

THE *Current*

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

Book by UCSB English Scholar to Receive Prestigious MLA Award

Stephanie L. Batiste, associate professor of English and Black Studies at UC Santa Barbara, will receive the Modern Language Association's William Sanders Scarborough Prize for her book, "Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance" (Duke University Press, 2011).

In its citation, the selection committee described Batiste's work as "richly textured and finely nuanced," adding that it "brings intellectual energy to the well-worked period of the 1930's. She persuades that seemingly nation-focused Depression-era texts reference a wider international world ... Batiste has produced a theoretically sophisticated and beautifully-written reading of race in United States literary and cultural production."

"Darkening Mirrors" examines ways in which African Americans imagined themselves as empowered, modern United States citizens and transnational actors in Depression-era plays, operas, ballets, and films. It is about the promises and failures of American national identity, and the cultural gestures through which that identity is sustained.

"William Sanders Scarborough was born a slave and became a classical language professor, Wilberforce University President, and the first black member of all-white scholarly organizations near the turn of the 20th century," Batiste said in response to the MLA award. "He was a powerful intellect, writer, activist, and a champion of

African American education. I am profoundly honored to be recognized in his memory. I am also incredibly humbled by this recognition, as I have been reading several of the astounding monographs in African American literature and culture published very recently. The research is deep, nuanced, and far-reaching. It models new ways for thinking about race, the material and symbolic force of blackness, national and global belongings, and the power of creativity on artistic and scholarly planes. It is a beautiful time for the field and I'm immensely proud to be a part of this moment."

Batiste received her Ph.D. in American studies from George Washington University. Her interests encompass the relations of representation, performance, race, and power. Her research and teaching focus on how cultural texts and forms act as imaginative systems that help create identity, cultural values, and possibilities of justice. Her work has been published in numerous journals and collections in theater and performance studies.

The William Sanders Scarborough Prize is one of 15 awards that will be presented on January 5, 2013, during the MLA's annual convention in Boston.

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