

## The Highest Level Of Storytelling: An Interview with Amaleka McCall By: Michelle Cuttino

Amaleka McCall is the author of five novels – *Myra: A Twisted Tale Of Karma*, *Hush*, *Price Of Fame*, *Hard Candy* and *Hard Candy 2: Secrets Uncovered*. She has a knack for writing mystery/crime thrillers with an urban/street flair. Catching the eye and attention of best-selling authors, Ashley & JaQuavis Coleman, at the onset of her writing career, Amaleka's dreams have finally been realized.

With the creation of their new publishing company, Official Writers League (OWL), Amaleka has been elected the chosen one. She is one of the first authors to be signed, with her debut novel under the OWL imprint being released in June 2013.

**Black Literature Magazine** had an opportunity to catch up with Amaleka to find out more about the incredible woman behind such intriguing prose.

**Michelle:** I know you grew up in Brooklyn, NY. Why did you relocate to Washington, DC?

**Amaleka:** I relocated when my then fiancé, now husband, came to the DC area for a job opportunity. Trust me, that wasn't an easy thing!

**Michelle:** With a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice, a Masters in Public Administration and a job with the US Government – was writing just a hobby for you, or did you picture yourself making it a career as well?

**Amaleka:** Honestly, I've always wanted to be a writer but my parents were strict about education and what they thought were traditional careers – so I went the degree path. I started writing seriously while on maternity leave with my second child. I was suffering from insomnia and used to sit up nights writing. I started out writing my life story, but decided that it just wasn't that exciting, so I threw in a dash more drama and some fictional characters and boom! My first novel was born.

**Michelle:** Does your Criminal Justice background shine through in your writing?

**Amaleka:** I think it certainly does. A lot of writers who put detectives, federal agents, and even politicians in their books may not know the inside details that would make the characters seem more realistic. I think having that background and insight into the inside information, without putting out too much, I am able to make these types of characters very real. There is only but so much writer research can give you. Just like with living the street life, if you live it for real you can write about it more authentically than if you just hear about it. On the flip side of that, I've read stories where writers try

to describe the criminal justice system with details so fake it made me put the book down. I believe I have a slight advantage in that area as well.

**Michelle:** How did you catch the eye of Carl Weber and get signed to his Urban Books imprint?

**Amaleka:** That story is pretty much like every writer's fantasy. Lol. I was actually without a book deal at the time after being dropped from Melodrama Publishing. I was sitting home and I received a call from Ashley Coleman. After a few pleasantries were exchanged, she simply said, "Leka what are you working on?" I told her I had a book (*Hush*) completed and just sitting in my computer. She said, "Would you like a deal under a new Urban Streets imprint we are starting through Urban books?" I couldn't even get the answer out quickly enough. I was so dumbfounded and blessed at the same time that I almost choked. "Of course!" I hollered. The rest is history. (I'm smiling really big right now just thinking back on that time).

**Michelle:** Is that where your relationship with best-selling authors Ashley & JaQuavis began?

**Amaleka:** Ashley and JaQuavis dropped their first book, *Dirty Money*, the same year I dropped my first book. We were all hungry authors trying to make a name for ourselves and we all joined an online book group called "Coast2Coast Readers." It was there, through chat rooms, book discussions and messaging that I met Ashley and JaQuavis. We agreed to exchange books through the mail. I think by then they were on to their second book. *Diary of a Street Diva*. I sent them a signed copy of my first book and they sent me a signed copy of *Diary of a Street Diva*. They read my book and immediately sent me a message with their praises. I did the same. It was a friendship from then on. Now, almost eight years later, I consider them family.

**Michelle:** The duo has started their own publishing company, OWL aka Official Writers League, and you are the first author to be signed to it. First of all, Congratulations! Secondly, what do you hope to gain from this association?

**Amaleka:** Thank you! I am extremely blessed to be the first author signed. I am equally as blessed that Ashley and JaQuavis have never, ever, no matter how big they've grown, forgotten me as a peer that started out in this industry with them. I don't think I have met a more genuine, humble, down to earth couple in all of my travels through this business. I feel like being signed to OWL is my last chance at letting the world know about me and my talent as a writer. I want to represent the company's motto "The highest level of storytelling." I want to be a part of the history that Ashley and JaQuavis are about to make in the book industry. In the end, I've already gained two more members of my family from my association with Ashley and JaQuavis and all I hope to gain from being signed to OWL is literary history making.

**Michelle:** You will be releasing your novel, *Cold Summer*, in June 2013 with OWL. Please tell us what the book is about.

**Amaleka:** *Cold Summer* is about a female boss, Summer Banks who is forced to take the helm of several legal and illegal businesses after her husband, the powerful, Jesse Banks is gunned down on their wedding day. With no experience, Summer has to depend on her husband's crew to help her navigate the drug world. The crewmembers are not so thrilled to have a female as their boss, which leaves her trying to figure out who to trust in and out of her circle. Summer also has her own past demons she is running from—old debts she has yet to pay off that come back to haunt her in the deadliest way possible. *Cold Summer* is a street fiction novel with my signature thriller/suspense spin.

**Michelle:** Where did you get the idea for this story?

**Amaleka:** As always, my stories come straight from my vivid imagination. When I've watched stories about female drug bosses like Griselda Blanco, I've always imagined what it would be like to be them. I thought it would be thrilling to write about a female boss from an insider's perspective.

How these female bosses struggle to compete with men in a business that almost always turns deadly. How they have to fight harder for their male boss counterparts and their own workers to respect them just because they are women. How vulnerable and fearful they can be inside yet always needing to put up a hard front like they are fearless. How they long for real love but can't trust any man. How they want children or have children that they love, but can command the murder of their enemy's children without thinking twice.

*Cold Summer* is my imagination running wild on these very topics. I think it will have readers hooked! I am excited!

**Michelle:** Will you be re-releasing any of your titles under the OWL imprint, or will it be all new material with the new publishing company?

**Amaleka:** I don't think OWL will be acquiring my other titles. This new journey will be all fresh, new and exciting material. I can't wait to show the readers what Amaleka McCall and OWL has in store.

**Michelle:** Street/crime thrillers are your forte. Do you want to branch out into other genres, or will you continue to write what you know?

**Amaleka:** I love all genres and I can write in all genres. I am open to anything. I want to try my hand at young adult fiction and children's chapter books next. I have a 17 year

old and a 9 year old who are both dying for mommy to write a series using them as the main characters. Lol! As soon as I have time, I promised them I would. I never break promises to my children.

**Michelle:** What can we expect next from Amaleka McCall?

**Amaleka:** I am really focused on Cold Summer and making it the best that has ever come from me. After it is released, based on the reader feedback a determination will be made about whether or not to carry Summer into another book. Either way, three and four story ideas come to me a day so I think it will be a while before I run out of story ideas.

**Michelle:** What advice would you give to upcoming authors looking to write thrillers? In other words, what are your keys to success?

**Amaleka:** The keys to success for writers of any kind of books, is always – conflict, drama, resolution and change. Readers want to know what is happening to your character, see it unfold, know why it happened, and how the character got out of it and changed because of it. Character development is also a huge key. In my books, you always know where my characters came from and what they have been through. Whether I use flashbacks or exposition, I always reveal my character’s journey. This little trick works wonders on telling readers why a character might be motivated to do a certain thing. If a reader doesn’t know where your character has been it’s hard for readers to root for where the character is going in your story.

With thrillers, a little suspense will always keep the story moving forward. Not so much suspense that your reader is frustrated and skipping pages, but enough that the reader wants to keep reading. Suspense is not an easy writing tool to use, I’ve seen authors signed to major publishing companies fail at suspense.

I am an avid reader so I know how I feel when I read. I am constantly thinking about readers when I write because no matter what readers come first.

**Michelle:** Please tell us how we can find out more about you and/or follow you.

**Amaleka:** I am on Twitter @AMcBrathwaite and Facebook at Amaleka McCall Brathwaite. My website is AmalekaMcCall.com and my email is AmalekaGMcCall1@aol.com.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

**Michelle:** Thank you for welcoming us into your world.

## About The Author

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Amaleka McCall grew up fast watching the harsh streets destroy many of her family members and friends. After graduating high school with honors Amaleka planned to become a criminal defense attorney, but in 1995, while a sophomore at St. John's University, she became pregnant with her first child. Working a number of city jobs and struggling as a single mother, Amaleka went on to earn her baccalaureate degree in Criminal Justice from St. John's University and her Masters in Public Administration from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Aptly dubbed the "intelligent hoodlum" by family and friends, Amaleka was always able to use her imagination and her education to create wonderful stories.

In 2004, Amaleka moved from New York to the D.C. metro area. It was then that she decided to take her journals and her imagination and do something constructive with them. The result was the birth of her first novel *A Twisted Tale of Karma* (re-released as *Myra*, 2009.) With a love for thrillers and first hand knowledge of the criminal justice system and street life, she completed her subsequent urban mystery/crime thriller novels, *Hush*, *Price of Fame*, *Hard Candy* and *Hard Candy Part 2*.

Recently, Amaleka was invited to join the Official Writer's League, a new endeavor spearheaded by the dynamic writing duo Ashley and JaQuavis. This deal has been by far the most exciting and rewarding Amaleka has embarked on in years. With her writing career looking brighter than it ever has, Amaleka is looking forward to bringing you more authentic, well-written stories under OWL.

Amaleka currently resides in Northern Virginia with her husband and three children. She loves spending quality time with her family, writing, watching movies, and reading books. She is hard at work on her new release *Cold Summer* set to drop June 2013.



New York Times bestsellers Ashley and JaQuavis have added publishers to their many titles. Known for their business savvy, both authors have decided to venture into the publishing realm. With the nationwide success of their own novels, they are expanding and presenting high quality and thought provoking novels to the masses.

Established 2013, the company promises to offer "the highest level of storytelling" and it focuses on quality over quantity. All stories are handpicked by Ashley & JaQuavis themselves and they plan on raising the bar in AA literature.