

A photograph of Barack Obama, smiling and wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and grey tie. He is standing in front of the California State Capitol dome, which is visible in the background under a clear blue sky. The text 'THE DIASPORA' is overlaid on the top of the image in a large, white, serif font with a maroon outline.

THE DIASPORA

Department of African American Studies • University of California, Berkeley

FALL 2008

WINTER 2009

Welcome to the Faculty:
Professor Na'ilah Suad Nasir
Professor Janelle T. Scott

Visiting Scholar:
Professor Joanne Braxton

Graduate Student Travels:
From Johannesburg to Beijing

An Introduction to Hopology



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THE DIASPORA

The *Diaspora* is the newsletter of the Department of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Contributions are welcomed from UC Berkeley's faculty and students, as well as from guest columnists and scholars. Articles may be edited for length, clarity, and style.

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Department of African American Studies University of California, Berkeley

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Charles P. Henry

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THE DIASPORA

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Words from the Chair

By Charles P. Henry

My initial responsibility as chair is to thank Professor Ula Taylor for her stewardship of the department during the 2007-2008 academic year. Under Professor Taylor's leadership, the department underwent major changes and endured many challenges. We welcomed Vernessa Parker as our Management Services Officer, and celebrated Toni Whittle-Ciprazo's new employment opportunity with the Department of Art Practice. We welcomed Professor Darieck Scott to our faculty, filling a void in our department's literature curriculum. We also endured the loss of Professor VèVè Clark, and paid tribute to her life, legacy, and many intellectual contributions at a campus wide celebration in December 2007. During the past year, the department hosted several events that furthered our presence and good reputation on the campus and in the greater local community. This included the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Department's Ph.D. program. As part of Black History Month, we hosted a daylong event and a month long photo display highlighting the contributions of the Black Panther Party. In spring 2008, we hosted a campus-wide program on the significance of Barack Obama's presidential bid and hosted a conference (under the leadership of Professor G. Ugo Nwokeji) marking the bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade. Over the last year, the department also graduated five new Ph.D.s who have all advanced our outstanding track record by securing assistant professorships and postdoctoral fellowships at colleges and universities around the nation.

Concluding a successful search process that was started last year, the department enthusiastically welcomes Professors Janelle T. Scott (Ph.D., Education, UCLA) and Na'ilah Suad Nasir (Ph.D., Education, UCLA) to the faculty. In partnership with the Graduate School of Education and the Berkeley Diversity Research Initiative (BDRI), we were able to recruit these two talented and engaged scholars to the campus. Professor Nasir joins us from the School of Education at Stanford University and Professor Scott comes to Berkeley from the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at NYU. We are excited to welcome these two outstanding scholars to our intellectual community and look forward to the many contributions they will make to the department and to the university.

This semester, we also welcome our twelfth cohort of graduate students who commence their studies leading to the Ph.D. in African American Studies. We welcome Christopher Ferguson, who completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Southern California; Bryan Mason, who most recently studied at the Graduate Theological Union; Shaun Ossei-Owusu, who completed graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania before coming to Berkeley; and Ianna Owen, who most recently studied at Hunter College of the City University of New York. These young scholars will certainly add to the outstanding work done by our graduate students and we look forward to their work in the Department and in the field in the coming years.

In October, the department's faculty, staff, and student representatives met at the Clark Kerr Campus for a daylong retreat. It was the first such retreat in three and a half years. The department's external review (completed in 2006) gave us a working document to discuss and consider in planning for the future. The morning was spent discussing the graduate program and the graduate and undergraduate curriculum. In the afternoon, participants discussed future faculty and staff positions, a possible minor in African Studies, and fundraising.

A number of items were referred to the curriculum committee for further development. Unfortunately, the current state budget makes faculty and staff additions unlikely in the near future. However, given that several faculty will be eligible for retirement in the next five years, intermediate and long-range planning remains essential. The current state of the campus budget also makes fundraising critical. Opportunities for funding chairs and fellowships were discussed. Professor Taylor also announced that the new travel research fellowship honoring Professor VèVè Clark has been established and is accepting additional contributions.

The retreat also offered an opportunity for faculty to talk about their current and future research. This discussion made clear that our faculty is engaged in cutting-edge, engaged research that should help shape the department and the field of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies for years to come.

Charles P. Henry is Department Chair and Professor of African American Studies.

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM, STEREOTYPES, AND THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

By Charles P. Henry

A recent story about Barack Obama in my alumni magazine caught my attention. The author was a conservative reporter for the *New York Times* who had been assigned to interview Obama. It was April 2007 and after a long day in the Senate the telephone interview was not going well. The interviewer was asking about foreign aid and Africa and Obama was sounding cranky and tired. Then the interviewer asked Obama if he had read Reinhold Niebuhr and if he had, what he thought about Niebuhr's work. According to the author, Obama immediately became enthusiastic. He said that Niebuhr was one of his favorite authors and proceeded to offer a fifteen-minute summary of Niebuhr's complex thought. Niebuhr was probably the most influential American theologian of the Twentieth Century and a major influence on Martin Luther King, Jr. However, despite all the talk about the importance of religion in U.S. elections, no one discusses Niebuhr. The author concluded that it might be nice to have a "thinking president" but ultimately Obama's intellectualism could hurt him in the election.

Of course, I would be reflecting my own bias if I said that using the term "professorial" to attack someone seemed absolutely wrong to me! However, I do think the increasing anti-intellectualism in American politics has major negative consequences for all of us. Both political parties, aided and abetted by the media, attempted to shape our images of the candidates. Obama is an elite professor type while John McCain is a war hero. Joe Biden is the Washington insider

while Sarah Palin is a hockey Mom with "small town" values. Former Secretary of Education, Bill Bennett, said Palin's lack of academic heft was not important. Hillary Clinton appealed to "blue-collar" and "hard-working" Americans. All of these labels contain explicit and implicit messages. What is interesting in Obama's case is that the notion of an "over-educated Black" runs counter to stereotypes and creates some confusion. The same piece that talks about Obama's views on Niebuhr and asks if he is too "UC" (University of Chicago) also quotes Chris Matthews' asking whether Obama is too "Southside" (Chicago's Harlem). The question demonstrates an unwillingness to see any diversity or class differences in the Southside's 800,000 Black residents.

Richard Hoffstader, in his classic work *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), argued that such anti-intellectualism is not new and runs in cycles. We seem to like John F. Kennedy's elite style but Jimmy Carter's wonkishness turned us off even though we are beginning to talk about some of his energy proposals today. Sure Ronald Reagan was more likeable than Carter but Hubert Humphrey was more likeable than Richard Nixon and lost. Both George W. Bush and Al Gore downplayed their elite educations and voters preferred Bush's "C" average to Gore's in-depth speeches. Bill Clinton emphasized his "bubba" image



and seldom mentioned his Rhodes scholarship. John Kerry was labeled a "metro-sexual" even though he and Bush were members of the same exclusive Yale club. What does it mean when a White voter says they are not "comfortable" with Obama?

Hoffstader defines intellect as the critical, creative, and contemplative side of the mind. Intelligence, on the other hand, is an excellence of mind within a fairly narrow, immediate and predictable range. We are going to need someone with great intellect to lead us out of our current problems as a nation. Let's hope that the "othering" that is currently going on does not exclude those with "intellect."

New Faculty Profile:

Professor Na'ilah Suad Nasir

By Jasminde Kaur

The handshake. Our conversation. A hug. An afternoon chat with Professor Na'ilah Suad Nasir was indeed an effortless experience; an experience I am sure most people will encounter and agree with upon meeting her. Nasir joins the Department of African American Studies this semester as Associate Professor and holds a joint appointment in the Graduate School of Education. She taught in the School of Education at Stanford University for the past eight years, where she was the recipient of Stanford's coveted St. Clair Drake Teaching Award (2007).

Nasir shared with me that Berkeley seemed like a good fit for many reasons. The department's interdisciplinary approach to teaching and research resonates well with her. This reason is coupled with a new cross-campus initiative called the Berkeley Diversity Research Initiative (BDRI) of which Professor Nasir is part. BDRI focuses on research related to racial and ethnic diversity in the University and works to generate prescriptions for changes in policy and practice that both draw and build upon the strengths of our diverse intellectual community.

In addition to being a good intellectual fit, there were several other factors that drove Professor Nasir's decision to move to Berkeley. A proud Berkeley alum, Nasir received her undergraduate degree in Psychology and Social Welfare (with a minor in African American Studies) from UC Berkeley. From there, she went on to UCLA where she earned her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Psychological Studies in Education (with a focus

on Human Development). Having once been a student here, the move brings her back to a campus with which she is all too familiar. The East Bay has also been home to her and her family for the last several years and her move to Berkeley brings her professional and personal lives closer together.

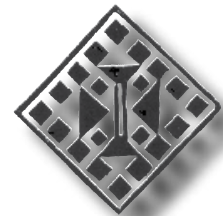


Professor Nasir's research interests focus on the "intertwining of social and cultural contexts (cultural practices, institutions, communities, and societies) and the learning and educational trajectories of individuals, especially in connection with inequity in educational outcomes." In addition to her ongoing research projects, Nasir will be teaching graduate and undergraduate courses that will be cross-listed with the Graduate School of Education and the Department of African American Studies. When asked about her teaching philosophy, Nasir indicated a strong preference for interactive learning settings where she functions as a facilitator

rather than merely a bearer of information. For her, learning for is a mutually engaging process. Reflected in our discussion is a clear student-centered approach to teaching and learning. This approach extends to her relationships with her students. She remains committed to the students she was mentoring at Stanford and is working with them to ensure her move is as undistruptive to their process as possible.

Her intellectual focuses and teaching beliefs will nicely complement our department. I want to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to Professor Nasir in her transition to Berkeley and hope that everyone else does the same.

Jasminde Kaur is graduate student in the Department of African American Studies.



New Faculty Profile:

Professor Janelle T. Scott

By Petra Raquel Rivera



The Department of African American Studies is pleased to welcome Professor Janelle T. Scott to the faculty. Scott holds a joint appointment in the Department of African American Studies and in the Graduate School of Education. She joins us from her most recent appointment at New York University where she was Assistant Professor of Education in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development for the past six years.

Scott is a native of Southern California. A Berkeley alum, she majored in political science and took several classes in African American Studies as part of her undergraduate degree program. In particular, Scott was inspired by many courses taught by Professor Charles Henry that dealt with policy issues in the African American community, including education. After college, Scott worked as an elementary school teacher in Oakland for four years.

Scott received her Ph.D. from the School of Education at UCLA. Her dissertation research dealt with the racial politics of public K-12 education. Specifically, Scott looked at politics surrounding school choice policies, especially charter schools. Her project examined issues surrounding the privatization and management of urban public schools by private corporations, and the negotiation of power between local communities and these corporations.

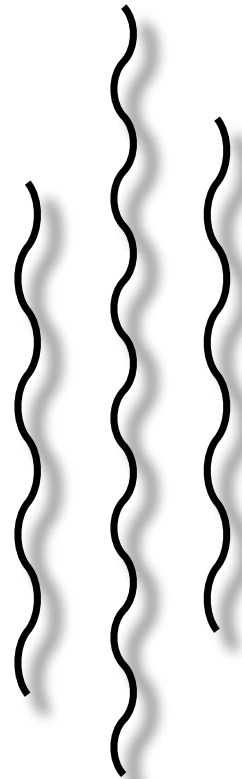
Her current project continues her earlier exploration of the impact and politics of privatization and public schools. Scott is now investigating the ways in which philanthropy is shaping school choice initiatives. She is especially concerned with venture philanthropy, which is a more aggressive and targeted philanthropy that provides funding for specific projects at urban schools. She is interested in the racial dynamics of these projects; especially because most of the philanthropists are white males and the urban schools to which they donate are populated with predominantly students of color.

Professor Scott's joint position in the Graduate School of Education and the Department of African American Studies is part of the Berkeley Diversity Research Initiative (BDRI). BDRI is a partnership between the Graduate School of Education, the School of Law, and the Departments of Ethnic Studies and African American Studies. Professor Scott was especially attracted to the opportunities to collaborate with faculty and students from disciplines across the university. She has offices in both Tolman Hall and Barrows Hall, and will teach undergraduate

and graduate courses beginning in the spring semester of 2010. The courses she will teach include an undergraduate survey class on African American Education, which she plans to co-teach with Professor Na'ilah Suad Nasir.

We are very excited to welcome Professor Scott to the department. We have no doubt that she will make marked contributions to the scholarship and life of the department and the university.

Petra Raquel Rivera is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of African American Studies.



Joanne M. Braxton

Visiting Distinguished Research Scholar

By Ronald Williams II

The Department of African American Studies is pleased to welcome Professor Joanne M. Braxton as Visiting Distinguished Research Scholar for the 2008-2009 academic year. A renowned poet, author, teacher, and researcher, Professor Braxton is visiting Berkeley from the College of William and Mary where she teaches Black Studies and English as the Frances L. and Edwin L. Cummings Professor of the Humanities.

A native of Lakeland, Maryland, Braxton is an American Studies Scholar by training and in practice. She took her undergraduate degree from Sarah Lawrence College and continued her studies at Yale University, where she completed the Ph.D. in American Studies in 1984. At Yale, she worked closely with noted scholars Charles Davis and John Blassingame, completing a dissertation focused on Black Women's autobiography. Braxton has continued her work in and on Black Women's autobiography throughout her career.

Professor Braxton is author and editor of several books and collections of essays. Some of her works include a volume of poetry *Sometimes I Think of Maryland* (1977); *Black Women Writing Autobiography* (1989); *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* (co-edited with Andrée-Nicola McLaughlin) (1990); and *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993). Braxton still writes and publishes poetry, and currently serves as editor of the *Women Writers of Color Biography Series* (Praeger Publishing Group). This ongoing multivolume series includes



biographies of noted women writers such as poets June Jordan and Lucille Clifton and novelist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston.

Reflecting her longstanding love for teaching, Braxton has been on the faculty at the College of William and Mary since 1980 and has held the Cummings Chair for the past twenty years. She has taught at Yale University and the University of Michigan, and has worked as a visiting professor, scholar, and researcher at several other colleges and universities, including the University of Pittsburgh, Harvard University and Wellesley College and Muenster University in Germany.

Professor Braxton's pioneering intellectual contributions have not gone unnoticed. Her honors include recognition as a Danforth Fellow, a Mellon Fellow, a member of the Michigan Society of Fellows and a Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies. She has taught doctoral seminars in Spain and Italy as a Senior Fulbright Professor. A recipient of the Alumni Achievement Award from Sarah Lawrence College,

Professor Braxton delivered the commencement address at her alma mater in 1999, an institution to which she has also been of service as a member of its Board of Trustees.

While at Berkeley, Braxton will continue work on several projects. As a curator of American folk art, Professor Braxton continues her work in establishing the Anderson Johnson Gallery in Newport News, Virginia. Her work on this project has proven instrumental in the preservation and restoration of Johnson's work for public display and appreciation. A street preacher in his early life, Johnson was paralyzed in an accident in 1985. He spent the duration of his life painting murals in his home, which he converted into a church called Faith Mission. These murals were discovered and preserved when his home was slated for demolition in 1993. Professor Braxton's work with this project (in partnership with the City of Newport News) has produced the first permanent gallery devoted to a single folk artist anywhere in the United States. She is also curating a traveling exhibition of the sculpture of Black woman artist Barbara Chase-Riboud for the Muscarelle Museum at the College of William and Mary.

We are excited to have Professor Braxton as part of our intellectual community. A lifelong learner in every sense of the term, Professor Braxton is auditing classes at the Graduate Theological Union while continuing her research and writing. She can be reached by email at jbraxton@berkeley.edu.

Ronald Williams II is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of African American Studies.

Prison Outreach Project: Volunteers Needed

By Lindsey Herbert

The Prison Outreach Project has been a huge success for the past five years because of the work of student volunteers. We have maintained a program that allows us to mail educational material to inmates to assist them with their personal goals while incarcerated. Some of these services include sending selected readings around the topics that are of interest to inmates; providing them with books that have been donated; responding to and giving feedback on writing; and researching topics that may be of interest personally, academically, and legally.

Students and staff in the Department of African American Studies have also participated in numerous events at prison sites, where both graduate and undergraduate students were able to contribute as guest speakers or discussion participants. These programs have been extremely successful in the past and mutually beneficial as well.

We are currently working to maintain a pen pal program that keeps prisoners in touch with students and allows them to engage in educational conversations and dialogues around issues of both historical and contemporary significance. This project is more of a challenge due to students matriculating and leaving the area. The Prison Outreach Project is in need of volunteers. For more information contact us by email at prisonoutreach@yahoo.com or by phone at (510) 642-3419.

Lindsey Herbert is the Student Affairs Officer in the Department of African American Studies.

Congratulations to

**Our Graduate Students
Who Received the Master of Arts Degree in
African American Studies in Spring 2008**



J. Finley



Malika Crutchfield



Michael McGee, Jr.



Jasmine Johnson



Gabrielle Williams



Keep It Movin': Reflections from a Newly Minted Ph.D.

By Libby Lewis

Writing a dissertation is more than a notion. I filed my dissertation this past summer. As I transition into a postdoctoral fellowship at the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, I want to share some of the highlights of this past summer and what I mean when I say, “keep it movin’.”

My dissertation has undergone a few title changes over the years. The title that I finally decided on, *The Monolithic Media Myth: Struggle Over Representations of ‘Blackness’ in Television News*, caught the attention of organizers of a diversity and leadership conference at the United Nations. As a result, I was invited to speak at the conference as part of a panel discussion called “Global Diversity and Gender in the Media.” While I was honored to be invited to speak at the U.N., I was hesitant in accepting the invitation while dealing with the challenges of finishing a dissertation. I was also preparing for one of the largest journalism conferences in the U.S. where then-Senator Barack Obama was scheduled to speak. Like the conference at the U.N., it was an opportunity to find new ways of engaging some of the issues and concepts offered in the dissertation. In addition, I wanted to better understand how people outside the academy connected with my project. Speaking at the U.N. turned out to be more helpful than I had imagined. I received extensive feedback from conference attendees and U.N. representatives. It was an opportunity to gain a better understanding of African Diaspora journalism praxis and the critical tools that African Diaspora Studies offers in discussions and debates around how Black journalists in

the news industry are engaging the African Diaspora.

Speaking at the U.N. opened doors to a wide range of networking opportunities. I was also invited to speak about the dissertation in Brussels because some of the issues raised in the dissertation resonated with the Black women visiting from Europe, organizing around issues of race, gender, sexuality, and power. Who knew?

Soon after the conference at the U.N., I attended the Unity Journalists of Color conference in Chicago where Obama spoke for the first time after what CNN coined his “information gathering” trip overseas. Security and secret service agents had noticeably increased in number and quality of service since Summer 2007, when I met Senator Obama. Back then, I was able to walk up to him without much difficulty. The only visible security measure was checking the bags of conference attendees and media coming to hear him speak. While I was happy to get my copy of his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, signed by him in 2007, I was disturbed by the ease with which I was able to walk up to him and make the request. This time was noticeably different (bags were checked, metal detectors were used, and the rules of audience decorum and participation during the question/answer segment were more stringent). The extra security at least signified a shift in understanding of what was at stake.

During this year’s journalism conference, Obama answered questions from journalists in various news organizations. The questions got heated fairly quickly when he was asked to explain why he had visited Christian sites of worship

while avoiding Mosques. He offered a list of mosques he had visited and Muslim Americans with whom he had been working. Obama maintained a calm demeanor as he answered each question with a detail that most journalists were not accustomed to after eight years of George W. Bush. We were witnessing Obama deconstructing assumptions about him based on race and journalists’ expectations of politicians as evasive as Bush. It was another learning moment in terms of expanding on some of the issues of power, branding, marketing, and placing “Blackness” in television news raised in my dissertation.

The learning moments outside academe and the classroom may be as rewarding if not more rewarding for a dissertation. I encourage graduate students to present at conferences, give talks, say yes to panel discussions, and publish whenever possible; in other words, face whatever challenges come your way and keep it movin’. Get to know Graduate Student Policy on any and all matters concerning you and your rights as a graduate student. Most importantly, take time to get to know the professors you are considering inviting onto your dissertation committee. Choose committee members who will support your project and make sure that everyone has a clear understanding of what support means. Support may come in a variety of ways including: writing letters of recommendation, providing meaningful feedback on your work, making themselves available outside office hours, making extensive detailed comments that encourage thinking and rethinking your theoretical framework, concepts, and

arguments. Supportive committee members also encourage publishing - guiding you to the appropriate academic journals. They keep you informed of academic conferences that are closely related to your work, and throughout your Ph.D. program, committee members introduce you to faculty interested in your work, which may lead to future job and postdoctoral fellowship opportunities.

Now that I literally have to keep it movin' (to Los Angeles), I am overwhelmed by the amount of support from staff, administrators, undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and leadership here at Berkeley. I consider myself lucky that everyone in my cohort was so encouraging during the tougher times of the Ph.D. program. I am going to miss being able to meet and greet everyone at Percy Hintzen's infamous pool parties. I am also very thankful for my dissertation committee: Herman Gray, Paola Bacchetta, Robert Allen, and Trinh Minh-ha.

Our department graduates some of the nation's most innovative scholars, and I am excited about the work of graduate students in our program. I am proud to say that I have earned all of my degrees from Berkeley. For graduate students feeling overwhelmed, it is okay to take a step back and unplug - I certainly did - the Bay Area has a lot to offer. Connect with communities outside the Berkeley campus that are helpful to your projects, and soon you too will have a better appreciation of Maya Angelou's poem, "And Still I Rise."

Libby Lewis is a recent graduate of the Ph.D. program in African American Studies. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Ralph Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA.

Libby Lewis, Ph.D.

Ph.D., African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley

M.A., African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley

M.A., Journalism, University of California, Berkeley

B.A., African American Studies, University of California, Berkeley



Libby Lewis' dissertation, *The Monolithic Media Myth: Struggle Over Representations of 'Blackness' in Television News*, examines the ways in which Black television news anchors and reporters meet the unique challenges of their jobs. Through her work and research, Libby has received speaking invitations from numerous organizations including the United Nations. When asked to offer some words in praise of Libby and her work, Professor Paola Bacchetta said, "Libby worked very hard and diligently to produce her highly interdisciplinary dissertation, with great results. She gathered together an impressive,

original set of primary sources, which included written documentation, data from fieldwork, and extensive interviews." Bacchetta further praises Libby's work for its "use of a wide range of pertinent theoretical materials on gender, sexuality, race, visibility/invisibility, the body, media, etc....a wonderful combined creative-intellectual endeavor."

Offering further praise of Libby's work is Professor Trinh Minh-ha. She writes, "Libby is certainly one of the most dedicated students I've had at Berkeley...Libby repeatedly struck me as being unusually receptive in her absorption of complex theoretical issues. Time and time again, she surprised me with her fresh input and her huge, unprejudiced curiosity - qualities that I rarely find even among my best students." Adds Professor Robert Allen, "Libby Lewis chose to take a critical look at the construction of 'blackness' in the newsroom...she produced a ground-breaking study of how a discourse of 'professionalism' is deployed to produce an acceptable 'blackness' in the newsroom and on the screen."

Libby Lewis began her journey at Berkeley twenty-two years ago when she enrolled as a first-time freshman. Originally from Los Angeles, California, Libby took her undergraduate degree in African American Studies in 1990. After completing her undergraduate studies, Libby returned to Los Angeles where she worked as a newsroom intern for KPBS TV. After her brief stint with KPBS, Libby returned to Berkeley to continue her studies in the Graduate School of Journalism where she was awarded the M.A. in journalism in 1995. Libby went on to work in various capacities in the television news industry. These included working as an evening anchor and midday reporter for the CBS affiliate in Humboldt County, California, and as a morning and noon anchor for the NBC affiliate in northern Mississippi. In 1999, Libby returned to Berkeley to begin graduate work in African American Studies. She earned the M.A. in 2003 and completed the requirements for the Ph.D. in 2008.

Meet the 2008–2009 Graduate Students

Each year the Department of African American Studies welcomes a new cohort of graduate students to begin their studies leading to the Ph.D. in African American Studies. The individuals featured in these pages certainly represent the best and brightest of future scholarship in the field. We welcome them to the Department and to graduate life at Berkeley. We are excited about their work and look forward to their emergence as preeminent scholars.

Each student in the fall 2008 cohort brings a unique background, set of motivations, and research interests to their graduate studies. They certainly further our department's reputation as a center for diverse and engaged scholarship. A few weeks ago, we asked them to provide us with some information on their backgrounds, motivation for pursuing the Ph.D. in African American Studies at Berkeley, and to give us an idea of some of their hobbies and interests beyond their intellectual pursuits. This is what they shared with us.



Christopher Ferguson

B.A., African American Studies, University of Southern California

My name is Christopher Ferguson, and I'm originally from Boston. I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Southern California where I majored in African American Studies. My research interests include black masculinity, hip-hop, and the repertoire of blackness styled therein. I am also drawn to notions of black authenticity, namely its production and (mis) appropriation by both peoples of color and non-Blacks. While I am still new to the area and have plenty of exploring to do, my favorite leisure activities include sporting events, exercising, and enjoying the outdoors. I chose African Diaspora Studies at Berkeley because of its esteemed faculty and its emphasis on interdisciplinarity.

Shaun Ossei-Owusu

B.S., Communication Studies, Northwestern University
M.L.A., Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania

I was born and raised in the South Bronx, New York to Ghanaian immigrants. In 2007, I completed my undergraduate education at Northwestern University. Subsequently, I attended the University of Pennsylvania and received a master's degree in Africana Studies with an emphasis in Urban Studies. While at Penn, I taught at a charter school in North Philadelphia. Having lived in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and now the Bay Area, I have become fascinated with the relationship between race and space—particularly urbanity, urban sensibilities, and the host of issues faced by communities in urban centers. Additionally, I am interested in how the law and legal institutions impact racialized communities and immigrants in urban areas. Lastly, I am interested looking at the ways in which popular culture (specifically sports, hip-hop, and urban fiction) provides unique insight into race, class, and gender relations and disparities in urban America and globally. I came to Berkeley because I think it is the best place to draw the conceptual connections between these interests while conducting interdisciplinary, ethnographic fieldwork. Moreover, I find Berkeley to be replete with the faculty, academic resources, and intellectual vibrancy necessary for me to become a sound scholar. For fun, I enjoy traveling domestically to visit friends and family, exploring cities (which ever one I'm in at the time), writing, playing basketball, listening to music and watching collegiate and professional sports.



of African American Studies



Ianna Hawkins Owen

B.A., Africana Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York

I was born to artists in New York City and grew up in Tannersville, Pennsylvania. I earned my undergraduate degree in Africana Studies at Hunter College of the City University of New York, where I graduated as valedictorian. During my time at Hunter I became radicalized by my experiences in All City (a Freirean popular education activism group), as well as by experiences in Anarchist People of Color-NYC and Canterbury-NYU. Later I worked for the Safe OUTside the System Collective of the Audre Lorde Project in Brooklyn to end police and hate violence against queer and transgendered people of color without relying on state power. In addition, I have been active in the arts by organizing poetry readings called “We’re Gonna Make It” to fundraise for a cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis. I am honored and blessed to have been afforded the opportunity to study in the Department of African American Studies at Berkeley. I am excitedly exploring my interests in the Black Diaspora in the Celtic world and in the areas of folklore, gender, and sexuality studies. I also have a love for zombies, vegetarianism, driving with my best friend through Pennsylvania back roads, laughing with my parents, and hanging out with my younger brother in Philly.

Bryan K. Mason

B.A., Information Systems, Drexel University

M.A., Systematic Philosophical Theology, Graduate Theological Union

I am originally from Philadelphia, home to such great inventions as the U.S. Constitution, the Cheesesteak (not Cheez Whiz), and the Philly left hook (Joe Frazier). Not to mention some of the best music in the world (Patti LaBelle, Boyz II Men, The Roots, etc.). About four years ago, my wife and I came to the Bay Area from Washington, D.C. to pursue our careers; she as a lawyer, and me as an academic. In that short time, I have earned a master’s degree, been introduced to the word “hecka” (though I still refuse to use it), and made a lot of good friends. Best of all, I find myself pursuing a doctorate in African American Studies at Berkeley.

I am a student of Hopology, a little known form of anthropology that focuses on the study of human combative behavior across various cultures. It is an interdisciplinary study that can combine aspects of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and even physiology and kinesiology. I have come to study in the Department of African American Studies because my personal interests center on the too often ignored combative traditions of the African Diaspora. I am hopeful that my time at Berkeley will be the beginning of a scholarly conversation on these cultural arts as well as an understanding of how the connections between them translate into connections between the Diasporic cultures that created them.

In addition to Hopology, I am interested in the Harlem Renaissance, issues of Double-Consciousness in contemporary African American life, and Diasporic cultures in general. When I am not in school, I study martial arts (both physically and academically), watch movies, listen to music (Jazz, Blues, R&B and Hip-Hop), and I read. I will read anything from *Don Quixote* or *Paradise Lost* to a *Star Wars* novel. I am also a big Shakespeare fan. Huge. Like I would get the throwback.

So that’s me in brief. I haven’t been here long, but I’m inspired by the atmosphere of the department, the broad range of knowledge and projects, and most of all, the close-knit feeling that permeates the sixth floor of Barrows Hall. I’m as excited about the friends that I might make among students and professors as I am about the knowledge I will gain and the work that I’ll do. I have a long road ahead, which means I’ll be around for a while. So if you see me, say hi. I’ll do the same. Peace.



eBlack Studies: the Next Movement in Black Studies

By Carmen Mitchell

EBlack Studies describes the ongoing application of current digital information technology towards the production, dissemination, and collection of historical knowledge critical to the field of Black Studies. Thus, eBlack Studies, as it is now understood, is widely recognized to be at the forefront of research in the field. With this in mind, a group of Black Studies scholars from across the country first gathered together at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in July 2008 for the inaugural eBlack Studies workshop.

The scholars gathered at this meeting represent various subfields in Black Studies and emerging issues of digital technology. We work in a number of related fields of study including Afro-Latin America and Latino(a) Studies, Archaeology, Black Atlantic Studies, Black Queer Studies, Comparative Literature, Cultural Studies, Ethnomusicology, Psychology, Public Health, and Women and Gender Studies. As we work to influence the future of the field through eBlack Studies, we acknowledge and celebrate our roots in the history and traditions of Black Studies, while enthusiastically embracing digital culture as it critically interrogates, interprets, defines, and documents the experiences of people of African descent.

eBlack Studies is grounded in the everyday experiences of living Black communities, and is committed to increasing access to knowledge about the histories, experiences, and perspectives of Africans and African descendents throughout the world. Moreover, eBlack Studies is based on a model of engaged community advocacy. As such, eBlack Studies hopes to

contribute to creating a better world for all peoples. eBlack Studies will work to eliminate the vast digital divide across and transform the technological systems that structure Black life, as well as the patterns of political, economic, and cultural power relations that influence technology design, production, and use.

We see eBlack Studies as a movement which is integral to the future of the discipline of Black Studies, and that this future will include utilizing, innovating, interrogating, critiquing, and, where needed, resisting digital tools and spaces. We believe that Library and Information Sciences will also prove central to the development of eBlack Studies. Not only will eBlack Studies be at the vanguard for work in Black Studies, it will also contribute to its future through the development of digital archives in documenting the history of Black Studies and Black experiences. We believe that eBlack Studies and Black Studies in general must reaffirm scholarly commitment to the wide-ranging diversity in Black experiences, as eBlack Studies holds promise to innovate and develop new directions for the field. The innovations we collectively achieve will offer unique possibilities for other disciplines as well.

We are witnessing an information revolution — a revolution that is leading global transformation. People of African descent have always played pivotal roles in the history of technological revolutions — sometimes as innovators and inventors, more frequently as laborers — and whose labor permitted the wealth that spurred further technological advances. The social consequences of today's information revolution include suffering and



economic insecurity for African Americans and others in the African Diaspora, and also dislocations among others in society. Our communities have been digitally divided but we are dedicating ourselves to serve as a bridge over the river of that divide. Our social values are cyberdemocracy, collective intelligence, and information freedom. We embrace the information revolution and dedicate our scholarship to academic excellence and social responsibility. We welcome others to join us in this endeavor.

This workshop was sponsored by the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) with funding from the Ford Foundation. It resulted from discussions at a series of workshops during the conferences of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and NCBS, and the Ford Foundation. The workshop was hosted by the Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Carmen Mitchell is a graduate student in the Department of African American Studies.

XIAO KAI-FEI'S RETURN

By Robeson Taj Frazier

In autumn 2007, I spent six weeks in China completing research for my dissertation. I traveled to Beijing and Hong Kong to analyze Chinese newspapers, government documents, and the archives of several American expatriates who resided in China between the years of 1955 and 1976. My project examines several African American activist intellectuals' relationships with the Chinese government and their interest and study of Maoist thought during the height of the Cold War. It considers how people who were not diplomats, foreign correspondents, or government officials engaged and translated the politics of the Cold War to local, national, and international populations and utilized China and Chinese communism as a site to flesh out alternative models of development, community relations and affairs, and radical politics. They recognized China's emergence as an imminent global force and employed China's focus on the Third World to challenge racial capitalism and U.S. imperialism.

This was a very exciting trip. Ten years earlier, I lived in Beijing for five months as an exchange student. Housed in the home of a Chinese family, I was immersed into Chinese society and culture. My host father was a scientist and my host mother worked as a technical engineer. My host brother, a second year student at a university on the city's exterior, was gone during the week (which allowed me sleep in his bed and take over his room) and returned home on the weekends. The family gave me the Chinese name, Xiao Kai-Fei, which I still use today. In China, the family name is always stated first, thus Xiao

meant I was now part of their family. My host brother's name was Xiao Kai-Da, so the family thought it would be funny to name me Kai-Fei. You see, in Mandarin, Kai-Fei means, "to fly a plane." They figured that since I traveled to Beijing on a plane, this name would be both ironic and comical. What made this even more humorous was that, the name, depending on how you pronounce it, could mean something completely different—a fact I soon learned. When I would tell people my name, they would instantly laugh, something that I felt broke the ice and opened up the space for more dialogue. But I soon learned that the joke was on me! When I said the name, my East Coast American accent made it sound more like, "Syau Café" than "Xiao Kai-Fei." In Mandarin, "Syau Café" translates into "Small Coffee." For most of the Chinese people that I met, it was therefore fantastic and a bit satirical that the first Black person they ever met, who, I might add, happened to be over six feet tall (a grand height to some), was named, "Small Coffee."

My five months in Beijing during the autumn and winter of 1997 are some of my fondest memories. My bicycle and I were inseparable. I rode to all sections of the city, immersed in bike-to-bike traffic, figuring out how to weave my way through narrow and wide streets, speeding cars, and dusty roads. I played basketball throughout the city, dunking a basketball for the first time in my



life on an unready college student who cursed me out in Mandarin due to his embarrassment. I, on the other hand was excited because I could understand what he was saying! And I was treated by my host family with profound courtesy and warmth, being awakened early by my host mother for warm milk and bread, assisting my host father in preparing "jiao-zi" (dumplings) every Saturday afternoon (one of our weekly rituals), and staying up late to gamble and play mahjong against neighbors from our apartment building.

It was with all this in my mind that I returned to Beijing last year. It had been ten years since I lived there, and I was excited to see how Beijing had changed and to locate my host family. I spent my first days walking the city and was shocked by its new look. Gone were all the bicycles. In their place was car-to-car traffic. Even the rinky-dink multicolor taxicabs (which we used to call bread boxes), so light in weight that a person could push it over easily, were gone. They were replaced by cog-like cabs—a testament to the government's efforts to give the city and its services a more uniformed look. Skyscrapers surrounded me, and

where there was air, the foundations for new buildings stood, waiting to be developed and raised to towering heights. I visited my old school. Where its dusty track used to be was now a world-class track, which was so soft on the shoes that you felt like you were running on carpet. Ten years ago, the school was heated by a large coal furnace. Now, it has an electrical heating system. Third Ring Road, down the road from my former home, was now lined with trees and vibrant businesses, resembling white flight suburbia in the U.S. in the 1950s. The butchers and markets that were once there had been replaced with cell phone stores, banks, ATMs, and expensive retail shops. Much of what I remembered was gone. Also gone from much of the city were the poor residents of the Hutongs. In poor Chinese citizens' former depleted homes now were chic boutiques, shops and cafés that housed China's new coffee-shop culture. Inside, people drank cappuccinos and conversed while Coldplay plays in the background and a picture of Mao hangs above the counter—a complete juxtaposition of globalism, communism, and Chinese tradition. Sadly, my host family too had been forced to move. I stopped by their building and found out that rents had skyrocketed. They had moved to the countryside to help take care of their parents.



One thing I did find truly interesting is how Black culture is being remolded, reshaped, and repackaged on Chinese soil. Basketball courts are everywhere in Beijing. Advertisements and billboards with Black American faces such as Tiger Woods, LeBron James, and Kobe Bryant are all throughout the city. Also becoming prominent more and more among Chinese youth is rap music and Hip Hop culture. But rather than study hip-hop's pioneers like Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaata, they look to artists of the mid-to-late 1990s such as Gang Starr, Tupac, Biggie Smalls, and Lauryn Hill. They are becoming connoisseurs of kicks and are now part of the ever-growing sneaker culture, another byproduct of the amalgamation of hip-hop culture and basketball. Chinese adolescents and young adults are collecting hard-to-find Nike Dunks, Reebok Pumps and old school sneakers such as British Knights and Filas, sneakers produced predominantly by their countrymen and other Asians in East Asian and Southeast Asian factories.

With all of this development, the Chinese government and higher education are also opening up their libraries and archives more and more to support research by foreigners. I was able to examine various documents at the Chinese National

Library. For example, I spent days looking at the papers of Anna Louise Strong, an American writer and journalist who lived in China from the mid 1950s until her death in 1970. Strong developed close relationships with scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, writer and activist Shirley Graham Du Bois, and Black militant and internationalist Robert F. Williams and his wife Mabel

Williams, during their stays in Beijing. I left Beijing and spent the rest of my time in Hong Kong in the library at the University of Hong Kong. Although I enjoyed Hong Kong, I could easily sense its past as a former British colony. The narrow winding roads, cars on the left side of the street, and double-decker public buses reminded me of London. Ultimately, Beijing made a more lasting impression. While I knew that Beijing's development had been spurred and accelerated by China's future hosting of the Olympics, it was apparent that China, or at least Beijing, had forgone its former image for a more modern cosmopolitan look. Beijing had appropriated the West in some ways, but was also staking out its own claims for development, sophistication, and a unique elite national and international identity. I returned to the states with bags filled with hard-to-find documents to examine, faux Chanel bags and Northface jackets to give family members for Christmas, memories of a past that I wished to relive again, and curiosity about what else will emerge in a place I once called home.

Robeson Taj Frazier is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of African American Studies.

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MY FIRST TRIP TO CONTINENTAL AFRICA

By J. Finley



In summer 2008, I received a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship to study the Zulu language in South Africa. This was not my first introduction of Zulu. However, it was my first trip to the African continent. Over the two months that I was there, I stayed in three different places, including the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg (near Durban), an urban home stay in the township of Imbali, and a rural home stay in the township of Maqongqo. During both home stays we spoke only Zulu. It was an amazing trip, with many ups and downs along the way. It was a life-changing experience. Here is a short piece that captures my journey.

June 16, 2008

Arriving in Durban

It smells like cooked food. The people are beautiful. The weather is like Oakland but the atmosphere, as yet, cannot be qualified.

June 20, 2008

A poem

We don't even know it
but our union was
accidental and could
appear as catastrophic
and painful as sweet
and destined.
How can I ever go home?
How can I stay here?

June 23, 2008

Knowing my ancestors were stolen from a place makes me feel like I was taken from my mother, even before birth. Like finding out I was adopted, left by my mother on some strange doorstep—I want to find her. I want to know her, feel like she is part of me and if I could only find her and know her I could know myself better. Now that I found her I realize she is no longer my mother. The longing ends anticlimactically. My mother is no longer my mother—our bond is broken. Time has done so much to change us both—an ocean, centuries, names. I realize I have more than one mother. Africa is my dead mother. America is my abusive stepmother who I can never disavow because she molded and shaped me.

June 29, 2008

I think I dreamed in Zulu last night. The church choir sang “Go Down Moses.”

July 4, 2008

It didn't even occur to me that I should celebrate this day. Telling a Zulu you don't live your life to make money is like telling them you are crazy.

July 9, 2008

People ask me if I am ‘colored’ daily. Only in America is life so black and white. Here I am pressed in between the two.

July 17, 2008

I learned the Lord's Prayer in Zulu today. That should be helpful.

July 22, 2008

My life changed today. We got off the bus and took off our shoes,

like the thousands of followers of Isaiah Shembe. We walked to the main ‘sanctuary’ where people sold everything you could think of, like a flea market. I felt the ground under my feet. I could finally feel Africa. This was the feeling I longed for when I got off the plane—home. I have been here almost a month and at that moment, history became reality. I couldn't help but think of Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca. He arrived angry and untouchable, a hatred 400 years deep and came back with a hope, a hope that had the potential to turn hate to love.

August 10, 2008

I realized what freedom is during my visit to South Africa. The choice to wear pants when all the other women in the township can only wear skirts. I am leaving South Africa today, going back to the future.

J. Finley is a graduate student in the Department of African American Studies.



Blackness, Technology, and Cyberspace: Digital Diasporas Conference and eBlack Studies

By Carmen Mitchell

Two major conferences and workshops late last spring and during the summer highlighted the continued growth and awareness of cyberspace and Internet technologies, in the African Diaspora and African American Studies. The 2008 Digital Humanities and African American/African Diaspora Studies Conference at the University of Maryland, College Park, featured a diverse array of poster presentations, academic talks, artistic works, and institutional reports that all fused technology, archiving creativity, theory, activism, and pedagogy in relation to black communities and allies in the United States and beyond. Noted to be the first of its kind, close to one hundred fifty participants attended the conference.

The keynote address was delivered by Abdul Alkalimat (University of Illinois) moderator H-NET AFRO AM listserv. He spoke on the continued persistence of the digital divide in low-income Black communities, hip-hop pedagogy and technologies of the studio, and eBlack Studies. Other speakers and panelists included Alexander G. Weheliye (Northwestern University), Kara Keeling (University of Southern California), Anna Everett (UC Santa Barbara), Howard Dodson (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), and Merle Collins (University of Maryland, College Park). San Francisco-based composer/performer and audio artist Pamela Z provided a multimedia performance. D.J. Spooky (Paul Miller) also performed and gave the conference closing talk on creativity, Pan-Humanism, Pan-Africanism and new media in the age



of 'downloadable Blacknesses', and interactive web technologies. The conference was organized by the African American/African Diaspora Area Group of the Department of English and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Conversations and active dialogue around Black communities, African American Studies, technology, and new media continued over the summer with the Information Technology and Black Studies Workshop held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from July 24 to July 27, 2008. In addition to being the keynote speaker for Digital Diasporas Conference, Abdul Alkalimat was also the main organizer and director of this workshop. An enthusiastic gathering of graduate students, archivists, professors, independent researchers, community activists, and librarians from around the

country, presented an array of projects and created a collective statement on the genesis, mission, and movement of what is termed "eBlack Studies."

The Information Technology and Black Studies Workshop was hosted by the Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois and sponsored by the National Council for Black Studies with funding from the Ford Foundation. For more information on the workshop, the full manifesto and continued online and interactive dialogue please visit the website at <http://eblackstudies.org/workshop>.

Carmen Mitchell is a graduate student in the Department of African American Studies.



AN INTRODUCTION TO HOPLOLOGY

By Bryan K. Mason



All life has a single fundamental goal: to survive. Within this overarching need are the roots of several other human needs, including the need to fight. The human need to fight manifested itself the first time a human being acted to defend territory, property or life, or just as likely, the first time one person attempted to relieve another of these things.

Like most human needs, the need to fight is met with recourse to tools. Like all tools, those dedicated to fighting demand systems to govern their usage. Through a costly process of trial and error, tool, user, and method are all refined, and the system becomes an art. Concurrently, new weapons and methods are constantly evolving. The study of that evolution and of the varied cultural contexts in which it takes place is called Hoplology.



The name Hoplology derives from the Greek word *Hoplos*, which refers to arms or armor. The Hoplite, or armored person, was the soldier of the ancient world. The term Hoplology was first used to refer to a scholarly discipline by Sir Richard F. Burton, a prolific writer, explorer and Orientalist of the late nineteenth century.

Though his life and work were contemporary to the beginnings of modern anthropology, Burton was unable to secure a similar place for Hoplology within the academy, and the term fell into disuse.

Following World War II, Burton's charge was taken up by Donn F. Draeger, a marine captain who served as part of the American occupation forces in Japan. Draeger's interest in Japanese combative methods, beginning with Judo, led him to investigate many of Japan's oldest and most venerable art forms. Eventually his travels would take him to nearly all corners of Asia, including the Philippines, Indonesia, and India. Simultaneously, his writings would provide a point of intellectual access to Asian martial arts that continues to influence both scholarly and lay interpretations of such arts. In the

hope of again establishing Hoplology as a valid field of study, Draeger engaged in an aggressive schedule of touring and lecturing. He also made himself available to mentor many like-minded Westerners who traveled to Japan to immerse themselves in its martial culture.

Today, the banner of Hoplology is carried

primarily by the International Hoplology Society (IHS). IHS is a semi-academic group founded by former protégées of Draeger in the years following his death. As such, they continue his tradition of field research and emic participation in various parts of Asia.



Though the study of Hoplology closely parallels that of anthropology, it is often thought of as a separate entity. This may account for some of the difficulty the discipline has faced as it has sought a place in the modern academy. As the IHS is only semi-academic, its efforts seem to have done little to solidify Hoplology within normative academic traditions. Moreover, as an organization, they appear not to have transcended the Orientalist predispositions of Donn Draeger, as they conduct little to no research outside of that geographic area.

Bryan K. Mason is a graduate student in the Department of African American Studies.

Black Public Intellectualism Briefly Reconsidered

By Shaun Ossei-Owusu

Intellectuals have traditionally held a particular prestige in American society, and more broadly, in “modern” and “postmodern” society. The role of the public intellectual has become more complicated with the proliferation of new media. Blogs, podcasting, and digital visual media (e.g. Youtube) have expanded the outlets and possibilities for the public intellectual—all of which require a reconsideration of his or her role. Similarly, the increased presence of African American intellectuals in American colleges and universities in the last thirty years has posed a unique quandary for Black intellectuals in their efforts to reach audiences larger than those who are privileged to study or work in colleges and universities.

Numerous studies have illustrated the contested role and function of the public intellectual. Lewis Gordon (1997) points out how the public intellectual can be easily confused with the popular intellectual.¹ Gordon argues that the popular intellectual is a public figure, but may or may not produce knowledge for public consumption, whereas a scholar may be public with their work but unpopular because of their political perspectives.

The role of the black intellectual is also problematic itself, as it makes several assumptions. Among the many criticisms of this role is the idea that it assumes a separation between Black intellectuals and Black folk. Certainly this is rooted in a late nineteenth and early twentieth century conception of a Talented Tenth upon whom was bestowed a responsibility of providing leadership to the race. As contested as the discourses surrounding the Talented Tenth may be, the notion of an educated

elite has nonetheless produced an often-discussed disconnect between intellectuals and folk. The result of the foregoing is somewhat paradoxical. It has facilitated the belief that somehow Black folk need translators as well as the presumption that black populations are a monolithic group with uniform interests, perspectives, and politics. Historically, Whites often selected Black leaders who were palatable (e.g. Booker T. Washington), and with some exceptions public figures were usually not tied to academic institutions, and sometimes were connected to religious organizations. With the marked increase in numbers of Black scholars and the emergence of cultural critics the position of the Black public intellectual has changed.

So how do we imagine the Black public intellectual? Who is his or her “public”? What should his or her priorities be? Can he or she assume the moniker when speaking to other racial groups and not Blacks? Where do Black conservative commentators fit into existing conceptions of the African American public intellectual? In what ways do they disrupt it? How do market incentives complicate his or her role? Can Black intellectuals not trained in formal institutions fall under this designation? As for professional intellectuals, how do ties to academic institutions enhance or hamper their ability to speak to the public?

Some of these questions have been previously examined and are the source of debate for numerous scholars. For example, Joy James (1997) argues for a democratization of American intellectualism. Similarly, Adolph Reed (2000) insists that Black public intellectuals directly engage each other while

having identifiable constituencies similar to some of their progenitors.² Michael Eric Dyson (1997) (the first scholar often identified in Black public intellectual critiques) contends that Black scholars should be reflexive and self-critical of each other but not *ad hominem* and hostile. The critiques continue and are seemingly infinite.

While there is certainly no panacea to the several questions and contestations that surround the role of Black public intellectuals, there are ways to continually and critically consider their role. Michael Burawoy’s (2005) conceptualization of public sociology and the larger discipline provides a useful approach. Burawoy identifies four types of knowledge: professional, critical, policy, and public.³ One could argue that critical knowledge can be subsumed in the other three categories. Hence, Black public intellectuals can address a professional audience, focusing particularly on the academy (who in a way are a particular public). They can also speak to policy issues; in this role one does not have to be an academic and can be a grassroots activist, local organizer, or a journalist, providing provocative commentary on social policy (which often impacts a specific or several populations). Lastly, and most generally, the Black public intellectual that focuses on the “public” speaks to broader audiences and to a public that is fluid and diverse. She or he can be a professor, artist, graduate student, journalist, religious leader, or simply a lay scholar. This conceptualization widens the possibility for contributions by Black public intellectuals in their various forms.

Congratulations to

This framework does leave several questions on the table and creates new inquiries. My larger goal is to reexamine how Black public intellectuals are imagined and understood. In a “post-race” America, the role the Black public intellectual may either lose purchase or gain value. Part of this reconfiguration depends on our own intra-racial interpretations of his or her role.

Notes

1. Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
2. Adolph Reed, *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* (New York: New Press, 2000).
3. Michael Burawoy, “2004 American Sociological Association Presidential address: For public sociology,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 56:2, 260-290.

Shaun Ossei-Owusu is a graduate student in the Department of African American Studies.



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George Breslauer; Professor Robert Allen

Lia T. Bascomb
Recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor Award
From the Department of African American Studies



Lia Bascomb; Executive Vice Chancellor
and Provost, George Breslauer



June Jordan's Poetry for the People: Creating and Renewing Off-Campus Partnerships

By Aya de Leon

Poetry for the People was founded at UC Berkeley in 1991 by the late poet and essayist June Jordan (1936-2002). Jordan's vision for the program was that it would provide a space for artistic expression and personal empowerment for students. Since its inception, the program has maintained two primary components. First is teaching the work of poets of color in their historical political contexts. The second component is workshopping student poems weekly, according to a rigorous set of guidelines developed by Jordan at the program's inception.

Taught by Student Teacher Poets, the workshop sections of the course encourage student writing in the tradition of Jordan's work. Student writing deals with experiences of oppression, speaking what has been silenced, and offering alternative visions of what the world can be.

Throughout her involvement in the program, Jordan always created strong bridges between Poetry for the People and the community. Non-students have always been allowed to fully participate in the program and its classes. Jordan regularly organized off-campus readings and brought students to poetry readings outside of the university. Poetry for the People's outreach program has a history of bringing Student Teacher Poets to schools and community settings throughout the Bay Area. The program has struggled since Professor Jordan's death in 2002. However, with the continued participation and support of students and the Department of African American Studies, we continue to move forward and are



working tirelessly to keep Professor Jordan's vision alive.

In fall 2006, I joined the Department of African American Studies as Director of Poetry for the People. As a community artist and activist, I bring a background of university-level teaching and over twenty years experience in community organizing, teaching, and arts administration. I remain excited about the direction in which the program is moving and am committed to keeping with Jordan's tradition of reaching beyond the university.

Thanks to generous grants from the Chancellor's Community Partnership Fund, the Poetry in the Community Collaborative has been able to revive Poetry for the People's historical partnerships with Berkeley High School and La Peña Cultural Center. In addition, we have created partnerships with new entities including Berkeley City College. Some of our other activities include student teacher poets and student residencies teaching poetry at our partner

schools. These weekly workshops are free of charge, open to the public, and include an open mic component. Our programming also includes community performances by visiting literary artists, who are presented along with local spoken word, poetry, music and hip hop artists, as well as students and student teachers from the Berkeley campus.

Keeping with Berkeley's mission of Equity and Inclusion, we have begun a teacher-training program that reaches out to talented individuals outside of the university who have the potential to teach and excel at Berkeley, but have not had access. Our partnerships with Berkeley City College, Mills College, and other two-year, four-year and graduate programs, ensures a high level of cultural and socioeconomic diversity in our student teacher class. Our continued outreach to non-students contributes to this as well.

This year, Poetry for the People is also undergoing a paradigm shift in our program. We are gravitating away from an emphasis on "outreach" and are focusing more on service learning and engaged scholarship. The program has been selected for the University's Engaged Scholarship Initiative. In Spring 2009, we will integrate service learning into our programs, classes, and other activities. This will place all of our students in ten-hour mini-internships at organizations in the community, including schools, arts and literary centers, youth agencies, and community organizations. We will also integrate service learning theories and reflective practices into the curriculum. This reflects our belief that the program should

equip students not only with literary tools and skills, but also with relationships beyond those that they will make at the University. We often think of campus walls as locking some young people out. However, I am equally concerned about how it locks other students in. From a young adult development perspective, I want to institutionalize students' opportunities to create meaningful relationships with young artists in the greater Bay Area and community institutions outside of the campus. So many of our students need this exposure in order to chart trajectories in arts careers and activist communities beyond their college years. Otherwise, they hit a wall when they graduate, as they find themselves limited in their ability to transition to the so-called real world.

The upper division course, which satisfies the University's American Cultures requirement, is open to freshmen and sophomores. This year we will be studying African American, Arab/Arab American, and Native American poetry. Students of all writing levels are welcome. As always, Poetry for the People is recruiting interested students and student teachers for the program. Both Berkeley and non-Berkeley students are invited to participate. Students begin the program in January. The student teacher training program is by application only and begins in either fall or spring. Our Third Thursday Poetry in the Community performances will be at La Peña Cultural Center. All shows will feature both campus and community poets. All of our events are open to the public.

Aya de Leon is Director of June Jordan's Poetry for the People. She is also a lecturer in the Department of African American Studies.

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 And recently elected to the South Carolina Humanities Council Board



INTRODUCING

Johnael Glenn Rafael Simmons

Grandson of Glenn L Robertson

Birthday: 8/29/2008

Time of Birth: 3:12 AM

Weight: 7 lb, 6 oz

Length: 20.5 in

Baby's Proud Family

Tiwana and Rafael



Miles Scott Perry

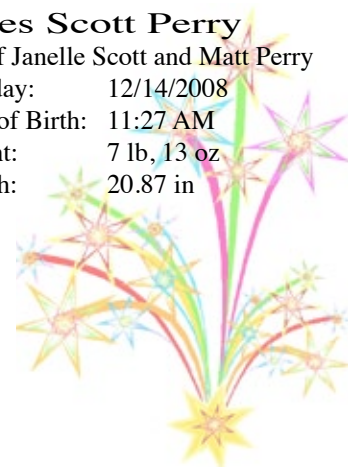
Son of Janelle Scott and Matt Perry

Birthday: 12/14/2008

Time of Birth: 11:27 AM

Weight: 7 lb, 13 oz

Length: 20.87 in



LIBRARY NEWS

New Library Database: Black Studies Center

By Jason M. Schultz

The University Library recently purchased the electronic database *Black Studies Center* (BSC). This resource combines a number of print and electronic reference sources for current and historical research on African Americans, the African Diaspora, and Africa. The BSC contains the following resources: the Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience, International Index to Black Periodicals (IIBP), Black Literature Index, ProQuest Black Newspapers, *The Chicago Defender* (1910-1975) in full-text, and the ProQuest Dissertations for Black Studies.

The Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience includes interdisciplinary essays on the Black Experience. It is accompanied by timelines, citations to scholarly articles, images, and film clips.

The International Index to Black Periodicals (IIBP) includes current and past bibliographic citations and abstracts from numerous scholarly journals and newsletters from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean. Many titles are core Black Studies periodicals.

Black Literature Index is an electronic index to the microfiche collection by the same name. It includes over 70,000 bibliographic citations for fiction, poetry and literary reviews published in 110 Black periodicals and newspapers between 1827 and 1940.

BSC includes full-text access to the *Chicago Defender* between 1910 and 1975. This is in addition to the *ProQuest Black Newspapers* that has bibliographic citations and abstracts to four additional historical Black newspapers, namely *New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1993), *Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-2002), *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), and the *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003). In addition, the Black Literature Index includes links to full-text articles from the *New York Amsterdam News* and *Pittsburgh Courier*.

Finally, BSC includes ProQuest Dissertations for Black Studies covering Ph.D. dissertations and Master's theses in various subjects related to Black Studies composed between 1970 and 2004 at institutions of higher learning throughout the U.S.

Jason M. Schultz is the librarian for African American Studies at the University Library.



Race and the Race: Some Notes

By Ronald Williams II

In the face of Barack Obama's unprecedented popularity in American politics, numerous questions and assertions have surfaced about his racial designation. Questions that have been raised include the following: Is he Black enough? Is he Black at all? When did he "become" Black? How can he be Black when he was raised by his white grandparents? Why did he choose to marry a Black Woman? Was he being strategic in this choice? These are by no means exhaustive or representative of the numerous ways in which Obama's race has been interrogated in the media and in everyday conversation. In response to these questions, numerous people have made assertions that have sought to situate Obama in relationship to what is understood as a normative Blackness. People have said that he is not Black enough. They have charged his marriage to an African American woman as part of a quest for legitimacy among African Americans. People have suggested that because Obama was reared by his White grandparents that he was not really connected to Black America or to Black Americans. Not only are these questions inherently problematic, but they also presuppose that there only one way to be African American.

Certainly the controversy surrounding Reverend Jeremiah Wright contributed to this question's surfacing. This instance caused numerous people to question Obama's relationship to "the" Black community and to issues of race and racism in America. Obama's response to this in his famed address "A More Perfect Union" at Philadelphia provided a thoughtful and defining response to this controversy. Although his

oration did not put the issue of race and racism to rest entirely, it served as Obama's way of positioning himself and his campaign relative to the issues of race and racism. Through this speech, Obama positioned himself as a person who lives *an* African American experience. He acknowledges his connection to the various races of the world through his White American mother, his Kenyan father, his Indonesian stepfather, and his Chinese brother-in-law. Most significant in this speech was the way that Obama positioned himself in relationship to African Americans. He movingly connects himself with African Americans and to African American experiences. He cites his relationship with his wife who is a descendant of American slavery. He professes his connection to Black Americans not only through his own lived experience at the intersection of race, class, and gender, but also through his marriage to an indigenous African American and to the two daughters who were born of this union. The most important aspect of this speech concerning African Americans is that Obama is a self-identified African American. Moreover, he has never explicitly or implicitly disassociated himself from Blackness in general or the experiences of African Americans in particular.

What was most impressive about Obama's approach and response to the race question was his ability to respond to one of the most complex issues in the history of the republic. Yet he did so in a way that enabled him to remain immensely popular. He won his party's nomination in the primary elections and went on to win the presidency through landslide victories in the Electoral College and in the popular vote. And he did this while maintaining his connections

to African Americans. He has effectively shown the United States and the world that there is more than one way to be African American. Certainly, Obama (whether out of necessity or by choice) strategically positioned himself on issues related to race and racial inequality. Yet he accomplished this without completely eradicating his symbolic connection to other African Americans. Indeed the support he enjoyed among African American voters underscores this. He was the resounding choice of African American voters in the Democratic Party primaries and in the general election. This is a particularly noteworthy feat considering the profound affection that African American Democrats have historically shown to Bill and Hillary Clinton. Even in the face of contested visions about race and racial progress, Black Americans have shown Obama, his campaign and his family, a level of affection that no other presidential candidate has enjoyed from the same group.

This election has shown the possibility for an African American to win a presidential election and to secure the percentage of non-black votes necessary to do so. This is no small feat. However, Obama's ascendancy does not, in any way, illustrate that Americans have somehow moved beyond race. Instead it shows that White Americans are, at times, willing to subordinate what can be understood as their racial interests to the need to produce meaningful change in the way that the economy and the government operates. Certainly Obama's success in the election is the product of political genius combined with a citizenry that is grossly dissatisfied with certain aspects of the status quo. Still,

these factors, and their production of a history-making election, do not show that the issue of race has, at all, been put to bed.

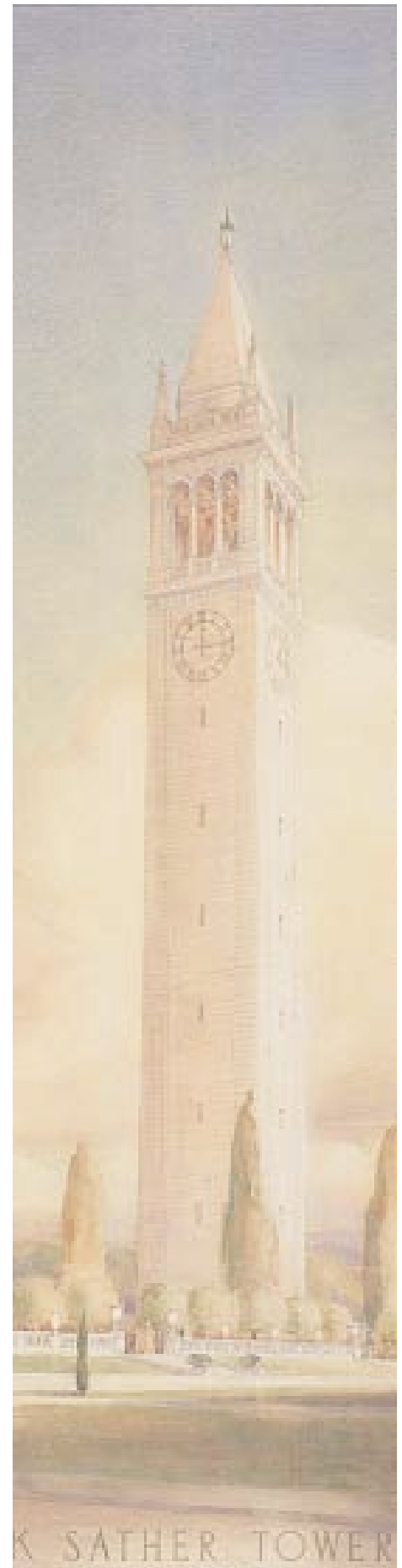
A recent op-ed column in the *Washington Post* presented an argument that was indeed disheartening. The column, written by author Marie Arana, was published under the headline, “Barack Obama is Not Black.” Connecting with Obama’s experience as a biracial American, Arana attempts to substantiate her claim by arguing the need to end the use of a racist practice if we are truly in a post-race America. She insists that, because Barack Obama is biracial, that he has just as much claim to Blackness as he does to Whiteness. On the surface this sounds fair. However, to suggest that Obama is somehow other than Black not only represents a shortsighted vision of progress, but it also demonstrates a less than sophisticated understanding of race. It seems that because Obama has been able to earn the respect, adoration, and votes of American Whites, or more generally, of non-African Americans, that attempts are now made to again claim that he is somehow other than Black. This is not to discount his biraciality. However, Barack Obama makes it clear that he has been socialized as an African American and identifies with that racial designation. And, when voting for him, people of all races were clear that they were voting for an African American (even those who did not “see” him as Black). So why should we try to take this away from him now? Had he lost the election, would this columnist have made the same argument?

Scholars on race and racism in the United States have made several key theoretical and conceptual observations about race. They have proven that race is socially

constructed. They have recognized that race in its “ism” form was used historically (and arguably contemporarily) to subjugate groups of people based on the allegation of inferiority because of phenotypic and cultural variations in the species. Still, contemporary scholars of race in America (and in the world for that matter) have recognized that, as problematic of a concept that race may be, it does have meaning. Individuals and groups are still socialized around it as a category of analysis. People’s identities are formed around various human characteristics and race remains one of them. Certainly the state continues to perpetuate the use and relevance of race as well.

Thus, rather than seeing the early twenty-first century as the beginning of a post-race America, it is important that all Americans celebrate the decisive electoral victory of Barack Obama (a self-identified African American) as evidence of progress toward the vision of a “more perfect union.” To suggest that the vision of a more perfect union means that an African American man can win the highest office in the land only by *not* being African American presents a blurred (and in some ways backward) vision of progress. What it does show is that there are different (and oftentimes conflicting) visions of the this soi-disant perfect union. Again, if their level of support for Barack Obama is any indicator, African Americans seem to see a president and first family who identify as African American and interact with African Americans as an indicator of progress toward a more perfect union. Every American should see it this way.

Ronald Williams II is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of African American Studies.



From the Editor

By Ronald Williams II

The latter half of 2008 played witness to several important moments in African American history, American history, and the history of the world. Barack Obama's defeat of Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Party's nomination for President of the United States was certainly a history-making feat. And Obama's landslide victory over John McCain in the November 2008 Presidential Election carried that feat forward to mark a turning point in the world. Not only is Obama the first African American elected to the American Presidency, but also in doing so, he has become, arguably, the most powerful man in the world. This historic election presents many opportunities for exciting new intellectual engagement in African American Studies and the numerous fields and disciplines through which the experiences of Africans, African Americans, and other African descendents are studied. I am excited to be a part of this important moment in history.

The work of my colleagues gathered in this issue of the *Diaspora* touches on a diverse array of research interests, covering subjects and activities that I hope expand the perspective of the reader as much as they expanded mine. There are several pieces in this issue alone that are particularly interesting. For example, Robeson Taj Frazier's descriptions of his experiences studying and conducting research in Beijing and Hong Kong provide a meaningful connection to his pioneering research on the ways that African American intellectuals have interacted with China. Libby Lewis' recount of some of her experience as a doctoral student serves as refreshing reminder of the value of

perseverance and the ways that one can be presented with numerous opportunities to showcase their research and talents over the course of their graduate studies. Carmen Mitchell's essays on the development of "eBlack Studies" provide further examples of how our intellectual community involves itself in numerous activities beyond the campus. Shaun Ossei-Owusu's essay on Black intellectuals was thought provoking, indeed. It raises some important questions about the complex role and social obligations of public intellectuals. I was also fascinated to read Bryan K. Mason's essay on Hopology, which provides valuable insight into the Black martial arts tradition. And J. Finley's narrative about her first trip to continental Africa underscores the ways that the study of the African Diaspora is capable of producing profound experiences both within and beyond the university campus.

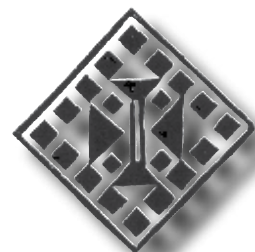
This issue of the *Diaspora* also showcases the work of some of our Department's faculty. Petra Rivera and Jasmin Kaur's respective essays on Professors Na'ilah Suad Nasir and Janelle Scott introduce us to two accomplished scholars who will continue to make important contributions through their teaching and research on various aspects of African American education. In addition, it was an enriching privilege to meet with Visiting Professor Joanne Braxton and to make contact with her expansive



Photo credit: Ethan L. Caldwell

and diverse body of work. Lastly, Professor Charles Henry's essay on anti-intellectualism in the 2008 presidential election raises important considerations about the place for intellectualism in a changing American political climate and scene. If the outcome of the election is any indicator, Americans seem to prefer intellectualism in national politics over efforts to discount the intelligence of the American people. Certainly Professor Henry's essay prepares us to grapple with this.

Previous issues of this newsletter have benefited from the expertise of Glenn L Robertson. This issue is no exception. Therefore I extend my thanks to Glenn for his efforts in turning what would have been merely a collection of short essays and notes into the newsletter that you hold in your hands.





Summer Sessions 2009

TAKE COURSES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
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Freshman Composition
(African American Studies R1A)
with Aparajita Nanda

African American Life and Culture in the United States
(African American Studies 5B)
with Lia Bascomb

Film of the African Diaspora
(African American Studies 119)
with Leigh Raiford

The Philosophy of Martin Luther King
(African American Studies 124)
with Charles Henry

Black Visuality: A Crisis of Representation
(African American Studies 139)
with Ariane Cruz

The Life and Legacy of Tupac Amaru Shakur
(African American Studies 139)
with Lisa Morris

Scream, Queens, Ravishing Simians, and Missing Links: Race, Gender, and Simian Others in Cinema
(African American Studies 139)
with Zakiyyah Jackson

Black Popular Music and Culture: From Be-Bop to Hip-Hop
(African American Studies 159)
with Rickey Vincent

Popular Music and the African Diaspora in the Caribbean
(African American Studies 159)
with Petra Rivera