johnson Publishing Company. He wrote for *Ebony*, as well as *Negro Digest/Black World*. In fact, once when I was reading poetry at the New Sutherland Lounge on 47th and Drexel, I was accompanied by musicians and I read this poem titled "In the Interest of Black Salvation." Llorens was in the audience. People never seemed to forget the last three lines of the poem: "Jesus saves / Jesus saves / Jesus saves S&H green stamps." A big howl went up; that was Llorens. He nearly fell off his chair at the bar holding his drink. He had been raised Catholic, and, you know, if you're a Black man coming out of the Catholic Church and you become conscious, then you're really at odds. But that's when we became friends. He came up to me and said, "Man, I've never heard anybody say anything like that about Jesus." When I got my position at Cornell University, Llorens approached John H. Johnson at *Ebony*

to do a piece about me, the first Black Poet-in-Residence at an Ivy League university.

*What about Amus Mor?*

Amus Mor was one of the finest poets to come out of Chicago. But he never published a book, only poems here and there. In fact, one of his poems is published in *SOS*, the Bracey, Sanchez, Smethurst anthology. He was married to Lorne Cress. I went to her to see if she had any of his poems, but she said no. So that was that.

*As we talk about unsung Chicago BAM artists, what about women? Not just writers, but artists across the spectrum?*

The women got more coverage than most of the other artists—certainly Johari Amini. But she stopped writing at a certain period. Johari and Carolyn were members of the OBAC Writers' Workshop and early supporters of the press. We published their early books, and we published Angela Jackson's first book in the early seventies. Angela was much younger than the rest of us. She was completing her studies at Northwestern where she met Fuller. He began to mentor her, and their connection probably led to her involvement with OBAC. There was Carole A. Parks, who worked as an Associate Editor of *Negro Digest/Black World*. Also, she participated in many cultural activities throughout the city. In fact, she later edited the book *Nommo*. Then there was Sylvia (Laini) Abernathy. She was married to Billy (Fundu) Abernathy. They were both actively involved as visual artists. Some of the other women writing during this period were Sandra Jackson-Opoku, Nora Brooks Blakely, Eileen C. Cherry, Sandra Royster, and S. Brandi Barnes. We published many of their books. I just can't remember all of their names. So many great writers and visual artists came out of OBAC. We worked with all of them. Joan Gray, she ended up running Muntu. There was Barbara Jones-Hogu. Darlene Blackburn was one of the major dancers and choreographers to come out. There were a lot of sisters in AACM, but I just can't remember all of their names.

*As a key architect of BAM's legacy, how would you prefer that legacy be remembered, taught, and conveyed?*

We stood on and still stand on the shoulders of the artists who preceded us. I would not be here if it was not for Randall, Fuller, Brooks, and Margaret Burroughs. Of course, Baraka and Sanchez. The art itself is generational and lasting. One of the reasons that TWP/TWPF, Broadside Press, and Lotus Press are still functioning is because the work that we publish is a testimony to the artists that kept us alive. And for myself, I think that I've done many things that a lot of BAM artists were not able to do, for whatever reason. I absolutely feel that formal education is necessary, but along with formal education you have to have informal education; or even life-giving, life-saving education.

*What about in terms of the history of the movement itself?*

The literature is out there now. We published this new book *The Magic of Juju* by Kalamu ya Salaam on the history of BAM. And I mentioned the other book, *SOS*. So, where my deliberations in this interview may have a lot of holes, you can look at those publications to get some bits of protein that I was not able to share as a result of my flawed memory. The best source for the history of BAM is found in the ten years (or so) of coverage of *Negro Digest/Black World*, which is available online. For me, over my seventy-seven years (and most certainly fifty years, in terms of struggle) I've done this kind of work all of my adult life. Building independent Black institutions was and is critical. And what is produced and disseminated from those institutions is critical.

*There are a lot of universities and colleges around the country that have developed BAM courses. Is that an effective means of transmitting the history?*

Yes, absolutely. However, what is happening today is the serious elimination or transformation of Africana Studies and Black Studies programs around the country. This cannot be denied. In fact, if you look at the number of people of African ancestry teaching at the university level, you'll find that the numbers have decreased to the point where we are less than five percent of the total faculty nationally.

*I'm not aware of any courses being offered or developed at the high school level or the elementary level, but I know at the university level this seems to be going on.*



It's absolutely necessary. As long as the work is being taught in a way in which it gives credit to the artists.

*Do you think there's enough being done here in Chicago to transmit the history of Chicago BAM?*

No. I had mentioned that there was a recent exhibit on the Wall of Respect at the Chicago Cultural Center. Now you have this fifty-year remembrance going on. We had the celebration of the centennial of Brooks. Then we had the fifty-year celebration of TWP. So there was a year of celebrations in many cases. In 2017, we had several celebrations leading into 2018 with more celebrations of Black institutional development.

*We've talked about museums and curatorial efforts. I know Marvin X has been pushing for the creation of a BAM Business District in the city of Oakland. He's in communication with the mayor and other officials to get the city to fund historical remembrance around BAM. Would you like to see something like that occur in Chicago?*

We have the DuSable Museum. I think they should probably devote a space in the museum for BAM remembrance. Maybe a permanent exhibit. As you know, here at TWPF we have converted a large portion of our first floor into the Gwendolyn Brooks Writers' House. Our school will also be transforming their auditorium into the Gwendolyn Brooks Writers' Auditorium. I think any efforts that keep our writers alive are good—Brooks, Killens, Margaret Walker, Mari Evans (who just passed in 2017), Baraka, Larry Neal, Ted Joans, Randall, Askia Toure, Eugene Redmond, Kalamu ya Salaam, Sanchez, Marvin X, Jayne Cortez, and many others. These are people who essentially laid the foundation for what we're doing. I didn't mention Joe Goncalves and the *Journal of Black Poetry*. These people were critical, and it's critical that their work be remembered and studied so that it may live on. We continue to teach African-centered culture, which includes BAM culture, in our schools in Chicago: New Concept School, Betty Shabazz Academy, Barbara Ann Sizemore Academy–Institute of Positive Education. It is important to mention that my wife, Dr. Carol D. Lee (Mama Safisha) remains the guiding light and chair of the board of our schools.