

# NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier  
University



## **Laurier hosts noted poet and playwright during Black History Month** *Black history scholar George Elliott Clarke to offer Canadian historical experience*

**For Immediate Release**

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WATERLOO – Canada's quintessential black history scholar, George Elliott Clarke, will discuss Canadian black history as well as his book and opera libretto *Beatrice Chancy* as part of the Black History Month celebrations at Wilfrid Laurier University. The Laurier Bookstore and the Department of Religion and Culture will host this Canadian poet and playwright in the Paul Martin Centre at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, February 8.

Set in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley in 1801, *Beatrice Chancy* is the story of the daughter of a black slave woman who was raped by her white master. Raised in the master's household and sent to a convent school to "copy white ladies' ways," she is her father's prize possession. After declaring her love for a slave, Beatrice is raped by her father, which leads to a chain of violence resulting in her father's death and Beatrice's execution.

"*Beatrice Chancy* is a fictional story, but it is based on the very real experience of slavery in Canada in the early 1800s," says event organizer Kathryn Wardropper. "Clarke's work fits perfectly with the theme and purpose of Black History Month by sharing the historical experiences and culture of black people in a contemporary setting."

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Born in Nova Scotia in 1960 and revered as a poet, Clarke's honours include a Bellagio Centre Residency awarded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the prestigious Portia White Prize awarded by the Nova Scotia Arts Council. Clarke taught African-American and Canadian literature at Duke University from 1994 to 1999, served as the visiting Seagram's Chair in Canadian Studies at McGill University from 1998 to 1999, and currently teaches world literature in English at the University of Toronto.

Despite the obvious differences between black history in the United States and Canada, important similarities in the slave trade and the concept of community still exist. Founded in 1929 by Carter G. Woodson and originally called Negro History Week, Black History Month became a month-long celebration in 1976. Black History Month is an opportunity to reflect on the past and present and this annual Laurier event is one of many being held throughout the Kitchener-Waterloo community in February.