

The James Haskins Endowment

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“The smallest individual action does matter
-- it does matter what you choose to do with
your life, the moral stands you take, the
things you decide, deep in your heart..”

– James Haskins



“James was the kind of pioneer who looked into the faces of young Americans and spent his life creating for those heads and hearts...and he was a soul full of grace and humane humanity.” – Arnold Adoff (poet and fellow author)

Portrait of a “Humanitarian Philosopher”

“On the most basic level, it is this historic ability to define our own humanity, and thereby to create a heritage of which we can be proud, that to me is the most significant aspect of being a Black Alabamian.”¹



A Small Ounce of Privacy

Who could imagine that from a small place like Demopolis, Alabama, would emerge a man of such enormous vision and talent? James Haskins was born there on September 19, 1941. Family and relatives knew him by his basket name, “Dazzle,” and later Uncle D; his teachers knew him as James; and to friends and neighbors he was simply Jim. Amidst the noise and antics of a houseful of siblings, Jim found a small ounce of privacy in reading. It opened up the windows of his imagination and transported him away from the segregated borders of Alabama to the world beyond.

The foundation for the values and mores that shaped his life was laid in Demopolis. Nurtured by the wisdom and love of his family, friends and teachers, the “humanitarian philosophy” he absorbed as a child “encouraged the idea of helping others, not bringing them down.”² But segregated Alabama operated under another philosophy, one that denied the humanity of its black citizens. In fact, many of the treasured books Jim read came, via a white woman, from the segregated library he, as a black child, was prohibited from entering. Jim recalled that “Alabama in the forties was a terrible place. I mean ... for the most part, it seemed to me my childhood was a constant series of being told where to go and what to do in order to not aggravate the white power structure.”³

The World Beyond Alabama

Not surprisingly, segregation forced James Haskins to leave his beloved Alabama. At Alabama State College (now ASU), he was captivated by the civil rights movement and its philosophy of social justice and equality. He actively set out to do as an adult what he was not allowed to do as a child—aggravate the white power structure of “unearned privilege.” For his political activism, he was dismissed from Alabama State; however, a mixture of serendipity and talent led Jim to Georgetown University on a scholarship. He earned bachelor’s degrees from Georgetown and Alabama State and in 1963, a master’s degree in social psychology from the University of New Mexico. Then he headed north to Harlem.

Jim played a mean trumpet and once dreamed of making a living as a musician, but he said he put away the instrument after hearing Miles Davis play. He sold advertising copy for the *Daily News*, trained as a stock trader on Wall Street, and worked in an anti-poverty program before getting a job as an elementary school teacher. In the classroom he discovered that he could make a real difference in young lives. He also began to write books. In 1977 Jim published *The Cotton Club* and joined the faculty of the University of Florida in Gainesville.

“Conversations with Himself” and the World

While his first foray into writing and publishing (*Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*) may have been accidental, his subsequent corpus of work reflects a man on a mission. Considered “the most prolific Black writer ever,”⁴ James Haskins saw writing as an opportunity to engage in “conversations with himself” about those he called “the undeservedly obscure.” It was also a way to chronicle for young readers the achievements of African Americans who struggled against the odds and continued to persevere even when they lost. Mabel Mercer, Stevie Wonder, Bill Cosby, Lena Horne, Bricktop, Rosa Parks, Shirley Chisholm, Black Dance, Black Inventors, The Harlem Renaissance, The March on Washington — a sample of his subjects suggests why he deserved to be called the “unofficial biographer of Black America.”

An intensely private person, he often said that his own life was unremarkable and deflected inquiries about his personal life with enigmatic statements: *I have never wanted to be who people wanted me to be, because I was never who people thought I was.* James Haskins was, without question, a master of words who succeeded in engaging the world in an enduring conversation on humanity and the African American experience.

1. James Haskins, “The Humanistic Black Heritage of Alabama,” *The Remembered Gate: Memoirs by Alabama Writers*, eds. Jay Lamar and Jeanie Thompson (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 55.

2. *Ibid.*, 56.

3. K. Alycia Allen, “Portrait of a Freedom Writer,” *Applause: Gainesville’s Entertainment Magazine* (March 11, 1983): 8.

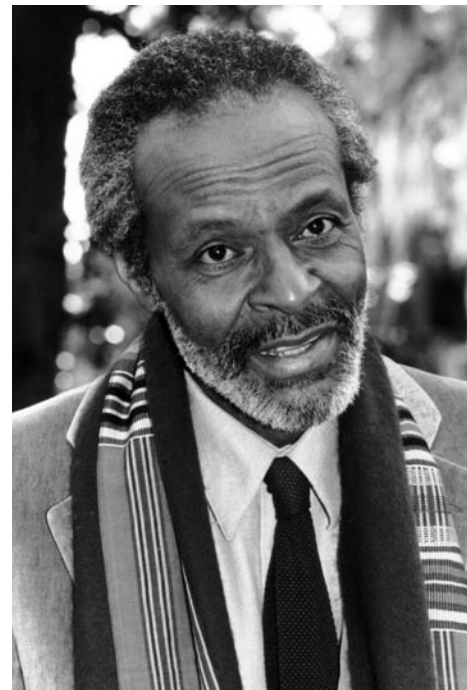
4. Paul Jerome, “Conversations with Himself,” *FlaVour* (Summer 1995): 44.

“A teacher affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops.” – Henry Brooks Adams

The James Haskins Endowment ...

To honor the memory and achievements of James Haskins

Gifts to this endowment will come from colleagues, family, friends, students and all who believe in the vision of James Haskins. This endowment will fund two programs:



The James Haskins Visiting Scholar Fellowship in African American Studies at the University of Florida

In recognition of Professor James Haskins and his stellar contributions to literature and history, the program in African American Studies at the University of Florida has created the James Haskins Visiting Scholar Fellowship in African American Studies. This award honors an extraordinary man and prolific writer whose legacy should never be forgotten. By the power of his pen James Haskins changed the way America and the world view African Americans.

The James Haskins Visiting Scholar Fellowship will support research and teaching by emerging and established scholars who seek opportunities to conduct research and collaborate with African American Studies faculty at the University of Florida. Scholars will be chosen in a national competition. The fellowship award is open to U.S. citizens and permanent residents with a Ph.D. or equivalent professional training. Applicants will be judged on the basis of intellectual merit and distinction; the relevance of the proposed research to the focus of African American Studies at UF; the contribution of the proposed research to the field of African American studies; and supporting references.

African American Studies at the University of Florida is an interdisciplinary program that explores the historical and socio-cultural experiences of people of African heritage in the United States and in the African Diaspora. In 2004 African American Studies proudly celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary and continues to grow. The program is committed to the growth, development and authority of African American Studies as a discipline, community-based work, and the development of a concentration in film and visual studies. African American Studies currently offers an 18-credit undergraduate minor and is working towards the implementation of a course of study that will add an undergraduate major and a graduate certificate. All these initiatives will provide students with strong interdisciplinary, theoretical and methodological tools for studying the experiences of people of African descent in the United States, the Caribbean and beyond.

“The University of Florida community is proud to honor the outstanding literary and academic achievements of Professor James Haskins. His life, his work, and his commitment to documenting and setting the record straight on so many things should stand as a bright beacon to guide each and every one of us through the challenges that always accompany creativity and commitment.” – President J. Bernard Machen

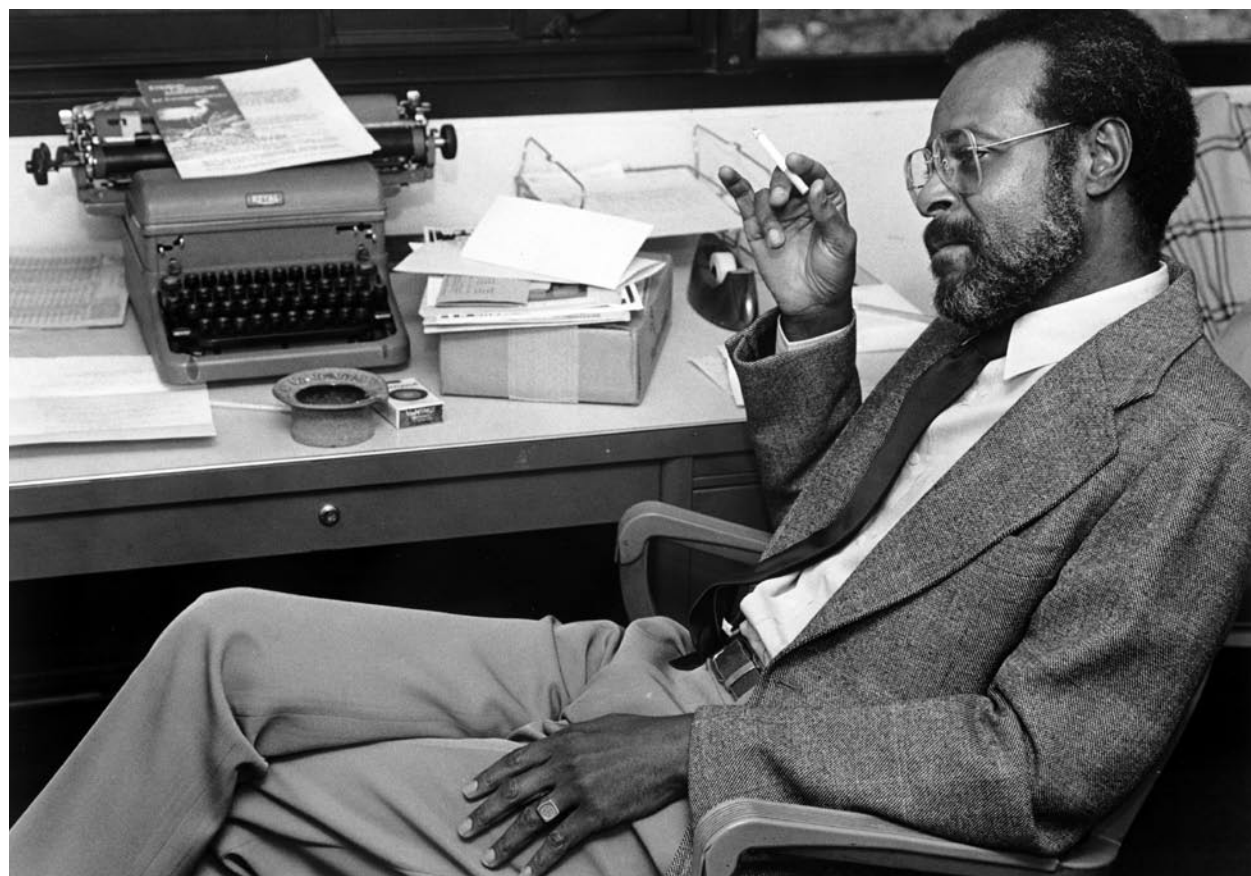
... An Enduring Legacy

The James Haskins Collection in African American Literature at the University of Florida

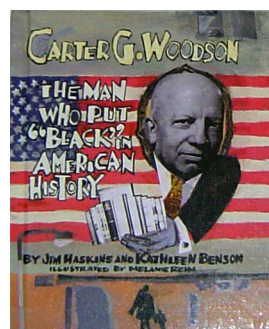
The George A. Smathers Libraries is privileged to announce that it has received its single largest collection of research materials related to twentieth-century African American history, literature and cultural studies from the late James Haskins. The donation includes books and magazines (almost 150 titles by Jim Haskins alone); his personal collection of American literature; personal and professional correspondence, notes and business papers; audio and videocassettes of interviews with the subjects of his biographies; and transcriptions and photographs. This collection, a lasting tribute to Professor Haskins's legacy, will be housed in the Department of Special and Area Studies Collections and will join other important materials that relate to African American history and culture.

The James Haskins Collection will encourage financial support to acquire and process additional material that can advance scholarship. African American history and culture are well represented among the holdings in Special and Area Studies. In addition to the papers of Zora Neale Hurston, which form part of UF's manuscript collections, numerous resources relate to the scope and content — as well as the *spirit* — of the Haskins collection. The Baldwin Library in particular holds many literary works for children that inform the societal background against which Haskins created his own literary works for children. The Belknap Collection provides primary resources that add depth to the biographies that Haskins wrote about the entertainment world. The P. K. Yonge Library supports studies of the racial and political climate of the Florida in which Haskins lived and worked for almost thirty years. Placing the Haskins collection in its multidisciplinary perspective will support programs at UF that relate to African Americans and will play a crucial role in gathering other collections of research materials from Haskins's peers. While no university can be great without a great library, it is also true that a single collection can become the building block for a great university research collection. For the University of Florida, the James Haskins Collection in African American Literature is that collection of significance.





“Young Black readers have not had a more trusted guide to their culture and history than James Haskins.”– Herb Boyd (Managing Editor, The Black World Today)



Selected Awards and Recognition

1994 *Washington Post* Children’s Book Guild Award honoring an author whose total work has contributed significantly to the quality of non-fiction for young people.

1997-2001 Guest Curator. *The Jazz Age in Paris*, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services (SITES).

Cecil Poole: A Life in the Law, John and Patricia Beatty Award from the California Library Association, 2004.

Carter G. Woodson: The Man Who Put “Black” in American History with Kathleen Benson, Carter G. Woodson Honor Book Award, 2001.

I Am Rosa Parks by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, Carter G. Woodson Honor Book Award, 1998.

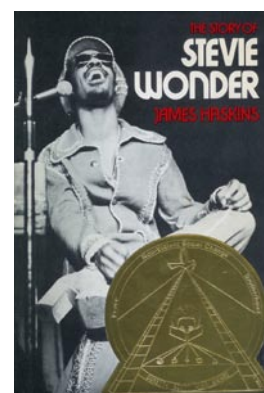
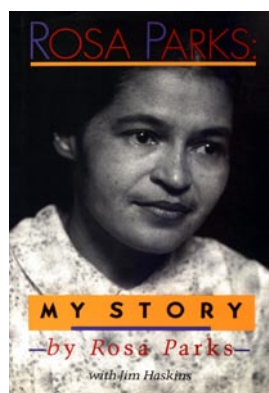
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement, Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 1998.

The Harlem Renaissance, Carter G. Woodson Book Award, 1997.

The March on Washington, Carter G. Woodson Book Award, 1994.

Thurgood Marshall: A Life for Justice, Carter G. Woodson Outstanding Merit Book, 1993.

Outward Dreams: Black Inventors and their Inventions, Carter G. Woodson Outstanding Merit Book, 1992.



Black Dance in America, Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 1991.

Black Music in America: A History Through Its People, Carter G. Woodson Book Award, 1988.

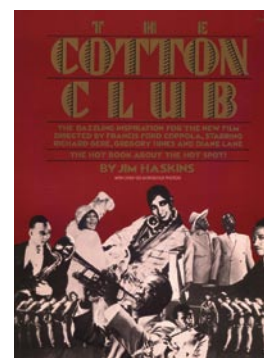
Count Your Way though the Arab World/China/Japan/Russia series, Alabama Library Association Award for best work for children, 1988.

Lena Horne, Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 1984.

Bricktop by Bricktop with Jim Haskins, selected by the English Speaking Union as a Book-Across-the Sea, 1983.

Andrew Young: Young Man with a Mission, Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 1980.

James Van DerZee: The Picture Takin’ Man, Carter G. Woodson Outstanding Merit Book and Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 1980.



Scott Joplin: The Man Who Made Ragtime with Kathleen Benson, The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) Deems Taylor Award for excellence in writing in the field of music, 1979.

Barbara Jordan, Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 1978.

The Story of Stevie Wonder, Coretta Scott King Award, 1977.

The Cotton Club, 1977, inspired a film of the same name, 1984.

The quotation on the cover is excerpted from “Rosa Parks Day,” a radio essay for *Recess!* December 1, 2004:

“So when Rosa Parks says she was tired, it may be the metaphoric understatement of the century. And what this simple, powerful act says to young people today is that the smallest individual action does matter -- it does matter what you choose to do with your life, the moral stands you take, the things you decide, deep in your heart, that you won’t stand for any more, the things that you’re just too tired to take for another moment. A kind, gentle lady galvanized the civil rights movement; now, one hopes the example of Ms. Parks’ heroism will say to young people, what are you going to do?”

To view a complete list of James Haskins’s books, please visit <http://www.english.ufl.edu/faculty/jhaskins/>