

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
DAVID C. DRISKELL CENTER COLLOQUIUM SERIES
2003-2004

**Koritha Mitchell, Graduate Fellow, Driskell Center
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English**

***Re-directing Our Gaze: An Examination of
Lynching and Anti-Lynching Drama, 1890-1935***

Many historians agree that lynchers needed audiences; they intimidated by working publicly. Lynchings were also scripted events that moved predictably from forced confessions to souvenir hunting. But if there is general awareness that mobs relied on theatricality, scholars overlook the fact that American theatre relied on the mob and its rituals as well. Lynching provided the early American stage with a grand set of themes, characters, and symbols. Because they recognized the cultural partnership between lynching and theatricality, turn-of-the-century African Americans refused to treat theatre and lynching as discrete entities, and anti-lynching drama is one manifestation of that refusal. Plays emerging from this awareness include: *Rachel* (1916) by Angelina Weld Grimké; *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1918) by Alice Dunbar-Nelson; *Aftermath* (1919) by Mary Burrill; *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925) and *Blue Blood* (1926) by Georgia Douglas Johnson; *Frances* (1925) by G.D. Lipscomb; *For Unborn Children* (1926) by Myrtle Smith Livingston; and *Safe* (1929) also by Douglas Johnson. While protesting racial violence, these plays change what qualifies as “dramatic”—ultimately altering the impact that theatre would have on black communities in the early 1900s and forcing a reconsideration of African American literary history today.

**Tuesday, March 16, 2004, 4:00-6:00pm
Driskell Center Multipurpose Room, Tawes 2102**

The colloquium will conclude with a brief reception and light refreshments.

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Koritha Mitchell earned her MA in English Language & Literature at the University of Maryland in 2000 and is now a doctoral candidate, specializing in turn-of-the-twentieth-century African American literature and culture. She is completing a dissertation on early anti-lynching plays and the significance of this unique genre. Her dissertation is entitled, “A Different Kind of ‘Strange Fruit’: Lynching Drama, African American Identity, and U.S. Culture, 1890 – 1935.” Another version of this research won first prize in the 2003 S. Randolph Edmonds Young Scholars Competition, sponsored annually by the Black Theatre Network.

The David C. Driskell Center Colloquium Series features innovative research on Africa and the African diaspora by scholars and practitioners of distinction. When possible, the speaker's paper or other relevant work will be available through the Driskell Center website <<http://www.driskellcenter.umd.edu/programs/2002-2003/colloq>> three days prior to the colloquium.

For further information, please call (301) 314-2615 or email <driskellcenter@umail.umd.edu>.