FLORIDA BLACK WRITERS AND ARTISTS SERIES

Purpose

The Department of Africana Studies at the University of South Florida (USF) is currently involved in an effort to showcase the talent of black artists and writers based in the state of Florida through the creation of a Florida Black Writers and Artists Series. We recognize the value and critical role of the humanities in the Black community and desire to encourage and strengthen artistic and creative endeavors on a regular basis. We are currently involved in improving our relationship with the Tampa Bay community through a variety of outreach efforts. Promoting the arts should be an integral part of any such endeavor. Our goal is to develop and sponsor lectures, performances, seminars and other venues for black Florida-based writers and artists, as well as others who exemplify the black experience.

Blacks in Florida

Since 1528, when a Moroccan-born black man known as Estebanico arrived in Florida with the early Spanish conquistadors, African Americans have played a significant role in the development, history and culture of Florida. The first free black community in North America, Fort Mose, was established in St. Augustine in the 1730s. In addition, blacks also immigrated to Florida from the Caribbean to work in all sectors of the Florida economy. Since that time, Florida blacks have performed all types of work necessary to the survival and enrichment of life on the plantations and post plantation life.

But the contribution of blacks to Florida is not limited to labor. Florida's African Americans, whether born on United States soil, or émigrés, continued to contribute widely to the development of the state, emerging as important leaders in literature, medicine, newspapers, businesses and education. Their achievements include contributions to the armed forces, the space program, arts and entertainment, education, and politics. In addition, the humanist aesthetics of dance, theater, literature, music, painting, sculpture, carving, journalism, stepping, marching bands and drum corps, music, storytelling, and other forms of creative expression, are all part of the ways that members of the African Diaspora have kept black history, heritage and culture alive in the state of Florida. The Florida Black Artists & Writers Series will increase the opportunities for artists to share our rich artistic heritage with all members of the community.

When and How

The Florida Africana Writers and Artists Series will be an annual celebration, presented at different venues, designed to reverse popular stereotypes about black culture by showcasing outstanding Florida African American writers and artists. The presentations, panels and discussions will afford the public and students the opportunity to learn about the rich cultural contributions of black artists and writers and interact with them. This project will enrich our community and provide role models and intellectual motivation for African American students at USF and in area high schools. Although the Series itself will be based at USF, the workshops, lectures and performances would be the result of a collaborative effort between our department and other organizations and institutions in the Tampa Bay area.