

PERMISSION TO WRITE

Meet Our Board



Simóne J. Banks is a writer and poet interested in listening. Lately, her writing has immersed itself infinitely in the study of Black ecologies. Her work has appeared in the Santa Fe Writers Project, About Place Journal/Black Earth Institute, and eMerge Journal and is forthcoming in Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora and Root Work Journal. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Louisiana State University, where she earned the William Jay Smith Thesis Award in poetry. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Albright College and is writing her debut collection of poetry, 'continuum



Dr. Cecilia Caballero, Based in Los Angeles, is a poet, creative nonfiction writer, adjunct professor, and co-editor of The Chicana Motherwork Anthology. Cecilia is a 2024-2023 Octavia Butler Earthseed fellow, a 2024 Virginia Center for the Creative Arts fellow, a 2023 California Arts Council fellow, and a 2023 Aspen Words Emerging Writer fellow. As a teaching artist, Cecilia facilitates spaces of storytelling and healing for BIPOC folks and she has given numerous writing workshops and talks for colleges, universities, and organizations. Cecilia is currently completing a memoir and her creative writing appears in Raising Mothers, The Acentos Review, and elsewhere.



Jina DuVernay is a librarian and cultural consultant. She has published several professional articles and book chapters and is a freelance writer for "Sisters From AARP" newsletter. DuVernay has participated in the Hurston/Wright Foundation and instructed writing courses for a "midnight and indigo" literary journal and Permission to Write. Her creative writing has appeared in Kweli Journal.

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Diarra English is a writer based in Cambridge, MA whose use of narrative to demonstrates the many ways in which we are all connected through rituals, experiences, and products. She explores cultural critiques, beauty and skincare trends, and highlights social injustices through her work. In addition to serving as an editor of Arizona Coffea Magazine, contributor to Rebirth Mag and Coffea Flair Magazine, she has had work published in several publications such as BlazeVOX, Where Y'At Magazine, Anti-Racism Daily, YR Media, and more. During her free time she enjoys taking long walks, traveling, and curling up with a good book.



Kimolee Eryn is an award winning, multidisciplinary artist and author from Connecticut whose love of learning has empowered her to fuse elements from life and art to drive human-centered storytelling as an independent artist as well as a teaching artist. With awards such as the Jamilah T. Muhammad Award, the Elizabeth L. Mahaffey Arts Administration Fellowship, The Artist of Color Accelerate Fellowship and a residency with The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, she has been seizing opportunities to learn, grow, and share with those around her. As a poet, she believes in authenticity and vulnerability and has an affinity for word play. As an educator and artist, she is process-oriented with an emphasis on reverse engineering from a vision: big picture meets every little bit counts.



Milan Harper is a Bay Area native based in Los Angeles, CA. She works as a home interior buyer by day. In her free time, she publishes her newsletter "The What and The Why" and manages an online community and website, "On The Harp"- a platform dedicated to women of color and the industries they influence: fashion, beauty, and wellness. She is currently working on her first novel and enjoys reading and talking about books.

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Gabrielle Ione Hickmon is a Black woman from a middle place—Ypsilanti, MI. Her lab is a place where clay and words meet. She is interested in body memory, waiting rooms, layovers, circles, Black imaginaries, and ocular proof.

Gabrielle's work includes essays, ethnographic research, and coil-built ceramics. Her writing has appeared in *Condé Nast Traveler*, *The Baffler*, *The Pudding*, and *Literary Hub*. She is also behind *WORKING PROCESS*, an offering of conversations with Black women who work with clay about their work and process.

Gabrielle is currently at work on *The Boyne City Project* and a memoir about her experience with breast cancer.



Diona Howard-Nicolas is a Compliance, Internal Investigations and Government Enforcement attorney at Bruch Law Group, PLLC. Before joining Bruch Law Group, Ms. Howard-Nicolas was a litigation associate for two prominent law firms in Baltimore and the District of Columbia. Through her experience, Ms. Howard-Nicolas has developed substantial litigation skills, handling a diverse array of matters involving insurance and securities litigation, commercial disputes, insurance coverage, general liability, professional liability, white collar defense, and employment litigation. She began her legal career as a law clerk for the Honorable Jeffrey Geller at the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, Maryland. She has also served as a judicial intern for the Honorable C. Darnell Jones at the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania; the retired Honorable Randolph F. Treece at the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York; and the Honorable Sally D. Adkins at the Court of Appeals of Maryland.

While attending American University Washington College of Law, Ms. Howard-Nicolas served as a Note and Comment Editor for the *Administrative Law Review*, where her article addressing reformation of the federal sentencing guidelines was selected for publication.

Ms. Howard-Nicolas graduated magna cum laude from Temple University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. She also earned a Master of Public Administration from the University of Pennsylvania in 2010, and received her law degree from American University Washington College of Law in 2014.

Ms. Howard-Nicolas has a wealth of experience in public interest advocacy and board membership. She currently serves as a Board of Directors for the Abramson Scholarship Foundation, a mentoring and scholarship organization supporting Washington, D.C. public high school graduates. She serves as the Co-chair of the Abramson Scholarship Foundation's Development Committee. Ms. Howard-Nicolas also serves as a Board of Directors for the Council for Court Excellence, a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic organization that works through research, policy advocacy and civic education for an equitable justice system in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Howard-Nicolas enjoys spending time with her family, studying philosophy, cycling, live jazz, museum/gallery hopping, and creative writing.

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Jeneen Owens is a native Philadelphian. When she isn't helping to secure the safety of the city's citizens, she is helping to move forward the Creative Arts through writing and editing both fiction and creative non-fiction. Her latest reflection can be found in issue one of Love Now Magazine (Fall 2023).



Shonette Reed, born and raised in South Central Los Angeles, holds a BA in Journalism and Integrated Media and an MA in Intercultural and Urban Studies. Shonette is also the creator of Resolute Magazine– a Christian arts and culture magazine for Black creatives and creatives of color. Currently, Shonette is a freelance features writer with GROWN Magazine. She enjoys art in its many forms, reading, cooking, and exploring.



Na'Kera Richardson serves as a community advocate for girl empowerment through her role as Director of Operations for a non-profit. At night she ventures into her own world of storytelling through writing. With a B.A in Journalism and African American studies she enjoys collaborating with others to create impactful and meaningful change for young girls in her hometown of Richmond. When she is not working with youth she enjoys a good story, a good experience, and a good dance party.

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L'Oreal Thompson Payton is an award-winning journalist, celebrated author, and influential speaker known for her passionate storytelling and commitment to inspiring and uplifting others. Her personal essays, celebrity interviews and feature stories have been featured in esteemed media outlets such as *Essence*, *Fortune*, *SELF* and *Well + Good*.

With her debut book, *Stop Waiting for Perfect: Step Out of Your Comfort Zone and Into Your Power*, L'Oreal demonstrates her commitment to empowering others, encouraging them to embrace their full potential and live life boldly. A native Marylander, L'Oreal lives just outside of Chicago with her very patient husband and vivacious daughter.