For decades, Black scholars in the humanities struggled to have their “voice” heard in the academic world. An occasional presentation at the Modern Language Association’s annual meeting was about all the focus they received on the national front.

Fifty years ago that changed as the College Language Association met for the first time. A few dozen members presented critical analyses of Black writers and scholarship. The association, formed a few years earlier as an offshoot of MLA, concentrated on a world previously all but silenced.

“CLA has become a forum where Black scholars gain sustenance. It’s an essential community for many bright minds,” says Maurice Shipley, assistant professor of Black studies and coordinator for the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

For most of its existence, CLA has held its annual meetings in the South, in close proximity to many of the Black colleges and universities. Except for a few meetings in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York, members never met in the North or West.

That will change this spring. CLA’s 50th convention will be held April 18-21 across from Ohio State, at the Holiday Inn on the Lane, 328 W. Lane Ave. Some 500 delegates are expected to attend sessions in areas including: Black American fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography and folklore; Francophone literature from Africa and the Caribbean; linguistics; criticism; rhetoric and composition; English and American literature; contemporary Afro-Hispanic literature; and computers and the teaching of languages.

“One subject that will get special attention is the emerging role Black women writers are playing in revealing a more intimate look at our community. In growing numbers they’re examining family life, and the strengths and challenges we face, much more than men have ever done. It’s telling us a lot about ourselves,” says Shipley, a member of CLA’s executive committee and the English area representative.

It’s largely Shipley’s influence which convinced the association to meet in Columbus.

David Bradley, novelist, critic and faculty member at Temple University, will deliver the keynote address at 8 p.m., April 19. He’ll discuss Black scholars writing literary criticism, and how “our racist culture” affects their work. The book he now is writing also addresses this subject.

Bradley’s 1986 book The Chaneysville Incident examines the role of slavery and how it has affected Black people since its abolishment.

For information about registration or specific sessions, call Roxanne Mountford at 292-7262 or 292-3700.