In April 1980 renowned African writer Chinua Achebe and African American literary giant James Baldwin met for the first time in Gainesville, Florida. The occasion was the African Literature Association conference devoted to the African Aesthetic.

On the 40th anniversary of Baldwin and Achebe’s historic encounter at the University of Florida, this two-day event invites return and reflection. The first day probes the experiential archive through oral history, memoir, and artifact. The second day invites literary engagement around reading, representing and writing the nexus of Africa and America in the present on the UF campus and across the community.

How might we come to know and narrate this past in its midst and from afar. Does a Black Aesthetic today displace the pursuit of an African one? Can there ever be a single voice to speak with or against? Does a literary imagination forged in displacement and diaspora transcend attempts at localization? What are the artistic and political stakes and do they recall or refute the promises of the past?