



An Interdisciplinary Journal of Africana Studies

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Our First Edition:

Welcome to our first edition of *Moja*: one with a special focus. *Moja* was born on the University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA) campus as an opportunity for creating a forum that would invite, encourage, and support the interdisciplinary work of Africana Studies. It was created as a space where people, engaged in many forms of critical and creative inquiry and expression, could present their materials/performances/ideas to the community. In other places, in the past, Africana Studies sometimes focused more on one component of the community than another: African, African American, or African Diasporic. This created artificial barriers to communication instead of unifying the community. But UNCA's Africana Studies has always strived to avoid such approaches. Thus, this interdisciplinary journal and its name—*Moja*. Its mission: to create a welcoming space, a gathering place for academics, intellectuals, community activists, artists, and all people dedicated to interrogating, understanding, documenting, celebrating all things Africana—past, present, and future.

Moja is a Swahili word meaning one. Moja was chosen as the name of our Interdisciplinary Africana Studies journal in recognition of the collective heritage—and cultural differences—of Africans and people of African descent. Moja is the intellectual unification of Africana people who, though separated by geopolitical maps, continue to assert their cultural traditions, and retrieve their repressed histories through a decolonizing process. Moja, One! Unity is Strength.

To that end, we have chosen to begin with a Special Edition crafted from a Symposium held in the fall of 2019 in Asheville, North Carolina on “Closing the Opportunity Gap: Black Children Thriving in Schools,” especially in the Western North Carolina region. The papers presented here offer best practices from contemporary scholars about how to achieve that. The presenters are themselves people who have been educated in those systems and are currently scholars, teachers, activists, and parents of children being educated in similar institutions. *Moja* is proud to have the opportunity to provide greater access to the work of these scholars and hopes to engage the readership in a robust discussion of and amplification of these ideas.

The event sponsors provided this description of the inspiration for and intentions of their work:

Asheville is in a crisis. We have the worst academic outcomes for Black children in the state of North Carolina.

This opportunity gap is a result of the structural inequities Black children face within the educational system. Emphasizing the best practices in education, a think tank of local scholars will present solutions that promote black children thriving in our schools. This think tank seeks to increase awareness and generate ideas leading to the implementation of these solutions in our region.

To address these crises, a team of scholars in Western North Carolina will come together to present the best practices that support black children thriving in our schools.

This first edition includes work by the following scholars and community activists:

- Dr. Agya Boakye-Boaten (*University of North Carolina Asheville*)
- Cortina Jenelle Caldwell (*Artists Designing Evolution Project, LLC*)
- Dr. Summer Carrol (*Lenoir-Rhyne University*)
- Dr. Brandi N. Hinnant-Crawford (*Western Carolina University*)
- Itiyopiya Ewart (*Expanding Equity in Our Schools*)
- Dr. Joseph Fox (*Fox Management Consulting Enterprises, LLC*)
- Dr. Tiece Ruffin (*University of North Carolina Asheville*)
- Dr. Darrius Stanley (*Western Carolina University*)

Finally, in addition to the work of these scholars and activists, we include a special blessing by Dr. Dwight B. Mullen (Professor Emeritus of the Department of Political Science, UNC Asheville).

We welcome your responses and look forward to your future submissions.

The Guest Editorial Staff:

Dr. Dolly Jenkins Mullen

Dr. Dwight Mullen

Dr. Deborah (Dee) James

Dr. Charles G. James, Jr.

Professors Emerita

UNC Asheville