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### Focusing on Black Queer Writing: CLAGS at the Fire & Ink Cotillion III in Austin Texas

Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz

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## Focusing on Black Queer Writing: CLAGS at the Fire & Ink Cotillion III in Austin, Texas

By Shawnta Smith

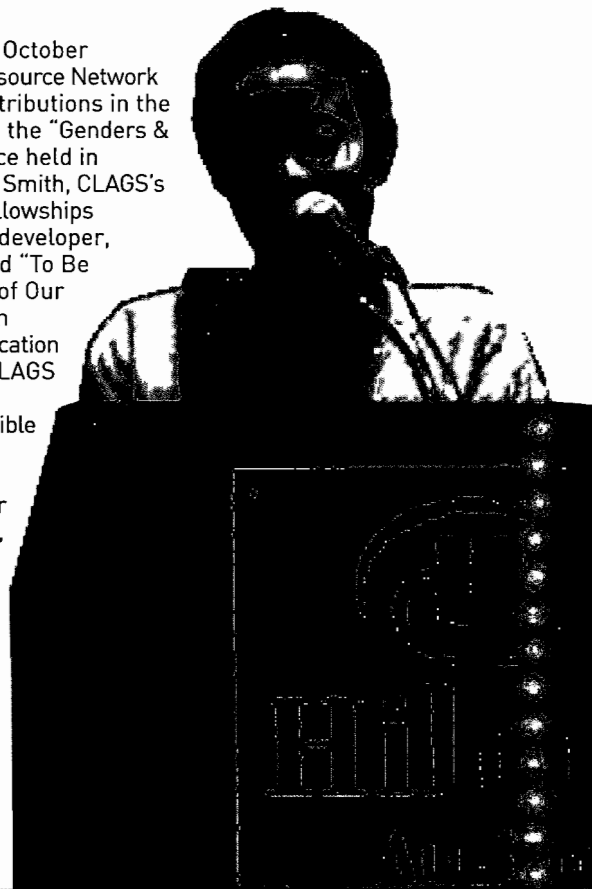
On October 8–11th, 2009, an historic event occurred in Austin, Texas. The Fire & Ink III: Cotillion brought together LGBT writers and artists of African descent from around the nation and beyond. In 2002, its founding year, Thomas Glave, editor of *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (Duke University Press) and author of *The Torturer's Wife* (fiction), provided the keynote, later published in both his essay collection, *Words to our Now* as well as the Summer 2003 issue of *Callaloo* (literary journal) under the name: "Fire and Ink: Toward a Quest for Language, History and a Moral Imagination." This year, the CLAGS Board member offered his expertise and commentary in the moderation panel, "Contemporary Caribbean LGBTQ Writing" and roundtable, "Broadened Visions: Black LGBTQ Writers and Global Human Rights."

All of the influential talks corresponded with this year's keynote delivered by Nikky Finney and soon to be released for a larger readership. Black writers from around the world, including Giard Fellowship Finalist and International Resource Network Fanny Ann Eddy Award recipient from Africa (IRN-Africa), Zanele Muholi, were found in the crowd.

(Muholi was awarded later in October by the CLAGS' International Resource Network (IRN) for her outstanding contributions in the study of sexuality in Africa, at the "Genders & Sexualities in Africa" conference held in Syracuse, New York.) Shawnta Smith, CLAGS's previous Memberships and Fellowships Coordinator and now its web developer, presented a workshop entitled "To Be Constantly Writing: A Survey of Our Resources," as an instruction session on how to receive publication opportunities and apply for CLAGS fellowships and awards. That workshop helped to make possible at least two accounts of the Cotillion by emerging black queer writers (see below). For more information on Fire & Ink, please visit their website, <http://fireandink.org/>.

*Thank you to Lisa C Moore, Thomas Glave, Zanele Muholi, Dierdre Harris, and Arianne Benford for contributing to this section.*

*Lisa C. Moore addresses the crowd*



## Fire & Ink: What Better Way?

By Dierdre Harris

Fire & Ink is an advocacy organization dedicated to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender writers of African descent. This past October, writers and readers, scholars and publishers, students and teachers, and curators and media geniuses all joined together in Austin, TX to inspire, support, and share powerful creations and make enduring alliances."

Hundreds of participants came to the edge of UT Austin from all corners of the US, and from Canada, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America to spend three and half days immersed in presentations, conversations, workshops, and performances. Workshop topics ranged from traditional literary genres to discussions of screenwriting, playwrighting, book production, publishing, translating, and blogging. The gathering also explored issues around building a writing community, human rights, the sacred and the profane, voice and movement, facing heterosexism in homosexual hip-hop, humor writing, LGBTQ Caribbean focused writing, building black LBGTQ collections for librarians, and the preservation, interpretation, and criticism of Black queer literature. Other spaces included an on-going film festival, an altar room, open mic, an oral

Not since the first Fire & Ink Conference back in 2002, have I seen such an outpouring of sexy, gifted, and creative LGBTQ writers of African descent.

history booth, morning literary stretches, and play performances. These powerful panel discussions and workshops were concurrent, which made for difficult and critical choices for the duration of the conference. Other spaces included an on-going film festival, an altar room, open mic, an oral history booth, morning literary stretches, and play performances. These powerful panel discussions and workshops were concurrent, which made for difficult and critical choices for the duration of the conference.

A deeply memorable moment took place when all the volunteers, participants, co-founders, presenters, panelists, performers, and guests came together to document our pres-