

# Black Academy

## In Conference

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By Hollie I. West

CHICAGO—Black scholars must seize on ferment in the black community as the raw material for their artistic and scholarly works if black arts and letters are to continue to develop.

That was the message keynote Dr. Margaret Walker Alexander, a professor of English at Jackson State College in Jackson, Miss., delivered to black scholars and artists here this weekend at the first annual conference of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters.

Attending were more than 150 of America's most well-known black scholars and artists.

Their task—to assess the state of black arts and letters in 1972.

There were heated disagreements on issues and personalities, as might be expected at a meeting of reticent professors, aggressive young teachers, and rebellious artists. But ultimately the conferees concluded that the black intelligentsia is obligated to promote and support the rising tide of black arts and letters.

Among those attending the conference were Charles Hamilton, professor of political science at Columbia University; Dr. Alvin Uousaint, professor of psychiatry at the Harvard University School of Medicine; novelist Ishmael Reed; dancer Donald McKayle; playwright Lonnie Elder III; Dr. Mason Wright Jr., professor of urban affairs at the State University of New York at Albany; and poet Mari Evans.

Panel topics included music; film, television, and photography; children's literature; scholarly works; visual arts, performing arts, theater and playwriting; literature: fiction and non-fiction; poetry; cultural centers, archives and museums—and the artist as entrepreneur.

The dual themes running through all panels were that black scholars and artists do not relate well enough to the general black population, and that the black intelligentsia is still chained to white standards.

There was spirited discussion concerning black teachers' dependence on whites

for recognition in publishing and academic affairs, and concern that the news media do not utilize black social scientists as sources in the way they do white sociologists.

Touching on this theme in her address Saturday, Dr. Alexander commented:

"We expect black people to continue to conceive of new uses for education so that old curricula such as the liberal arts college will disappear and more relevant, productive and creative schools will develop... Our black institutions will relate more closely to the black communities that inspire and support them.

"Sociological studies of the black family, the black community and all other black institutions will focus themselves largely on our folk history, lives and culture rather than on the watered-down theories of outmoded white racists."

She called on the academy to prepare a directory of black cultural centers and "move toward building a resource bank of our cultural assets."

One of the most explosive questions confronted the music panel—How do you define "black music?"

Music composed or performed outside traditions established by black Americans is not black music argued Donald Byrd, assistant professor of music at Howard. Dr. Zelma George, a sociologist and a former

member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, countered that any music performed or composed by blacks comes out of the black experience and is, therefore, black music.

Reporting for the panel on cultural centers, archives and museums, Jean Hutson, curator of the Schomburg Collection, recommended that the academy encourage the establishment of regional museums and archives and that academy members deposit their papers at black institutions.

Academy president C. Eric Lincoln, professor of sociology at Union Theologi-

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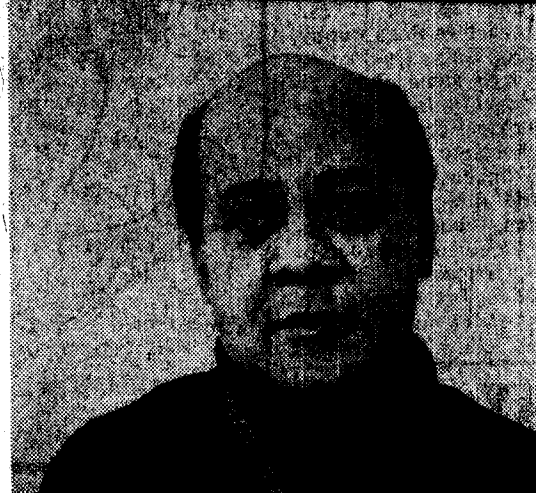
CONFERENCE, From B1

cal Seminary, said the group hopes to set up a central repository for black scholars and a revolving academic chair at several black universities.

Also planned, he said, are regional academic workshops, a project on oral history and the purchase and preservation of the home of the late Langston Hughes in Harlem that would be set up as an office for the academy. The conference this weekend was subsidized with two \$50,000 matching grants, one from the Na-

tional Endowment for the Arts, and the other from Johnson Publishing Co., publishers of Ebony and Jet.

The academy, made up of about 65 fellows, was founded in the spring of 1969 to recognize black scholarship and artistic achievement. Lincoln noted that a \$150,000 grant from the Twentieth Century Fund to underwrite the academy for three years would expire in October. After that, he said, the group would be on its own and would look to the black community for support.



By Linda Wheeler—The Washington Post

*John Killens: "I am encouraged and discouraged by black writing of the last generation."*