**Event Title:** The Many Roles of the Black Writer: An Appreciation of Calvin C. Hernton

**Type of Event:** Poetry Craft and Criticism

**Event Description:** Calvin C. Hernton (1932-2001) is renowned as an anti-racist sociologist, literary critic, champion of Black women, and a founder of Umbra, which was a model for the 1960s Black Arts Movement. He is less well-known as a poet, but recent attention has generated much acclaim. Based on new appraisals of his stature as a major poet, this panel will reveal him as an overlooked but important figure, who insisted on combining the roles of critic, teacher, poet, race theorist, and social commentator.

**Event Agenda:** The moderator will provide a brief introduction to Hernton, and discuss some of the reasons his poetry is now receiving new attention and accolades for its lasting influence. Each speaker will reflect on the totality of Hernton’s identity as a writer, his poetry as an influential precursor of contemporary trends in verse and society, and the ways he managed his roles as a poet, literary critic, teacher, theorist of race and gender, and social commentator. After their reflections, the panelists will engage in a lively roundtable discussion of the pressures that often face Black writers to fit into neat categories, and how Hernton avoided those narrow constraints to achieve greater impact.

Hernton was a trained actor (Avery Brooks was his student) and performed his poetry with an exceptional level of skill. We will share a rare recording of his performance and images of his poetry.

**Panelists:** The panelists are connected by our admiration for Calvin C. Hernton. We are his students, colleagues, friends, editors, and scholars of his writing. Hernton exemplifies the past and present challenges that often face writers of color who are expected to fill dictated roles. He is a model for the ways diverse writers can refuse to be relegated to narrow categories.


**Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper**, Professor Emerita at Spelman College, is an internationally recognized Langston Hughes scholar. She has published one monograph on Hughes’s Simple stories and has edited four volumes of short fiction by Hughes.
Lauri Scheyer is Xiaoxiang Distinguished Professor, Director of Creative Writing, and Director of the British and American Poetry Center at Hunan Normal University (China). Her books include *A History of African American Poetry, Slave Songs and the Birth of African American Poetry, Theatres of War, The Heritage Series of Black Poetry*, and *Selected Poems of Calvin C. Hernton* (co-edited with David Grundy).

Kathy Lou Schultz is a Professor at Memphis State University. She is a poet-scholar whose publications include a collection of essays, *Introduction to Claudia Rankine*, and *The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History: Tolson, Hughes, Baraka*. She is the author of four collections of poetry including *Some Vague Wife* and *Biting Midge: Works in Prose*.

Tyrone Williams holds the Gray Chair in Poetry at SUNY Buffalo. He is the author of seven books of poetry: *washpark* (with Patrick Clifford), *As iZ, Howell, Adventures of Pi, The Hero Project of the Century, On Spec*, and *c.c.*

**Moderator and Organizer:** Lauri Scheyer