

Karen Jones-Meadows Reacts To Series Of Successes With "Pride And Humility"

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

"To be a writer is nice. But when are you going to get a real job?" This solicitous question has been addressed to Charlotte playwright, Karen Jones-Meadows by more than a few people in her life.

Yet, following her childhood ambition to be a writer, Meadows as an adult made the conscious decision to work at the craft. Even if that meant being in opposition to the conventional standards of how people support themselves.

Now, possessing a prestigious award, extended recognition of her work, and deemed a high achiever, Meadows can ignore such quips about writers. The author of four plays: "Rounding Off Time," "Henrietta," "Shower of Tears," and "Tapman" has come of age. Recently, out of 853 entries, Jones-Meadows' "Henrietta" received the Atlanta New Play Project Award. And subsequently the same play was read as part of the Developmental Stage Series by the acclaimed Negro Ensemble Company in New York.

"A lot of things are happening," states Jones-Meadows, "I believe this is going to end up being an excellent year."

This year began with Jones-Meadows' play "Tapman," being produced last February by the Afro-American Cultural Center at Spirit Square. The event was a sellout. Meanwhile, "Henrietta" has been produced in the Virgin Islands by the Island Center in St. Croix.

Jones-Meadows reacts to these series of successes with a mixture of pride and humility. "I like it when people enjoy what I do and see the value in my work," she acknowledges. "The recognition lets me see that people are understanding what I'm trying to say."

"I always want to improve. I definitely try to make each play better than the preceding one," explains Jones-Meadows. She has begun her latest play, "Ktaised-Ktaised" (Sister-Sister, translated from the African Language of Twasana), a drama concerning an African Nun's involvement in the South African struggle.

The African theme in this play is intentionally an outgrowth of Jones-Meadows' ideals on writing black theatre. She expounds, "It's a mistake for the



Karen Jones-Meadows
.....Successful playwright

black writer to separate African culture from Afro-American culture. It has to be discussed," she contends. Jones-Meadows further explains, while black Americans have been externally influenced by American culture they are internally influenced by African cultural roots. "The African influence is seen in everything black people do no matter what geographical area they're in."

A New York native, Jones-Meadows has lived in Charlotte for a number of years and finds the city attractive. "Charlotte is

clean, comfortable and the quality of living here is very good," she's found. Plus, she adds, there are many opportunities for creative people to get in on the ground floor of cultural activities. "I like doing plays here," Jones-Meadows informs. However, she admits she's begun to entertain the thought of moving to a larger city for access to "professional cultural activities."

It is her wish to be a part of a larger community of professional writers, in a way to discern how she compares to them. "The

true test is not in mother's living room," attests the playwright. "You have to go where the big boys are."

Asked how a black female writer may fare among the "big boys," Jones-Meadows, a member of the Dramatist Guild, reflects, "You have to look at yourself as an individual. I'm constantly aware of my being black, moreso than being female, but essentially I want to be a good writer."

But if it comes to be a matter of consequence, she assures, "I'll use it to my advantage or make sure it makes no difference. I'm not going to let restrictions others have set limit me."

For other aspiring writers, Jones-Meadows advises they learn the skill through study, much reading and continual work at developing their style. And it's easy to tell whether a person has a propensity to become a writer, says Jones-Meadows. "They can't help but to write. People are writers or they are not writers."

"I've always thought I'd be a writer or actress," she admits. Since graduating from Wheelock College, Boston, Mass., with a B.S. in Education and minor in theatre and history, she has been successfully involved in both endeavors.

Her acting experiences include several commercials for First Union Bank and Bi-Lo Stores. She also uses dramatics to educate. Jones-Meadows is the

resident actress for the Afro-American Cultural Center and through their affiliation with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system she brings to the classroom. "A History of African-American Oral and Literary Art." The presentation is enhanced by her character portrayals of significant people.

The mother of one son, Jayson, Jones-Meadows plans to continue working hard at her writing. She's applied to participate in a few writers' workshops in N. Y. Says Jones-Meadows, she's not striving for fame. but Jayson thinks it would be nice. The nine year old tells his mother, "If you're famous then I'm famous too, right?"

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