

# PRESS RELEASE

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**NY1 News Anchors Cheryl Wills and Dominic Carter**  
**author of No Momma's Boy**  
**To Co-host West/ Rock Book Festival VIP Reception**

May 1, 2009 - Through a joint effort of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Westchester and Rockland Counties, Inc. and the QBR/The Black Book Review, sponsor of the Harlem Book Fair, the City of Mount Vernon, NY will host The West/Rock Book Fair, May 15 and 16, 2009 at City Hall Plaza, One Roosevelt Square.

Max Rodriguez, publisher and creative founder of the Harlem Book Fair has partnered with Robin L. Douglas, founder and Executive Director of the Chamber, to bring writers, publishers and other exhibitors together to celebrate their crafts and to share them with the community. The Book Fair is designed to feature the works of the African American, Caribbean and the African Diaspora experience. The honorary co-chairs for the West/Rock Book Fair are Mrs. Evelyn Young, a retired school teacher and the mother of Clinton I. Young, Jr., Mayor of Mount Vernon, Anne Young-Berkeley, his sister, who is a special reading teacher at Mandela High School and Dawna Michele Fields, National Program Manager for Colgate's Bright Smiles, Bright Futures. Musical entertainment will be provided by Reggie Woods *Workin' Music*. Honoree at the VIP Reception include Dr. Bettye Perkins, Executive Director of Today's Students, Tomorrows Teachers and Mrs. Opal Brown Lindsay, Director of the Mount Vernon Public Library. The May 15, 2009 VIP reception will be Co-host by NY1 News Anchors Cheryl Wills and Dominic Carter author of No Momma's Boy ([www.nomommasboy.com](http://www.nomommasboy.com)).

One of the most important events of the Harlem Book Fair is the HBF Wheatley Award, named for Phyllis Wheatley who was born a slave and who grew up to become a famous poet. This year's award will honor the poets, the people who have long told their story in poetic form, such as Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni and The Last Poets. Among the awardees this year are The Last Poets who, along with Gil Scott-Heron, are credited as being major influences on the development of hip hop and performance poetry and John Franklin Hope, author and historian, who will be honored posthumously.

In honoring these poets the HBF seeks to reinvent a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Black Culture, in honor of Barack Obama and the Black community. It is expected that the West/Rock Book Fair will follow the same theme. The West/Rock Book Fair will make the community aware

of local writers. It will impress upon the children that this is something they can do. Young adults can learn about the various employment opportunities in the world of publishing and writing. The Book Fair masks a lot of education in an entertaining way. For detailed information please visit the Chamber's website [www.aaccnys.org](http://www.aaccnys.org).

Some of the benefits of a Book Fair in the community are that books are available at very discounted prices, people become aware of and can interact with the writers of the community, and it becomes a hands-on learning experience, especially for young people. There will be workshops for young people to explore many of the facets of writing and publishing. The Book Fair will feature readings by authors of their works and panel discussions by authors, as well as entertainment.

Writing is done in a solitary environment, so a book fair is an opportunity for authors to meet and interact with one another and provide "edutainment" for their readers. Mr. Rodriguez states that aside from the fun, the educational value, the creative community empowerment, there is an economic value to the local community.

A *New York Times* Arts and Cultural editor noted that of all the areas of publishing, the African American publishing is the most profitable. Still, it is expected that the economic condition of the country may have some effect on the Book Fair. There may be fewer exhibitors due to the cost of traveling and staying in a host city.

The Harlem Book Fair, in its 11<sup>th</sup> year, started on West 125<sup>th</sup> St. at the State Office Bldg. with 43 exhibitors and has grown to need a 3-block area near the Schomburg Library. There were no African American Book Fairs in the United States prior to the Harlem Book Fair. There are now Book Fairs hosted by a number of cities across the country, such as Boston, Los Angeles, Long Island and other cities. It is hoped that these book fairs reflect the culture of the host city.

The Harlem Book Fair is managed by a very small paid staff and about one hundred and fifty volunteers. The book fairs are primarily sponsored by the large traditional publishers such as Simon & Shuster, Random House, etc. There are also corporate sponsors such as Starbucks, Commerce/TD Bank, who want to brand into the African American reader.

Although Mr. Rodriguez is a published author, he says he has many more books in him and hopes someday to get them down on paper and published. His interest in the writings of Black authors was raised in college.

Mr. Rodriguez says that all of us should explore the writing experience, even if it is just to tell our family story which is important to pass on. One of the key functions of a Book Fair is to reach teens, to create a bridge to inform them, to create a viable and accessible community for the future. He has been successful in introducing a course in teen writing and publishing throughout the Dallas Public Library system and hopes to be able to do this for the Westchester/Rockland communities.

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