

THE COLLEGE LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE PERFECT

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BY ANN VENTURE YOUNG

President's Address Delivered at the Forty-Sixth Annual  
CLA Convention in Norfolk, Virginia, April 18, 1986

The annual meeting of the College Language Association is an appropriate time to reflect on the current status of affairs in the profession and subsequently to evaluate the work that still remains to be done. There is the ever-recurring need to maintain the ground which has been gained, often painstakingly, and to develop new strategies for future accomplishments. The annual convention is a time for refining individual and collective visions—for making ever-more relevant attempts toward the identification and solution of critical issues. It is a time for CLA members to recommit themselves to a yet higher level of dedication to the organization and the profession; a time for targeting segments of the larger professional community as resources in the resolution of urgent questions.

Most often any serious consideration of the future goals

and aspirations of an organization necessitates at least a cursory glance backward towards the distant and the not-so-distant past. The past then will be the point of departure for these reflections on the future of the College Language Association. There will follow a glimpse at our achievements in the year just ended. And finally, there will be a consideration, in some detail, of the directions in which CLA can still propel itself to the increased benefit and profit of its individual members, the member institutions, and the professions it serves.

Our organization came into being in 1937 to address the need of black English teachers to come together in order to examine ways of improving the study and teaching of English and English literatures. The circumstances surrounding the emergence of CLA reflected a special need and a special urgency. In establishing CLA, the founders were making a direct and positive response to a situation in which black language professionals were systematically denied membership in existing American professional associations. The founding of CLA was a creative reaction to the fact that black scholars and educators could not attend national conventions or meetings of learned and professional associations, nor, in general, could they use public libraries or research facilities.

For almost a half century now, CLA has actively sought to cultivate the appreciation of English and English literatures and foreign languages and literatures. Likewise, CLA members have shared with each other work of mutual interest through participation in the annual meetings and through the *CLA Journal* and other publications. Further, the organization has encouraged teaching and scholarly research in languages and literatures, especially black literatures.

The chief vehicle for the achievement of these goals has been the annual meeting with its paper-reading sessions, its general sessions, business meetings, workshops, banquet and luncheon sessions, and cultural programs. Another vital

service which has been provided by the organization for almost thirty years has been the publication of the *CLA Journal*.

In the year since our convention in New York City, we have vigorously pursued our teaching, learning, research, and publishing objectives. Some of the year's accomplishments come to mind. For example, this was the year in which CLA Special Projects Editor, Therman B. O'Daniel, completed and published *A Twenty-Five-Year Author-Title Cumulative Index to the CLA Journal, 1957-1982*. The Association commends the publication of this *Index* as yet another major contribution made by Dr. O'Daniel to our organization and to our professions. (The *Index* is available for purchase through our Assistant Treasurer, Dr. Helen Houston of Tennessee State University, who has assumed the task of coordinating its distribution.) Therman O'Daniel has also edited a collection of essays on Jean Toomer which awaits publication as another CLA special project.

During the year, the CLA Placement Bureau, directed by Dr. Earle Clowney of Atlanta University, has continued to collect, select, and disseminate a large volume of information about job opportunities in the fields of languages and literatures. Members can assist in the realization and continuation of this important service by forwarding to Dr. Clowney, regularly and in a timely fashion, information about job opportunities in teaching and other professions.

This was a year of sustained activity by the Archives Committee, headed by Dr. Carolyn Fowler of Atlanta University. That committee has been involved in developing a procedure for the orderly transfer of official documents and materials from former CLA officers to the CLA Archives, which are housed in the library of Atlanta University. In order to facilitate the preservation of the Archives, the Executive Committee at its fall meeting recommended that the office of secretary have as one of its charges membership on the Archives Committee.

This was a year of brisk activity on the part of the Association Treasurer, Dr. Robert P. Smith, Jr., of Rutgers University. In addition to successfully negotiating the usual demands of the office, Dr. Smith has sought to increase membership renewals and new memberships.

A change of leadership has occurred in the Research Committee. The new chair is Dr. Robert J. Hudson, Professor Emeritus of Tennessee State University. The former chair, Dr. Robert P. Smith, Jr., continues as a member of the Research Committee, which for the past two years has compiled and published, in the *CLA Journal*, an annual bibliography of works by CLA members.

Also during the past year, the Membership Committee, chaired by Dr. Carol Marsh of Georgia State University, has put in place an impressive recruitment plan which includes "increased overtures to faculty in two-year institutions," "targeting particular geographical regions," and "recruiting through organizations with which CLA members are affiliated."

The year 1985-86 was particularly fruitful for the CLA Ad Hoc Committee on Cooperation with Elementary and Secondary Schools, chaired by Thelma B. Thompson of the University of the District of Columbia. The committee's major achievements for the year included participation in various programs under the aegis of the Association of American Colleges and the Council of Liberal Learning and in liaison activities with selected public schools in Baltimore, Washington, and Hamden, Connecticut.

Thelma B. Thompson and Enid Bogle of Howard University, together with other members of the 1987 CLA Convention Host Committee, have been working for more than a year on the plans for a convention in Washington, D.C., to commemorate CLA's fiftieth anniversary. As a result of the intense efforts of Drs. Bogel and Thompson, the invitation to cosponsor the 1987 Convention has been accepted by Dr. John D. Butler, Dean of the College of Liberal and Fine Arts for the University of the District of Columbia, and Dr.

John T. Wolfe, Jr., Provost for Bowie State College in Bowie, Maryland.

During the past year, the Executive Committee has undertaken the revision of the official CLA brochure. Directing these efforts are Dr. Helen Houston of Tennessee State University and Foreign Language Member-at-Large, Dr. Marcellus Brooks of Fisk University.

In the year since our last convention, the *CLA Journal* Editor, Dr. Cason L. Hill of Morehouse College, has published three issues which uphold the *Journal's* reputation as a scholarly publication of highest quality. However, financially it was not a good year for the *CLA Journal*. The award from the Rockefeller Foundation was exhausted as of January 31, 1985. Consequently, the *Journal* Editor and the Executive Committee are searching for funding sources which will assure the continued publication of our praiseworthy journal.

The Awards Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Ruthe T. Sheffey of Morgan State University, has intensified its commitment in order to give "due consideration to all eligible works by members." In addition to the review process, the Awards Committee is charged with the preparation of awards and certificates of appreciation and their presentation at the banquet session of the annual convention.

This concludes our brief review of some of the accomplishments for the year just ended. As promised, our reflections will turn now to what still remains to be done and some ideas concerning how to achieve it. Here, then, are some suggestions and exhortations:

First, let us give serious consideration to the feasibility of an organizational structure, different from that of the current College Language Association, which might encourage and support a greater degree of participation and involvement by the membership. Perhaps we might wish to establish two or more regional divisions of CLA. Keep in mind that currently CLA members may actively participate only

as presenters of papers at the annual convention or as committee members. With a regional structure, albeit limited, there would be more opportunities for direct participation in regional meetings, or on regional committees. There would also be expanded opportunities for leadership development. Furthermore, there seem to be certain activities which would be facilitated by an extended structure: that is, symposia, workshops, publishing projects, contests, fundraising activities, membership recruitment, and the like. The regional factor has already figured into the reorganization of various CLA standing committees and in the formulation of certain ad hoc committees. For example, most members of the Research Committee live in Philadelphia. Similarly, most members of the Foreign Language Curriculum Committee are based in Richmond; while all members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Historically Black Colleges live and work in the New Orleans area. This attention to the geographical issue promises to facilitate the functioning of these and other CLA committees.

Let us make better use of the Certificate of Appreciation, which is available for presentation to members who have rendered unusual service to the Association. We missed the opportunity to confer such an award on our former treasurer, the late Dr. Robert A. Smith, who performed so faithfully, so effectively, and for so many years on our behalf. There are no doubt other colleagues among us who deserve this special recognition. Make your suggestions to the Awards Committee, which administers the Certificate of Appreciation as well as the better-known CLA Award for Distinguished Literary or Linguistic Scholarship.

Let us encourage the CLA Executive Committee to exercise its option to recommend for honorary CLA membership distinguished writers, journalists, or educators in languages, literatures, or allied fields. We might also wish to invite the Executive Committee to seek appropriate funding for activities such as symposia, convention programs, workshops, research projects, scholarships, etc. That body

might also wish to explore the possibility of developing new publishing opportunities for the membership. One such opportunity might be the regular publication of the complete proceedings of the annual convention.

As members, let us pledge to make the *CLA Journal* our journal of choice for the publication of our scholarly articles and papers. It is important that the editors continue to have articles of high quality from which to choose. This commitment to our publication is especially important now that it publishes works by CLA members only. This probably means that fewer articles than before are being submitted and surely means that there is a better chance of having your article published.

Let us explore ways to achieve greater viability through heightened involvement with our counterparts in other regions of the world. Such an increased involvement could expand appreciably opportunities for the purposeful exchange of ideas and expertise. CLA might want to plan an occasional overseas meeting in conjunction with a foreign university department, institution, program, organization, or scholar/writer. An example might be a conference in Bogota on Afro-American literatures in joint sponsorship with the Afro-Colombian Institute. It is of interest to remember that many of our colleagues in foreign universities, especially in some of the South American and Caribbean nations, work and develop in varying degrees of isolation from the rest of the world community of scholars. There is a real opportunity for the professional enrichment of all of us.

In addition to networking with our colleagues in foreign countries, let us work towards better communication across academic disciplines and across professions. There is a true need to recognize and foster the inherent affinity which exists with related disciplines such as Philosophy, History, Sociology, Communications, etc.

Let us mobilize our resources to promote higher visibility for CLA at the institutions where we work. Perhaps local CLA members could sponsor a limited number of student-



oriented activities. During this 50th anniversary year, it would be especially fitting to arrange library displays, bookstore exhibits, book parties, and/or receptions for CLA member-authors and their works. At Morgan State, we are already planning to mount a CLA exhibit in our Soper Library to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Association.

Let us take advantage of other occasions for networking with each other. Let CLA put together a guide to information on the teaching materials which many of us have available in our home institutions and which we are willing to make available to our colleagues. Further, let us in CLA authorize the compilation of a listing of our institutions' library holdings in selected linguistic and literary fields. The models to use for such a project are the African-French and African-Hispanic Bibliographies: A List of the Holdings in the Peabody Collection at the Collis P. Huntington Library of Hampton Institute, compiled with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of a foreign language project directed by CLA member Beatrice S. Clark.

Another project which would prove of value to members and to our professions would be the formation of a CLA speakers bureau and the compilation and distribution of a CLA speakers directory.

Akin to the publication of a speakers directory would be the preparation of an annotated directory of CLA members categorized according to research, pedagogical, and/or administrative interests.

In our annual meetings and in our research activities let us examine with more attention pedagogical and methodological issues.

In addition, let us assist the Membership Committee in its efforts to recruit members in the various membership categories, especially in those underrepresented areas such as student members, associate members, and honorary members. As these new members are recruited, let us at-

tempt to develop workable strategies for their retention. For example, if we are successful in recruiting undergraduate and graduate students, then we must be sure that our program encourages their full participation.

Let us also work towards creating better strategies for recruiting English and foreign language majors and minors.

Let us do more within CLA to provide occasions for the informal exchange of ideas, information, and concerns between members.

Let us develop a mechanism for regular surveys of the opinions of the membership regarding their goals and aspirations for the Association and for the professions. A model for the opinion poll could very well be the questionnaire which was designed and successfully implemented four years ago by CLA Past President Eleanor Q. Tignor of LaGuardia Community College.

Let us organize more joint sessions which will be of interest to English and foreign language specialists.

Let us give some thought to the expansion of the scope of Special Projects to include foreign language projects.

Let us become more active and vocal as individuals and as representatives of CLA in regional and local language associations and programs.

And very importantly, let us vow to become more aware and more involved, as individual professionals and as an organization, in the political issues which impact on education in general and on the liberal arts in particular.

And further, let all that we do this year and in the years to come be clearly designed to hold aloft the goals of the College Language Association. And finally, let all of our future endeavors be patent affirmations of our pride in our organization and of our supreme confidence in its ability to attain even greater professional and academic significance in the future.

*Morgan State University  
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