

**Panel 17: Autobiography and the Black Female Body Politic: Illness, Singing, and Black Diasporic Subjectivity**

**Moderator and Respondent: Mildred Mickle**

Mildred Mickle is the Associate Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, McKeesport. There she serves as the Co-Head of Letters, Arts, and Sciences; the Head of African, and African American Studies; and the Coordinator of Theatre, the Creative Writing Certificate, and the Africana Certificate Programs. Dr. Mickle received her Ph.D. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**Tomeiko Ashford Carter**

**Zilpha Elaw, Virginia Broughton, and Lessons on Illness and the Power of Spiritual Healing**

Zilpha Elaw was an itinerant preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal church who wrote an autobiography about her spiritual experiences. Her encounters with the godhead were kariotic in nature: they offered decisive moments of spiritual action, whereby Elaw felt that the godhead was intervening in earthly situations and was prompting her to intercede on behalf of ailing individuals. Given her power to aid the healing of the sick, Elaw became well-known as a spiritual intercessor. She was routinely called upon to pray during hours of need of the infirmed; and she was able to transfer the spiritual power she gleaned in those interactions with the godhead to medicated bodies and to bodies that were in severe pain.

In her autobiography, Virginia Broughton shares how her mother's untimely death, challenges in her career, and her personal illness led to a crossroads in her life. She reports miraculous healing through steadfast faith, prayer, and divine intervention, which prompts a reversal in her career and, most importantly, her extemporaneous witnessing and exhortation during a Bible Band meeting. Bible bands were outreach ministries formed by American Baptist missionary Joanna Moore. They were to increase the biblical study of African American females in local churches. But, they were also powerful tools of corporate worship, healing, and spiritual autonomy. The latter of which changed the course of Broughton's life and catapulted her to the forefront of women's leadership in the National Baptist Convention, the largest denominational organization for African American Baptists at the time. Elaw and Broughton's consistent faith, prayer stances, and expectations of the godhead's intervention in their lives inspired my own road to recovery almost two years ago. I took ill suddenly—the result of internal bleeding. But Elaw's and Broughton's corporate prayer and communal care provided models of the same for my healing.

Tomeiko Ashford Carter is an English teacher in the Upper School at Carolina Friends School. Carter specializes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American autobiography. Carter also served as Assistant Professor of English at Florida State University. She is the author of *Powers Divine Spiritual Autobiography and Black Women's Writing* (2008) and *Virginia*.