

# Reading together

## Thousand join in to share black literature

By T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Last year, she sat, watched, listened, and she learned.

This year, she was one of the teachers — others watched and listened to her.

She sat in a chair before a group of about 15 smiling ladies, clutching a thin brochure in her hands. Before she opened the brochure and read from it, she introduced herself to the women.

She's Laura Spangler. She's a white, Presbyterian minister of Lloyd Presbyterian, a century-old African American church. And she has a fondness for African American literature.

Earlier this week, Spangler joined more than a million people across the nation and around the world in the 10th annual African American Read-In Chain, an event crafted by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English to promote the richness and diversity of black literature.

The goal of the Read-In is to form a human chain of people listening to, or reading literature by black authors at the same time. In order to accomplish that goal and to get as many people as possible involved, churches, schools, non-profit groups and civic organizations worldwide held reading sessions on Feb. 7 and Feb. 8, where people of all races gathered to share some of their favorite titles.

At some locations, people gathered to hear guest readers. At others sessions, everyone in attendance stood before the crowd to share their favorite book passages, poems or essays.

Spangler's group, which gathered Monday morning on an opulent glassed-in patio at the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, fell into the latter category.

Spangler read from a sermon by Katie Geneva Cannon, the first African American woman to be ordained by the Presbyterian Church.

Although she came to Reynolda House's Read-In last year — which was the first year the museum held the event — it was the first time she became an active participant.

"I feel empowered by the liberation emphasis in African American literature," she said. "I want to know the cultural history of my neighbors."

First conceived as merely a way to promote black writers, the Read-In Chain has evolved into a symposium for interracial dialogue that is appropriately held in February — National Black History Month.

Just as diverse as the people who attend the thousands of Read-In sessions each year, are the selections that readers choose. While the old standards like Baldwin, Hughes and Angelou remain the most popular Read-In classics, Bertha Roundtree — the woman who brought the Read-In Chain to the attention of Reynolda House officials last year — read a witty selection dealing with black women and hair from Starr Jones' book "You Have to Stand for Something or You'll Fall for Anything."

"I didn't know who Starr Jones was, until about a month ago," Roundtree said of the lawyer-turned-talk show host. "This passage shows how a lot of African American women buy into Eurocentric culture."

Selections shared by the other readers ran the literary gauntlet, from bitter-sweet slave narratives to obscure novels to short but powerful poems.

Kathleen Hutton is a Reynolda House employee who helped to organize the session. Hutton — who shared the Langston Hughes classic "I, too" with the group — said the Read-In complements the museum's focus on American art and culture.

"It fits right into the mission that we have here at Reynolda House of celebrating the arts," Hutton said.

Next year, Hutton said, the museum hopes to lure novice writers to the event to share some of their work.

This year's Read-In Chain rattled through locations across the city. The day before the Reynolda House event, nearly 30 people assembled on the campus of Winston-Salem State University for its Read-In.

The session was held in a huge auditorium-like classroom in the Hall-Patterson Building on the university's campus. Nearly all of those in attendance made their way to the microphone-rigged podium in the front of the room to share their readings.

Many of those at the Read-In were WSSU students or faculty, others were simply book lovers who welcomed an opportunity to be engulfed in great literature for nearly

two hours. Each reader seemed to have chosen selections that had struck a spiritual cord within them, some even shared their connection with the writing during brief introductions.

One student read a passage from diva Patti LaBelle's biography. She said the book's title — "Don't Block the Blessings" — had a special meaning for her.

The only male reader at the session read lines from "Invisible Man," Ralph Ellison's compelling study of a black male in America.

One of the highlights of the session came when two women stood before the group and performed a rousing version of the well-known, catchy poem, "Booker T and W.E.B."

Before they recited the poem, one of the women, Ruby Rodney, explained to the group why such a wide gulf existed between two of the greatest leaders of the 20th century — Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois.

"Du Bois believed that education for blacks should not be just based on race," Rodney said. "Booker T. believed in education of the hands: that blacks should learn manual skills."

The university's event was organized by English Professor Elwanda Ingram, who has been on the Read-In bandwagon from the very beginning. Ingram says that almost 30



Craig Dawson and Tate Decker pose with students at Whitaker Elementary School.

Photo by T. Kevin Walker

years ago, black female writers caused a surge in the popularity of black literature — a surge that continues until this day.

"I think it started in the 1970s when black women writers sprung forward and really created a lot of social awareness. African American people began to feel like we contributed to the world and we could write as well as anyone else," Ingram said.

Forsyth County Library Deputy Director Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin — who read a selection from Pearl Cleage's bestseller, "What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Afternoon," at WSSU — said that the library system has recognized that

there is a craving for books by black authors. She says the system is constantly working to satisfy that craving.

"We want to be global in our outlook," she said. "We have a lot of rich African American literature and we want to showcase that."

The system's main library now has a large section devoted to black writers. The section is near the entrance of the building near similar sections for new releases. The remodeled East Winston library and the Carver Road branch have underscored the system's commitment to embracing black literature, Sprinkle-Hamlin said.

Miriam McCarter says the cur-

rent popularity of black literature has led people of all colors to the doors of Special Occasions, an African American bookstore and novelty shop that she owns with her husband.

McCarter says that when major publishing companies rejected would-be black writers they began to publish successful books themselves. Hoping reap some of that success, major publishers have now opened their doors wider than ever to black writers.

"The success of black writers has made other blacks want to write," McCarter said. "If the publishing industry stays open I think it's going

See Reading on A10

Ever since Freedom's Journal published its first editorial in 1827, African American publishers have maintained a proud tradition of journalistic excellence, diverse opinion and service to community.

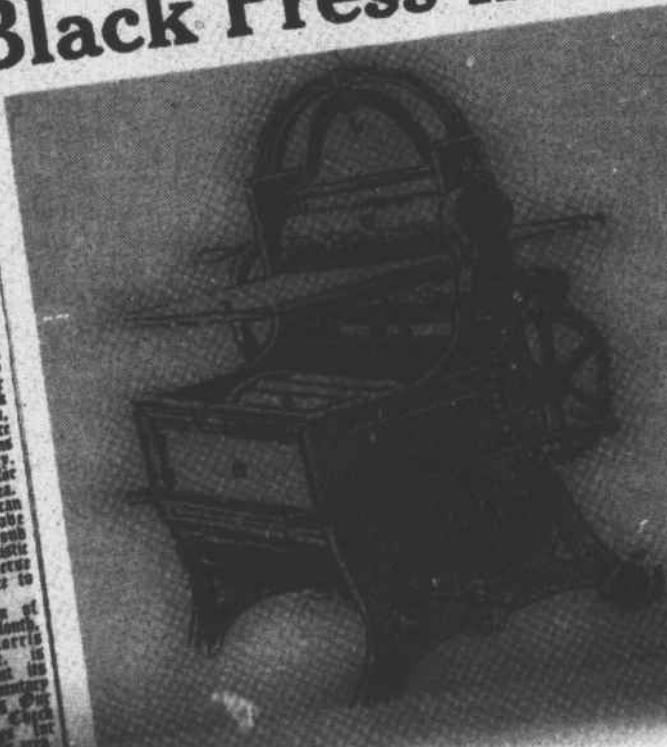
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**Wynona 12 765-5875**  
2001 HANES MALL BLVD.

**STATION SEATING IN THESE AUDITORIUMS**

PAY BACK (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30
THE THIN RED LINE (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
PATCH ADAMS (PG)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
BLAST FROM THE PAST (PG-13)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE (PG-13)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30

**Carmike 10 922-1301**  
2640 REYNOLDA RD.

SHE'S ALL THAT (PG-13)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
STEPHEN KING (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
PATCH ADAMS (PG)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
THE THIN RED LINE (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
A SIMPLE PLAN (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
SHREK (PG)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
SHREK 2 (PG)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30

**Marketplace 6 727-1787**  
2090 PETERS CREEK PKWY.

MY FAVORITE MARTIAN (PG)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
FACTORY (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
BLAZERS (R)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
PATCH ADAMS (PG-13)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30
SHE'S ALL THAT (PG-13)	1:30 4:30 7:30 10:30

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