Literature, Liberation, and the Law
The 39th annual conference of the African Literature Association (ALA)
Charleston, South Carolina, March 20-24, 2013

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:
- Leonora Miano, multiple award-winning Cameroonian writer
- Njabulo S. Ndebele, Noma Award-winning novelist, short story writer, and critic
- Justice Albie Sachs, former ANC activist and Constitutional Court Judge of South Africa
- Binyavanga Wainaina, Caine Prize-winning Kenyan writer
- Cleveland Sellers civil rights activist and President of Voorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina.

Conference Theme, and Rationale
From its inception the ALA has embraced the cause of liberation in Africa and the diaspora. Hosting the 39th annual conference in Charleston, SC in 2013, in the midst of Charleston’s four-year arc of commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, and coincident with the 50th anniversaries of the Civil Rights movement and the era of African decolonization, allows the ALA to further its important intellectual and political contribution by contesting memory locally, nationally, and internationally. Mindful of these significant historical and geographical resonances, the ALA’s 39th annual conference, “Literature, Liberation, and the Law,” seeks papers that explore the manner and extent to which writing—whether in statute books or in literature—can bring about liberation. Invoking the conference’s three key terms—literature, liberation and law—we encourage scholars to cross disciplinary boundaries in engaged and thoughtful ways as they reflect on how the legal, the political, and the literary are intertwined. More specifically, we anticipate investigations into, among other things:

- how liberation is inscribed in constitutions and declarations of human rights
- whether mental liberation depends on one’s own linguistic or legal framework
- what literature has come out of, or has influenced, African and African diaspora emancipation movements from the age of Revolution to today
- what relationships exist among literature, the law, and education, and to what extent literacy has empowered different groups at critical junctures
- how different narrative forms have grappled with the problem of freedom, the experiences of immigrants, the struggle for representation.
- whether the language of liberation is equally effective for all Africans irrespective of gender, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation
- how effective writing can be in securing freedom from economic domination
- to what extent literature or the law can provide security from environmental racism and/or the threat of ecocide
- what the historical conflicts between liberty and equality are
- how statutes attempt to amend and/or reconcile such conflict
- to what extent new media and technology enable liberation

Please send abstracts of up to 500 words for individual papers and/or four-person panels to Simon Lewis at lewiss@cofc.edu before November 30th, 2012.

Details on registration will be available at http://claw.cofc.edu/ala/conference.html.
Conference Hosts and Venue: The conference is hosted by the Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World (CLAW) program at the College of Charleston and the Charleston School of Law. Established in 1994, the CLAW program is dedicated to promoting scholarship on the Carolina Lowcountry, the Atlantic world, and the connections between the two. The program has established an impressive track record of conferences, symposia, seminars, and public lecture series, supported by significant digital archive initiatives and a book publication series with the University of South Carolina Press. Both the College of Charleston and the Charleston School of Law are committed to principles of diversity and international education, and both are acutely aware of the Africanness of Charleston and of the problematic history of race in our city.

The city of Charleston is thus a compelling site for the conference. While clearly identified in public perception as the center of secession and hence of Jim Crow segregation, Charleston can lay claim to being the birthplace of African America—the city was the site of disembarkation of an estimated 40% of enslaved Africans brought to continental North America during the period of the Atlantic slave trade. Connections between Charleston and slave forts such as Goree Island in Senegal and Bunce Island in Sierra Leone are well documented. In the latter case it has been possible to trace the lineage of families living in this area to individuals shipped from Bunce Island to Charleston in the 1750s. Given these connections, Charleston remains to this day one of the most African cities in the United States, the geographical center of the federally funded Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The city has particularly close ties to West Africa, not only because of the slave trade, but also because of the large number of African-American Charlestonians connected with “repatriation” and colonization projects in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The city also has extremely close ties to the Caribbean, having been founded as an offshoot of the colony of Barbados. Many freed slaves from Charleston found their way to the Bahamas, while refugees from St. Domingue [Haiti] played an important role in early nineteenth-century Charleston (not least in motivating Denmark Vesey’s planned 1822 uprising), and filibustering Charlestonians sought to invade Cuba in the mid-nineteenth century. Over the last two decades city authorities and private institutions have paid much greater attention to this history, preserving and marking key sites even as gentrification gnaws away at long-established communities.

Convener: Simon Lewis (College of Charleston) Conference Committee: Abdellatif Attafi, Viviane Bekrou, Tim Carmichael, Jack Parson, Mary Battle, Assan Sarr, John Walsh, John White (all College of Charleston); Deborah Gammons (Charleston School of Law)

Accommodation and Travel

The conference hotel is the Marriott Hotel, 170 Lockwood Boulevard, Charleston, SC 29403 (tel: 843-720-0835; fax: 843-723-0276; http://www.marriott.com/hotels/fact-sheet/travel/chsmc-charleston-marriott/). A large block of rooms has been reserved at the special conference rate of $149 + tax per night.

We are currently negotiating with airlines for discounted air-travel to Charleston, and with local tour operators for special conference rates for tours of the city and the surrounding area.