

Features

Church 'Crowns'

Four women at WSSU are part of book showcasing church hats



By Joy Scott
Argus Reporter

As a child, Sherrie Flynt-Wallington admired the regal women in her church that wore elaborate and decorative church hats. She said they reminded her of "beautiful dolls."

"But I knew how hard they worked all week. Sometimes, under those hats, there's a lot of joy and a lot of sorrow," she said in "Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats," a book celebrating the tradition of church hats.

Flynt-Wallington and three other Winston-Salem State University faculty and staff grace the pages of the book, along with local women sharing some of their most deep thoughts about life, love and loss.

A friend of the book's photographer, Michael Cunningham, and the book's writer, Craig Marberry, Flynt-Wallington, an advertising instructor and assistant to the honors program director, was instrumental in spreading the word to some of the 54 women featured in the book.

"It's just like the birth of a baby. From the beginning it was pregnant with so many promises," she said. "All the book signings are like little baby showers."

Cunningham and Marberry have

had book discussions and signings within the last month at Special Occasions and Barnes & Noble Booksellers in Winston-Salem to promote the book.

"When you talk to a woman about a hat, when she's worn hats all her life, you're not talking about her hat. You're talking about her life," Marberry said at Barnes & Noble on Nov. 18. The idea for the book began two years ago when Cunningham said he was talking to a friend about a church service and the hats the women wore to church. "At that moment, as a photographer, I could see there was something there," he said. "I felt like I was overwhelmed with something."

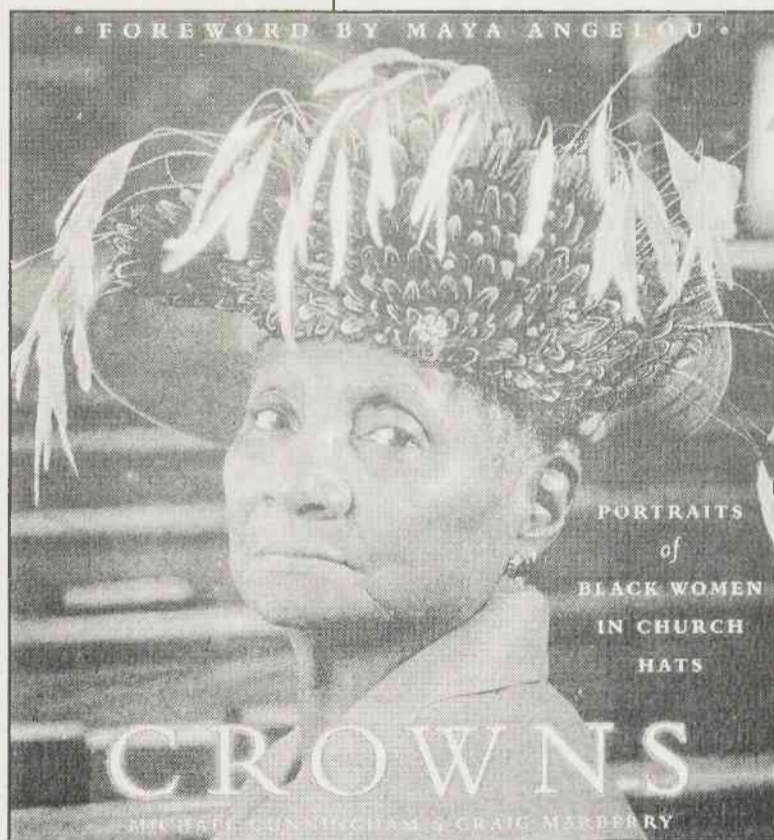
Cunningham began to come into Winston-Salem churches and take pictures of the women after church service.

After taking a few pictures, Cunningham showed them to Marberry. "Craig immediately saw a vision for the book," Cunningham said.

"Right from the beginning I began to hear the voices for the stories," Marberry said.

Immediately the men began to work on the project; Cunningham photographing the women, and Marberry interviewing them. "Everyday was like a mission to tell

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Photos courtesy of Michael Cunningham
Beth Hopkins (top) with her mother, Grace; Sanclary Saunders (above); and Carmen Bonham (right) display their best hats.

If a woman wears a hat all the time, she's going to look naked in the casket without one.

— Carmen Bonham

