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Media Contact: Ruthi Caldwell, 512.245.0040, [*r\_c423@txstate.edu*](mailto:r_c423@txstate.edu)

**SAVE OUR STORIES! LIFT EVERY VOICE! Texas State Black and Latino Playwrights Conference Launches Crowdfunding Campaign Raising Funds to Match a $50k NEH Grant**

*A $50,000 National Endowment for the Humanities, Humanities Access Matching Grant has been awarded to Texas State University’s Black and Latino Playwrights Conference. A crowdfunding campaign will accept donations until March 31, 2017, and the group has a number of events planned.*

**San Marcos, TX:** Amid today’s rocky political climate with racial tensions rising in the media, it is more important than ever for minority voices to be heard in a way that promotes peace and mutual understanding. Since 2003, the annual Texas State Black and Latino Playwrights Conference has helped share today’s minority stories by supporting Black and Latino playwrights in developing their new, unpublished and unproduced plays through an ambitious week-long workshop rehearsal process that gives the students and the community at large a rare opportunity to hear stories *of* minorities *by* minorities, and become part of the cultural discussion.

The conference’s Artistic Director, Eugene Lee, has been awarded a $50k Humanities Access matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to expand and support future humanities aspects of the conference. In an effort to raise funds to match this grant, he has worked with theatre students to launch a crowdfunding campaign on the TXST website. Donors are invited to “SAVE OUR STORIES! LIFT EVERY VOICE!” In reference to February as Black History Month, this rally cry is reminiscent of the black national anthem “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and reminds us of the importance of joining together to ensure every voice is heard.

Eugene Lee, Artistic Director of the conference says: “For years I’ve wanted to expand the conference into a larger, national conference where playwrights from across the nation can “hitch our wagons in a circle” to talk about where Black and Latino culture stands in America and the craft of playwriting. This grant will give donors an opportunity to have their donations matched so we can begin building an endowment fund that supports the growth of the conference.”

This is the first year NEH has offered this unique grant program. Rather than fund one conference event, the grant encourages awardees to fundraise and invest funds into a term endowment. In essence, the National Endowment for the Humanities will match donations 1:1 from now until April 30, 2017 and again until April 30, 2018 up to $25k for each cycle, creating a term endowment that can be spent on expanded humanities programming during the last three years of the 5-year grant. Mr. Lee plans to use this grant to spark a series of fundraising efforts calling upon donors from across the U.S. to support the development, discussion and documentation of today’s Black and Latino stories for generations to come.

**The crowdfunding campaign is being led by Eugene Lee and theatre student Mateo Ybarra, Vice President of the honor’s theatre fraternity, Alpha Psi Omega. Some of the events planned include: a FlashMob in the LBJ Mall on March 20th, a free performance of scenes and monologues by Black and Latino authors at the San Marcos Public Library on March 22nd at 7pm, a booth in the quad and LBJ Mall on various dates in March, and possibly additional fundraisers at restaurants like Raising Canes (more details to come on the crowdfunding website).**

With over 100 new play submissions from minority playwrights from across the U.S. each year, only two plays are selected for development at the conference. The selected plays will tell a story of our time and truthfully express Black and Latino culture. The September 2016 conference featured: *Black Super Hero Magic Mama* by Inda Craig-Galvan and *The Veils* by Hope Villaneuva. The first play explores the impact of violence on the streets in America as a Black mother struggles with rage, depression and forgiveness following the tragic loss of her teenage son who was mistakenly shot by a white police officer. *The Veils* explores the impact of war on a contemporary American Latino family where a female Marine returns home to be married after her second tour of duty in Afghanistan, and must come to terms with being a part of two very different worlds.

The conference serves as a cultural awakening for many of the participants. “It’s like cultural sharing,” Lee said. “It’s not just about doing black and Latino plays for black and Latino students. Everyone needs to understand one another.” The conference gives participants and audience members the opportunity to immerse themselves in different cultures. “People don’t change unless you bring them new information,” Lee said. “I believe that if you can understand somebody, you can’t hate them.”

Eventually, the term endowment from this Humanities Access grant will seed additional humanities activities throughout the year along with long-term endowment building efforts to encourage sponsors to donate toward a permanent endowment to fund the annual conference and add a part-time staff member. The new staff will partner with national minority and theatre organizations to scale up the conference to reach hundreds of participants across the U.S., while still inviting the local Central Texas community to join the cultural discussion. Another goal is to use funds to create a digital library cataloguing basic information about plays by black and Latino playwrights (including title, author, synopsis, and keywords or common cultural themes). This catalogue will make it easier for directors to find plays by black and Latino authors so they can be performed for the public. This catalogue is vital for sharing minority stories of our time. If plays by black and Latino authors cannot be found, then they cannot be performed, and our stories are lost.

The next Black and Latino Playwrights Conference is scheduled for September 4-10, 2017. **Black or Latino playwrights interested in having their play workshopped can send their unproduced script to** [**EL18@txstate.edu**](mailto:EL18@txstate.edu) **by March 15th, 2017**. Playwrights will be notified of acceptance by May 30, 2017. **Donations are being accepted online through a crowdfunding campaign website at:** [**https://donate.txstate.edu/crowdfunding?cfpage=project&project\_id=14039**](https://donate.txstate.edu/crowdfunding?cfpage=project&project_id=14039)**.** Rewards for generous donations include: an invitation to join the experience by becoming one of the actors, one hour of poetry reading by the Artistic Director Eugene Lee in your local home with up to 25 of your friends, or a signed copy of one of the scripts with a personal invitation to attend all rehearsals, reading presentations, and the closing night party.

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**About the Texas State Black and Latino Playwrights Conference:** The conference takes place at Texas State University- a large, diverse campus classified as a Hispanic-Serving Institution with 38,808 students, including 52% who classify themselves as a minority and 35.6% who identify as Hispanic (Fall 2016). The university also has a nationally recognized performing arts department recently ranked #9 out of 1,348 Performing Arts program in the country by BestArtColleges.com. Each year the conference receives over 100 submissions. Two or three scripts (from at least one Latino and one Black playwright) are selected for development in a week-long (25-30 hour) workshop rehearsal process. Conference activities also include panels and discussions of playwriting and Black and Latino Theatre history. Each selected script is assigned a professional director, a professional actor, and a dramaturg with remaining roles filled by university students. This process bridges the profession and the next generation of artists as university students polish their acting skills teamed with and learning from guest artists. Latino and Black students gain the special opportunity to play roles reflecting their own culture. The writers receive dramaturgical support helping them find clarity and truth in their storytelling in a nurturing and collaborative environment. The week-long rehearsal process culminates in public “script-in-hand” reading presentations followed by moderated “talk backs” as audience reactions help the writer gauge the impact of their work. Each year more than one thousand audience members participate from San Marcos and surrounding communities including Austin and San Antonio.

**Printed Materials: Sponsor Requirement:** Please include the logo of National Endowment for the Humanities on any Printed Materials. If that is not possible, please include the full name of “National Endowment for the Humanities”. The sponsor requests: <https://www.neh.gov/grants/manage/acknowledgment-and-publicity-requirements-neh-awards>

**Links:**

Crowdfunding Campaign: <https://donate.txstate.edu/crowdfunding?cfpage=project&project_id=14039>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TXStateBLPC/>

Website: <http://www.theatreanddance.txstate.edu/Productions/BLPC.html>

Twitter: BLPCFundraiser or <https://twitter.com/BLPCfundraiser>

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