December 18, 2007

Contact: Elaine Justice, 404-727-0643, elaine.justice@emory.edu
Contact: Lea McLees, 404-727-0211, lmclees@emory.edu

For Immediate Release

ALICE WALKER PLACES HER ARCHIVE AT EMORY

Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize-winner and internationally known Georgia-born novelist and poet, will place her archive with Emory University, Provost Earl Lewis announced today.

"The acquisition of the Alice Walker Archive is a major addition to Emory's collection," said Lewis. "Scholars and students from around the world will find in these papers Alice Walker: her commitment to social activism, literary genesis, personal growth and development, spirituality and self. We are delighted that she has entrusted us to share this aspect of her with the world."

Walker has written most frequently about the struggle for survival among Southern blacks, particularly black women. She also has given literary voice to the struggle for human rights, environmental issues, social movements and spirituality, as well as the quest for inner and world peace. Often considered controversial for her portrayals of racial, gender and sexual issues, Walker is widely recognized for her thoughtful weaving of realism with love for humanity and human potential.

"I chose Emory to receive my archive because I myself feel at ease and comfortable at Emory," said Walker. "I can imagine in years to come that my papers, my journals and letters will find themselves always in the company of people who care about many of the things I do: culture, community, spirituality, scholarship and the blessings of ancestors who want each of us to find joy and happiness in this life by doing the very best we can to be worthy of it."

Walker, who has visited Emory almost every other year since 1998 for readings or to interact with colleagues, said that when she first began considering where to place her archive, Emory was not on her list. "However, having visited several libraries at different universities, I realized the importance to me of a lively, diverse, committed-to-human-growth atmosphere, that when I visited Emory, I found."

The completeness of Walker's archive makes it truly exceptional, says Rudolph Byrd, professor of American studies and a founding member of the Alice Walker Literary Society, an international organization of Walker scholars and enthusiasts.

"The archive contains journals that she has been keeping since she was 14 or 15 years old," said Byrd, who also is a friend and colleague of Walker's. "There also are drafts of many of her early works of fiction, as well as the back and forth between Alice and the editors for each book."
"Her papers give you a sense of the process for creating fiction, and for creating poetry," Byrd said. "Everything that she's ever written, she has a record of – it's very exciting."

"The Alice Walker Archive will provide a major bridge in the university's collections on African-American literature, history and culture," said Steve Enniss, director of Emory's Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library. "Walker is one of Georgia's most beloved writers, and it is particularly gratifying that she has chosen to return her archive to the state where she was born, to the city where she attended college as an undergraduate, and to Emory which has, in the intervening years, become a major research center in literary studies."

Emory's African-American literary collections include significant collections related to the Harlem Renaissance novelists and poets Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson, and the papers of the Georgia-born novelist John Oliver Killens. The Camille Billops and James V. Hatch collection of African-American performing arts materials includes hundreds of playscripts including works by Zora Neale Hurston and August Wilson, among many others.

Walker's literary archive at Emory joins a world-class repository of some of the finest collections of modern literature; 20th century American, British and Irish poetry; and an extensive collection on the American South. The collection includes the recently acquired archive of Salman Rushdie, Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney's papers, British poet laureate Ted Hughes' papers, and the 75,000-volume Danowski Poetry Library.

In 1983 Walker became the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, which honored her novel "The Color Purple." The book depicts oppressive early 20th century life in the South for a young African-American woman named Celie.

Other honors bestowed upon Walker and her writing include the 1983 National Book Award, also for "The Color Purple"; the 1973 Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts for "Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems"; the Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters; and Radcliffe Institute, Merrill and Guggenheim fellowships.

Faculty, students and visiting scholars from around the world who study Walker's archives at Emory will be within a 90-minute drive to her home in Eatonton, Ga., and within 20 minutes of Spelman College, which she attended for two years.

###

The Emory University Libraries in Atlanta and Oxford, Ga., are dedicated to fostering courageous inquiry among students and scholars at Emory University and around the world. The nine libraries' holdings include more than 3.1 million print and electronic volumes, 40,000-plus electronic journals, and internationally renowned special collections. Visit the libraries online (www.library.emory.edu/).

Emory University (www.emory.edu) is one of the nation's leading private research universities and a member of the Association of American Universities. Known for its demanding academics, outstanding undergraduate college of arts and sciences, highly ranked professional schools and state-of-the-art research facilities, Emory is ranked as one of the country's top 20 national universities by U.S. News & World Report. In addition to its nine schools, the university encompasses The Carter Center, Yerkes National Primate Research Center and Emory Healthcare, the state's largest and most comprehensive health care system.