

WRITE

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UNION OF
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WINTER 2021

**On Being a
Black Canadian
Writer**

11

**Creating
Through
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Editor's Note

By Chelene Knight



When I was asked to edit this issue of Write knowing I would be working exclusively with Black writers, I desired the opportunity to respond to their pieces; to go back and forth and converse with these writers. I wanted to slow down and tell them how their pieces affected me and how I saw them fitting together, as a community.

I take to heart the relationship that can form when a Black editor and Black writer are encouraged to sit down together, even for a short time. Why is this relationship such a rare occurrence?

When I initially read through all of the pieces in this issue, I felt a common thread poking out from beneath the pages. Although these stories and opinions are offered to us on the page through different perspectives and various experiences, I couldn't ignore the cohesiveness. To me, this issue of *Write* began to feel as if we were all deep in conversation.

I've always known that through community and collaboration we could indeed visit and at the very least explore a reimagining of the Canadian publishing industry. We envision the necessity of transparency in Wanda Taylor's piece and how open communication with authors and publishers can empower us to create and sustain diverse spaces. And it is that sustainability that has been the missing link for so long. Even if Black voices make it onto the page, and into the decision-making rooms, how do we ensure this space is equitable? Equity and equality are two very different things. I think deeply about this all the time.

Adding the literary agent role to my other publishing hats meant that I had to protect myself and create firm boundaries around my time, and this wasn't always supported even when folks asked me directly: "What do you need?" I had to align my collaborators and be certain I had enough time, money, and curated support to step into such a role. I had to *create* time to predict and understand what my obstacles *might* be before I took this leap so that I could troubleshoot ahead of time. But is there room for those of us who need to move slower in order to make the necessary adjustments and to clearly communicate our needs? What happens if we make a mistake once we are in the room? "The stakes are greater for those of us who are not part of dominant society: Rejection, isolation, and fear of being exiled are real for people who are already on the margins," Dianah Smith says in her piece, "Writing from Within."

In this issue, we as a group ask: Is there truly equitable space at the table for more Black writers, agents, acquisitions editors, entrepreneurs, teachers, and CEOs to talk about the known nuances of publishing books, supporting authors, and creating stories that change the way we see the world? Is there time for us to learn about one another? All of the pieces in this issue offer me hope. They tell me it is possible and necessary. But how do we get there?

I am the only writer in my family. My parents didn't read to me as a child, and I was often discouraged from having my face buried in a book, but I refused to let go of the worlds I was falling into and the ones I was creating. I recall building stories that started at the end, and spiralling characters into unmentionable predicaments, but not having any idea if this was how writing started. As a young girl I would write letters to my father telling him all the stories I was creating and what was happening in my day. My younger cousin and I would write humorous, far-off tales about movies we'd seen and plop them into mailboxes addressed to no one in particular. What if we are encouraged to explore storytelling through uniquely constructed containers and structures as Rowan McCandless does in her piece on craft, "Playing With Form"? What if our entry point into the world of writing starts with writing a letter like Lawrence Hill speaks about in his piece? What if we could show the decision-makers that there is a demand and desire for work that unfolds in ways we've not seen before? What about Dianah Smith's exploration of language to tell our stories in a way that is authentic to us? What conversations are being had about these experiences?

Can mentorship and teaching play instrumental roles in highlighting non-traditional routes to publishing? The questions keep coming. There is no shortage of questions. The answers emerge through different voices, octaves, and words. The common thread that I witnessed from the very beginning is a desire to live in a world built for us to thrive. Not to merely exist, but to thrive.

We are collaborating. We are sitting at the table together having a conversation that is meant to spark and create permanent change and move us away from saying yes to temporary space. This is not a "one-off" or a veneer. We are exchanging ideas that will solidify and strengthen the publishing foundation. We are exchanging ideas and reminiscing. This issue is a gathering of incredible Black writers who are speaking and listening to each other. We are responding to one another, and through the lens of reimagining, folks on the other side of the door are listening.



Writing to Build Community

BY LAWRENCE HILL

When I reimagine the publishing industry through community and collaboration, my mind always goes to my own development as a writer and the community ties that have arisen along the way.

What was the first time that I imagined the process of making stories? When did I first write with passion or indignation? And how did working as a writer influence and enrich my own sense of belonging to communities?

My brother Dan, sister Karen, and I were lucky to have a mother who read to us and a father who made up wild bedtime stories.

My mother, Donna Hill, was a white, sharp-tongued, speak-no-nonsense civil rights activist who couldn't cook to save her life, but who brought energy, voice, and passion to the things she read to us at night. One of her favourite readings, which I quickly memorized, was the poem "Disobedience" by A.A. Milne. Here's how it starts:

James James Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great care of his mother
Though he was only three

The repetition and the over-the-top verbosity appealed to my mother's silly bone, and formed the marrow of mine. Listening to my mother read poems and stories taught me about playfulness, inanity, and absurdity in language.

My father, Daniel G. Hill, an African American WWII vet who married my mother on the Howard University campus in Washington DC in 1953 and moved with her the next day to Toronto, which they both embraced as their new home, never read a book to us aloud. But he made up stories nightly. He

could imitate human accents, mimic the sounds of raccoons and bears, and transport us to imaginary but impossible places. In my father's bedside narrations, lions wrestled with tigers, and children ran from stampeding elephants.

Other of my father's stories were entirely human and would begin with lines such as: "You'll never believe what happened today at work." By the time I was 6, he was director of the brand-new Ontario Human Rights Commission, and he came home with story after story. "I have met an apartment owner who refuses to rent a room in his house to a Black man from Jamaica and says he doesn't have to, because the owner lives in the house, too. What do you think I should do about that?"

In terms of helping me become a writer, my father's greatest gift was unintentional. He didn't want any writers in the family. He was an African American immigrant with a Ph.D., and like most other immigrants of his time, the last thing he wanted was for any son or daughter of his to become a novelist. He wanted us to become doctors, lawyers, engineers — anything that would provide economic security, offer social status, and insulate us from the racism he had encountered in the highly segregated American army.

He knew that professionals had to be literate, so he tried to move me along that path by making me write letters for the things I wanted. A kitten. My first pair of Adidas Rom running shoes. Permission to stay out and play after the streetlights came on.

I wrote and wrote and wrote for the things I desired, and generally, if I turned out a decent letter with no spelling mistakes, I'd get what I wanted. The letters became my instruments of argumentation and were designed to shift the thinking of a parent who sat down at the kitchen table with his arms crossed, as in "You'd better impress me with that letter."

By the time I'd written a few, there was no looking back. Writing could change my world. It could get me the things I wanted. A well-written letter seemed the only hope to change the mind of a domineering father. It could change my world. So I kept on with it.

I feel fortunate to have grown up in the 1960s and to have begun travelling in the 1970s, at a time when long-distance phone calls seemed out of the question, and we were still decades away from the internet and email.

I began travelling as a means to discover and affirm my own Blackness, since such affirmations were certainly not coming my way in the streets, chess clubs, debating clubs, track teams, or schools of the Toronto I knew in the 1960s and 1970s. When I travelled in the States to see my relatives, to Spain to write, to study in Quebec, and to work as a volunteer in the West African countries of Niger, Cameroon, and Mali, I wrote letter after letter to friends and family. They were playful, uncensored personal accounts. I wrote them too fast to worry about how badly they were composed. Frequent letter-writing helped me adopt into a natural voice on the page.

Using my mother's L.C. Smith typewriter, I began writing short stories at 14. The first stories were self-conscious and stilted. After my mother tore them apart, I would rewrite them from scratch.

Finally, in my late twenties, when I felt ready to start writing my first novel, I figured out that the best way to get more vitality and humour onto the page was to write it like a long, rambling, exuberant letter.

From the first short stories, my own writing reflected a need to explore and affirm my own racial identity. Perhaps growing up in a predominantly white suburb and with Black and white parents made me feel insecure about my own identity. I read and wrote to find myself, and to enter, if only in my own imagination, communities that would welcome me. In the world of adult literature, the first writers I read were African American: Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Countee Cullen. As a reader, I fell into their worlds. As a writer, I sought to emulate their clarity and immediacy.

My first novel, *Some Great Thing*, follows a young Black journalist's first year on the job at a newspaper in Winnipeg. It is not overtly autobiographical, but it draws upon my own observations as a reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press, where I worked in my first full-time job from 1982 to 1985. Like the other jobs I have held — dishwasher, canoe guide, bicycle tour guide, speech writer, and university professor — the people I encountered as peers and as bosses were almost always white. It wasn't just journalism. Throughout my elementary and high school years, I had only one teacher who was not white. I have studied at four universities, and only one of my many professors (a Vietnamese man who taught microeconomics at Université Laval in Quebec City) was not white. From 1988 to 2006, I wrote hundreds of speeches for Premiers, Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and Assistant Deputy Ministers in the Ontario government, and virtually all of the speakers (and bureaucrats who hired me) were white. In the last 30 years, I have worked with many agents, editors, and publishers in Canada, the U.S., and abroad, but to the best of my knowledge only one of them has been a person of colour.

Fiction became the one place where I could create Black worlds and characters whom I hoped would be lively, complicated, dimensional people. It was the one part of my life where I could make front-and-centre in my work the African Canadian, African American, and African voices and souls of my own family and of my travels and personal experiences in Canada, the U.S., Europe, and Africa. Writing fiction and creative nonfiction for me became a form of asserting and connecting with community.

I'm proud of the white characters I have created, such as welfare crusader Jake Corbett in *Some Great Thing*, slave owner Moses Lindo in *The Book of Negroes*, and the accident-prone Ivernia Beech in *The Illegal*. However, Black people have always figured prominently in my stories and novels. Building those communities on the page reflected my awareness of their absence in my day-to-day life and helped me realize that other forms of community connection in my life would also require conscious, proactive efforts.

I thought that writing *Some Great Thing* was the hardest thing I would ever do, but it turned out that the most difficult was to

Black people have always figured prominently in my stories and novels. Building those communities on the page reflected my awareness of their absence in my day-to-day life.

find a publisher who was willing to take it. It finally came out in 1992 with Turnstone Press, but not before pretty well every large or mid-sized Canadian or well-known small publisher had turned it down. One agent told me that it would be better to set the story in Toronto (that the characters, politics, and physical setting in the book are uniquely born of Winnipeg). Other observers in the publishing world let me know that stories about Black characters were unlikely to sell. At first, I believed them — the novel was barely reviewed at all, unavailable in most bookstores, and didn't sell more than a few hundred copies in the first years that it was available.

But over time, I learned what an entirely fictional and erroneous conceit it was to claim that Black fiction wouldn't sell.

In the 1990s, I organized a literary tribute in Toronto for the writer Austin Clarke, but first had to overcome objections that nobody would attend an event for a Black writer. I pushed ahead anyway, and the room at the Harbourfront Centre was packed. Later, of course, I noted the accolades and sales garnered by other writers such as André Alexis, Austin Clarke, Esi Edugyan, and Desmond Cole, and saw my own books do very well.

As I moved onto my second novel, *Any Known Blood*, I read a helpful book called *How to Get Happily Published* by Judith Applebaum and worked more thoughtfully and proactively to publicize my own work. I learned how to promote my own work. I accepted every book club invitation that came my way, sent my books with personal notes to librarians, bookstore owners, educators, literary festival directors, and to other persons of influence, and for newspapers and magazines I wrote op-ed pieces and features related to the themes of my novels. It also helped to learn to memorize the book segments that I planned to read in public readings, to get comfortable and relaxed as a public speaker, and to apply effectively for arts council grants. In the early years of writing and publishing, I made far more money from readings, public speaking, and arts council grants than I did from royalties.

One of the best parts of my life as a writer has been the opportunities to connect to communities. I have visited with hundreds of high school classrooms, and almost always love the interactions with students. In Black communities, I have conducted extensive interviews; been invited to give talks and

workshops and to serve as a mentor; assisted in public advocacy, activism, fundraising, and other volunteerism; and found myriad ways to feel part of the communities of colour that I almost never found enshrined in schools, universities, newsrooms, the public service, the media, and the world of Canadian publishing.

I hope that as we build communities together, we will be increasingly successful in our efforts to pry open doors that have been closed to us for far too long.

If one good thing can come of all the anti-Black violence that has become increasingly visible and undeniable in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere in the last year or so, it is perhaps that people in power are finally starting to see that they must open their eyes to us, recognize us, and see that they can't do their work well without us at the helm too.

We have been in this country and on this continent for four hundred years. We belong and we must be — along with others — at helm. We belong, and must be, in every other corner and crevice of the worlds of work, study, play, and art.

If we seek a better world for our children and grandchildren, we have no option but to keep building communities. Folks may not always listen. They will not always act right. But we will always have our art to wake them up, stir them to consciousness, and help them — in their hearts and in their actions — recognize our humanity.

Lawrence Hill is the author of ten books, including The Book of Negroes, The Illegal, and Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada. His 2013 Massey Lectures were based on his book of essays Blood: The Stuff of Life. His books have won many awards, including the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and have been read around the world. He co-wrote the television miniseries based on his novel The Book of Negroes, which attracted millions of viewers in the United States and Canada and won the NAACP award (for outstanding writing) and eleven Canadian Screen Awards. His essay about his mother, "Act of Love: The Life and Death of Donna Mae Hill" appeared in The Globe and Mail newspaper in 2018, and enriched a national conversation about medically assisted dying. He is completing a novel for children, working on a novel about the African American soldiers who helped the Alaska Highway during WWII, and teaches creative writing at the University of Guelph.

Writing from Within

BY DIANAH SMITH



As a Black, queer, mixed-class, cisgender woman, living with a brain injury, I'm no stranger to the state of being unmoored.

But COVID-19 and the succession of brutal murders of BIPOC within a short period of time in the spring of 2020 left me reeling. Beyond trying to maintain the basics of sleeping, eating, and moving my body, the thing that kept me on this side of reality (just) was the deliberate and repeated invocation of grandmothers, great-grandmothers, aunts, and great-aunts, the reaching out to Black peers and elders, the constant centering of my lineage.

Early in my writing journey, I founded “A” is for Orange (pronounced “Ahringe”), a creative incubator and reading series featuring emerging queer and trans writers of Caribbean decent (2005–2010), in response to feeling tokenized, marginalized, ignored, and/or exoticized in mainstream writing spaces. We started out as a small group of friends who met in each other’s homes, wrote, shared, and gave each other feedback.

In one of our early meetings, someone pointed out the incongruity in a short story I had shared set in Jamaica and written in Standard English. They suggested I rewrite the story in Patois. Although I was born in Jamaica, I immigrated to Canada as a child and was raised in the decidedly non-Caribbean enclave of Ottawa, Ontario in the late '70s and '80s; I was shy to write in Patois especially around those in the group who had grown up in the Caribbean and come to Canada in their teens or as adults. But I rewrote the piece, buoyed by the group’s clarity that Patois was still my mother tongue no matter how long I’d lived in “Foreign.”

After several months of writing together as a group, we decided that we wanted to share our writing with the larger community. I approached the Toronto Women’s Bookstore, and they agreed to be our main sponsor. We were generously supported through the donation of space, staff time, and assistance with publicity and promotion.

It was revelatory to look out at an audience and see a room full of faces that resembled yours; to stand at a microphone literally shaking and hear several voices saying, “You got this!”; to have your solo reading turn into a participatory event with audible interjections and high-spirited commentary. I was humbled to learn in the Q&As that often followed what the readings meant

I was a part of a lineage where I was held, witnessed, and celebrated, and part of my role/responsibility was to hold, witness, and celebrate my community.

to our community: There were straight allies who commended us on the important work we were doing and queer and trans folks who told us they had travelled from the outskirts of Toronto to attend, some leaving homes and communities where they did not feel safe or supported. I began to understand my role/responsibility as a Black (queer, mixed-class, cisgender woman) writer differently: I was a part of a lineage where I was held, witnessed, and celebrated, and part of my role/responsibility was to hold, witness, and celebrate my community.

Before “A” is for Orange, like many queer Caribbean folk, I had a mixed relationship with my culture: at times rejected by other Black people because of my queerness (told that being gay was a white thing) while simultaneously navigating the racism of the white queer community (told that Black culture was homophobic).

The stakes are greater for those of us who are not part of the dominant society. As a minority within a minority, my membership felt tenuous at times, and the margin of error allotted felt very slim. Rejection, isolation, and fear of being exiled were very real.

Being mentored within a queer Caribbean community meant that I could be all of who I was without fear of rejection or the need to explain or defend; my shoulders — my whole being — could settle. And with a settled being, I was able to create with curiosity and with less deference to an imagined audience/readership, without shame or damage to my being at such a critical stage in my writing journey.

I write this in the long shadow of a global pandemic and in the longer shadow of centuries of anti-Black violence. COVID-19 has laid bare the deep inequities that those on the margins already knew existed. These inequities often translated to brutal, premature, and unjust deaths. Some, like George Floyd, were highly visible in their brutality. Others were less visible but their deaths no less unjust. All caught in a system that didn’t recognize their full humanity.

Writing in community is writing in our full humanity.

Dianah Smith says, “I am my ancestors’ harvest, the manifestation of their unrelinquished hopes, dreams, and desires. I have had the honour of being mentored by Olive Senior, Catherine Graham, Martin Mordecai, Kate Marshall Flaherty, and Karen Lee.”



Who is Your Audience: The Things I Learned from Both Sides of the Industry

BY WANDA TAYLOR

THE AUDIENCE

Before I published my first book back in 2013, I had worked with Nimbus Publishing for about a year, trying to bring my book to life. *Birchtown and the Black Loyalists* was a middle grade nonfiction book written to share the history and journey of formerly enslaved Blacks to Birchtown, Nova Scotia, from the U.S. I knew who my audience was: young people. Nimbus also knew who its audience was: much wider than mine. We worked together to identify a shared idea about who this book could reach. That meant dialogue about what my established community connections were and what partnerships or working relationships Nimbus already had in the community — like people in the Department of Education's African Canadian Services Division.

In some small way, I felt like I was a part of shaping how far the book could go. I admired Nimbus' open communication and

insights. Now my first book is a part of the bookstore collection at Birchtown's Black Loyalist Heritage Centre and is available in every middle grade elementary school across the province. It was also listed as one of the best Black History Month books for youth by the Canadian Children's Book Centre and *Parent Today* magazine — expanding its reach even farther. As a new author back then, I don't think I ever imagined a reach beyond those few in my orbit.

About five years and several books later, I was hired as a contract acquisitions editor with a small publishing company. The experience had certainly expanded my knowledge about the publishing side of the industry. But as importantly, the more I began connecting with people across the country who were also working on the publishing side, the more I began to realize they all held specific ideas about who their audience was. I learned that

I learned that conversations around editorial tables were leaving out some very important demographics.

conversations around editorial tables were leaving out some very important demographics. Readers had been craving characters that looked like them. Stories that reflected their experiences. Role models and materials in books that spoke to their perspectives and their worldview. Kat Mototsune has been a freelance editor for thirty years. She indicated there are historical reasons why this could be: “Many decision-makers came up in the industry at a time when publishing was open (or perceived as being open) mostly to an elite: university-educated in the arts, often with an alternative source of income to be able to afford entry-level employment or unpaid internship — and therefore usually white. So, a lack of diversity in the publishing industry is longstanding and traditional, and hard to change in times when the industry is precarious.”

THERE'S A PATTERN HERE

In the '90s a little-known playwright named Tyler Perry wrestled with film studios, trying to make the case that his films were vital to tapping into a market that Hollywood had been ignoring at the box office — Black moviegoers. Perry was on to something; unfortunately no one was listening. But eventually, Lions Gate Films took a risk and signed a contract with Perry. As his films began hitting the theatres, Black audiences were coming out by the millions, just ecstatic to be able to go to the movie theatre and see themselves on the stage and on screen. Hollywood paid attention.

Perry made millions by leveraging the potential of a historically untapped market. However, he faced a lot of backlash from many in the Black community for what they felt were unrealistic portrayals of Black women in his productions. The ire from the very audiences he was trying to target sends a message that it's not just enough to *tap into* the market, but it's equally important to portray honest and authentic characters and stories rather than play into existing stereotypes about who and what we are as a people.

In the same vein of Perry recognizing that certain audiences were being ignored, readers of colour have been crying out for a long time to read books that speak to them and that reflect their lives. Publishing companies, who work to cater to their *audiences*, haven't always seen people of colour as being a significant part of that readership. So, when writers of colour came knocking on doors hoping to be published, the doors were abruptly shut, and in many cases not opened at all. As awareness widens about this untapped readership, it's not enough for publishers to just turn

out books; they have to be purposeful about the kinds of stories and characters they champion.

This is where authors as authorities on their work play a role. Of course, getting rejection letters is par for the course in this field. Publishing houses traditionally comb through hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts yearly, accumulating massive slush piles that gather dust in unused corners. Not every manuscript is ready to be published. But writers of colour faced the additional challenge of just getting in the door and having their work understood and respected. Before I began working on the acquisitions side, I always believed it was my writing that was the problem. I even graduated from a journalism course in college, assured that it would strengthen my writing skills in all areas. It did strengthen my writing, but it didn't improve my chances of being published. Those rejection letters continued to pile up.

It wasn't until I derived a deeper understanding of what goes on behind that mysterious curtain — where editing and publishing teams discuss book projects, marketing, and audiences — that I came to realize it wasn't my writing that was the issue. It was my audience. The process of taking a book from an idea to a physical book on the shelf involves a whole team of people with a variety of exceptional talents. And even this varies from house to house. I wasn't aware of any of that until I became a person on the other side of that curtain.

Generally, the acquisitions editor is like a gatekeeper. They read through and filter incoming submissions to select which ones may be a good fit for their company. Publishers, sales and marketing people, and senior editors sit around the table with that editor, discussing those selected projects from all sorts of creative and marketing angles. And even after the book and its author make it past those rigorous vetting decisions, there is a full production team waiting to make additional decisions about everything from line edits to book cover designs.

Absent in the room were the people who could challenge the status quo, question the sameness, and insert alternate perspectives into these conversations.

It was my worldview and the perspectives of my characters that didn't quite belong and didn't cater to the mainstream *audiences* of the publishers I was submitting to. I felt there needed to be a deeper awareness and deeper conversations around the table about BIPOC stories and creators. We needed to be included in those conversations and in those book decisions.

Learning is a vital part of the solution to dismantling the existing disconnect between BIPOC creators and publishing houses across the country. It's a key to positive growth within the publishing industry.

IS THE WORK BEING DONE?

"In the time I have been in publishing," Mototsune says, "the industry has gone from not engaging in such conversations to making a point of it. Importantly, just the last few years have seen the conversation go from inclusion of diverse characters to publishing diverse authors. However, these conversations are still too often about 'other,' with the people in the industry not identifying as minorities."

Mototsune hopes the much-needed push toward diversity behind the scenes now is more than just optics but a real step toward systemic changes. As BIPOC creators, we too have a role to play, by staying involved in industry progress, advocating for seats at the table, and fighting for the audiences who demand these kinds of stories. Seats at the table go beyond just a body in a chair but people in high-level positions. Publishers also need to take the necessary steps to inform BIPOC talent of how they can land in those seats.

During my work in acquisitions, I travelled around to colleges and universities with my editorial assistant, and we spoke to creative writing and English classes, and in communities, about routes to becoming a published author. Our goal was to increase the diversity of talent (in age, race, gender, ethnicity, and location). Publishers can also find similarly creative ways of reaching out to the community; to educate them about paths they can take to becoming employees who widen the diversity inside publishing houses. A senior editor at a major publishing house once told me that the pool of hires who apply for their positions are almost always white. She agreed that publishers in the past had rarely taken the extra step to determine why that is, or to try and change those continual patterns.

As publishing houses gain greater awareness of how the industry has historically shut out people of colour, many are trying to put their words into action by making intentional strides toward more diversity in publishing. Suzanne Sutherland, senior editor for children's books at HarperCollins Canada, says that through their new Open Box Initiative, the company has been actively seeking out BIPOC authors who can bring more diverse stories to market.

"It has been exciting to see the range of projects that have been shared with us [through the Initiative], and I feel as though we

are all learning a great deal about both the depth and breadth of engaging storytelling for young people by emerging BIPOC authors in Canada."

LEARNING AND RELEARNING

This move by HarperCollins has garnered excitement in BIPOC circles and is a great step towards reaching and appealing to those untapped audiences. Sutherland mentioned one particularly important word in her statement, and that was *learning*. We all must be open to learning more, beyond our individual and collective experiences and perspectives. Learning is a vital part of the solution to dismantling the existing disconnect between BIPOC creators and publishing houses across the country. It's a key to positive growth within the publishing industry.

Mototsune says this new industry shift must go beyond just the writers; publishing houses need to increase diversity within their ranks, with more editors, designers, and decision-makers around the table. She adds that in some communities, writing is not seen as an affordable or viable career goal, but publishing can take a greater role in nurturing these authors.

"Publishers need to explore non-traditional relationships and contacts to seek out and find these people," she says.

This learning relates to a new way of thinking about the possibilities within the industry. It is this learning that demands that publishing houses — who claim to be allies — listen more to their writers. It demands that they actively listen to the stories that BIPOC writers are telling, and why they are telling them that way. That BIPOC writers can write about more than just themselves and their *people* — they are gifted storytellers. That learning also demands that publishing houses relearn the breadth and depth of their readership.

Wanda Taylor is an author, social worker, and college professor. She has written six books of fiction and nonfiction. As a freelance magazine writer, she has been published in Understorey Magazine, Atlantic Books Today, Black2Business Magazine, and Peak Magazine to name a few. Wanda teaches college courses in journalism, media writing, and creative nonfiction, and is currently writing an adult fiction novel called Voices We Pulled from the Embers.