

Val Gray Ward is an internationally acclaimed dramatist-historian, actress, producer, director, educator, Pan-Africanist, and cultural activist who is famously known as “The Voice of the Black Writer.” Ward was born Q. Valeria Ward in the oldest all-Black town in the U.S., Mound Bayou, Mississippi. She is eminently recognized for her ritual and staged theatre productions such as Useni Perkins's Image Makers and James Baldwin's The Amen Corner; her one-woman shows Harriet Tubman and My Soul is a Witness; and for popularizing the works of celebrated and lesser-known prolific black writers such as lifelong friends Gwendolyn Brooks, Mari Evans, Sonia Sanchez, and Haki Madhubuti through her sensitive and sermonic interpretations. In 1968, Ward founded Chicago’s pioneering Black theatre, Kuumba Theatre with the active support of her husband Francis Ward, their children, and the community. In 1969, Ward opened the door as the inaugural director of the Afro-American Cultural Center at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana. Ward is the recipient of over 200 awards including several lifetime-achievement awards, a Grammy nomination for her tribute CD rhapsody in Hughes 101 honoring the life and legacy of Langston Hughes and an Emmy for her edu-tainment film Precious Memories: Strolling 47th Street, which won 21 Emmys. Soon-to-be 91, our beloved sister and living legend Val is still giving edifying lectures and electrifying performances at institutions and conferences across the world, virtually.