



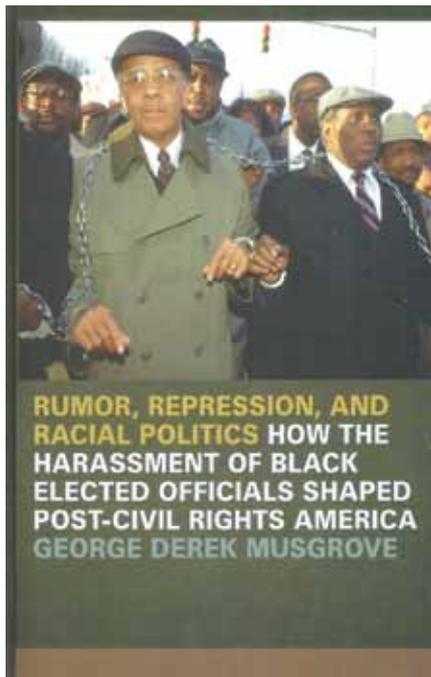
# the LITERARY HILL

A Compendium of Readers, Writers, Books, & Events

BY KAREN LYON

## Out to Get Them

In a 1976 article titled “Is There a Conspiracy against Black Leaders,” journalist Carl Rowan posed



A local historian reveals how harassment has been used against black politicians in an eye-opening new book.

this provocative question: “How do we determine which officials are victims of conspiracies to deprive them of power and which ones are crooks who deserve the contempt of the black community?” Recent headline-grabbing stories bring his query to the fore once again—if, indeed, it ever receded.

Local historian George Derek Musgrove considers this issue in a timely new book, “Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics: How the Harassment of Black Officials Shaped Post-Civil Rights America.” The book is already being hailed as “a real gem... that provides fresh insight[s]” and “a fine example of a new breed of his-

torical writing that connects politics and culture to explain the persistence of racism.”

Using news reports, published studies, trial transcripts, interviews with more than 40 sources -- including 25 sitting and former African American members of Congress -- and his own in-depth case study of Congressional investigations, indictments, audits, and surveillance, Musgrove examines the case for a systemized campaign of harassment against black elected officials from 1965 through 1992.

What he finds isn't pretty. Beginning with Nixon's scrutiny of his administration's “enemies,” through the government's use of the FBI and the IRS as tools of harassment, Musgrove paints a disturbing picture of white politicians only too eager to cast stones at black opponents and a media only too eager to chase negative innuendos—especially within the black community.

Musgrove steers clear of judging the guilt or innocence of black politicians accused of wrongdoing (although he does note that the behavior of DC's own Marion Barry served to undermine allegations of harassment). Instead, his purpose is to define harassment as “an ideology developed to understand the repression and disproportionate state scrutiny black elected officials experienced as they entered and rose through the ranks of U.S. electoral politics during the

post-civil rights period.”

He hopes that “by placing black elected officials' allegations of such harassment in context, [he has] demonstrated their significance to the larger body politic.” “Black elected officials operate in this narrative as a metaphorical ‘miner's canary,’” he contends, “warning us of the toxicity of modern U.S. politics.”

Given the blood sport that politics have become, his book is a powerful reminder of how the state can be used to repress opposition. In the end, he reminds us that Carl Rowan's dilemma of more than 35 years ago is far from outdated and is, in fact, one “that now faces the entire U.S. electorate.”

An assistant professor at the University of the District of Columbia, Musgrove comes by his interest naturally. “My father's campus organizing earned him a brief period of FBI surveillance,” he writes, “a fact of which I am terribly proud.”

## Growing Happy Kids

What does it mean to be a kid? Local children's writer Maya Ajmera

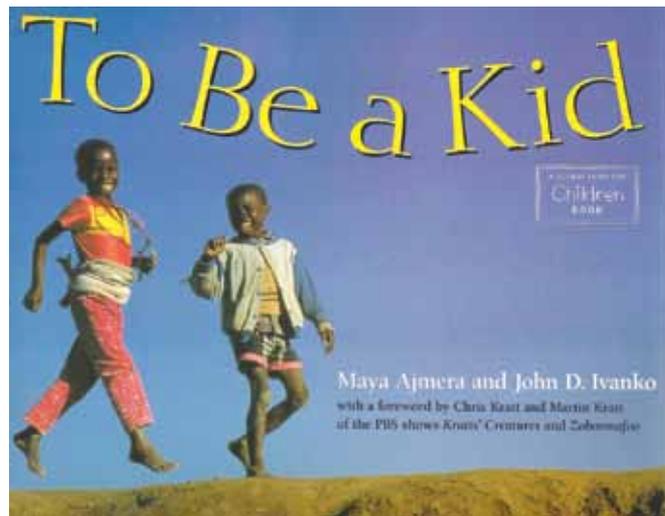
has lots of answers: learning things, sharing a story, running races, acting silly, dancing your heart out, and making friends that last forever and ever. In “To Be a Kid,” her delightful narrative is accompanied by gorgeous photos of children from all over the world taking part in the activities she names.

“To Be a Kid” is just one of the books published by The Global Fund for Children, which Ajmera founded “to advance the dignity of children and youth worldwide” by awarding grants to community-based organizations that serve young people. A portion of the royalties from the sale of the books helps fund the grants.

Ajmera also wrote “Faith,” which explores the ways in which people from all over the world pray, sing, read holy books, and observe holidays and festivals. The theme here is respect—for rituals and traditions different from ours -- and the book includes a helpful nondenominational section explaining various elements of faith and a glossary of religious terms.

All of Ajmera's books present a sunny, hopeful vision, reinforced by colorful photos of smiling children and clearly written explanations of what we're seeing. Leafing through her books, one can almost envision a whole generation of children whose attitudes are shaped by her loving and inclusive philosophy. And wouldn't that make for a beautiful world?

For more information, visit [www.globalfundforchildren.org](http://www.globalfundforchildren.org).



Maya Ajmera, founder of The Global Fund for Children, pens lively books for kids of all stripes.



Volunteer and join the fun at the 2012 Literary Hill BookFest on May 6 at Eastern Market! Photo by Carrol Kindel.

### Local Literary News

\* Cathy Travis, author of "Constitution Translated for Kids," has published a new e-novel that she calls "the perfect book for the political season we are now in." "Elected," which follows the fortunes of a president elected after a bitter recount in Florida in 2000 (sound familiar?), is available electronically at [www.amazon.com/dp/B00719CBH8](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00719CBH8).

\* If you couldn't squeeze in to one of the recent standing-room-only talks to hear Mary Z. Gray discuss her enchanting new memoir, "301 East Capitol: Tales From the Heart of the City," don't despair. The Overbeck History Lectures plans to schedule a repeat performance. Visit [www.capitolhillhistory.org](http://www.capitolhillhistory.org) for details.

\* A couple of literary heavyweights duke it out – metaphorically, at least – at a Library of Congress discussion by Joseph Fruscione, author of "Faulkner and Hemingway: Biography of a Literary Rivalry," at noon on March 16 in the James Madison Building. For more, visit [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

\* What if Shakespeare had a talented sister whose work remained unpublished because of her gender? The Folger Shakespeare Library mounts a challenge to Virginia Woolf's famous question by showcasing the work of Renaissance women who were actually writing up a storm. A new exhibition, "Shakespeare's Sisters: Voices of English and European Women Writers, 1500-1700," will be on view

through May 14. Details at [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu).

### 2102 Literary Hill BookFest

Can you blow up a balloon? Post a notice on a bulletin board? Consider volunteering for the 2012 Literary Hill BookFest, either before or at the event on Sunday, May 6, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., in the North Hall of Eastern Market. Join the dozens of volunteers who helped to make last year's BookFest a reality and enabled nearly a thousand visitors to meet local authors, hear book talks, learn about local libraries and other organizations, buy books, and participate in children's activities. Visit [www.literaryhillbookfest.org](http://www.literaryhillbookfest.org) or e-mail [volunteer@literaryhillbookfest.org](mailto:volunteer@literaryhillbookfest.org). ★

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