



# THE DIASPORA

Department of African American Studies • University of California, Berkeley

FALL-WINTER 2013

African American Studies Welcomes  
New Faculty Member Nikki Jones

Being Uncomfortable to Get Comfortable

Reflections:

...from a newly-minted Ph.D.

...of a recent graduate of UC Berkeley's African American Studies Undergraduate program



## 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, staff, and students. We also invite submissions from guest columnists and scholars who may not be affiliated with the university. Articles may be edited for length, clarity, and style.

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# *Words from the Chair*

by Na'ilah Suad Nasir

As 2013 comes to a close, I am pondering the issue of space. So much of what I do as department chair is about space: finding space, allotting space, bridging spaces, creating space, justifying and negotiating space. Sometimes this is about physical space, but often it is about metaphorical or emotional space—the spaces we create for students, to support graduate training and intellectual development, the spaces we maintain and hold for our colleagues and for ourselves. At their best, these are spaces of love, safety, forgiveness, and hope.

Reflecting back on the fall 2013 semester, I am most grateful for the opportunity to have contributed to the ways that the African American Studies Department creates and maintains spaces that seek to enrich our students intellectually, emotionally, and politically. For me, this semester has been marked by several key highlights, all related to our departmental space in some form or fashion.

This fall, we welcomed the largest new cohort of graduate students in recent history into our community, and they have added immeasurably to the space on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of Barrows with their enthusiasm, engagement,

and positive energy. At the same time, we have seen our more advanced graduate students move through the space and the program milestones in productive and impressive ways—completing position papers and qualifying exams, submitting and presenting at conferences, garnering outside funding for their research projects, and refining and developing their scholarly agendas.

We will also, as of January 1, welcome a new faculty member into our department. Professor Nikki Jones, a sociologist from UC Santa Barbara, will be joining us, offering a graduate seminar on Race, Gender, and Justice this spring. In future semesters she will also offer an upper division course on crime and race, and will take over teaching African American Studies 5B, a lower division lecture course on African American Life and Culture. We are very excited about what she will add to our department and to our community!

We have made our space available to undergraduate students in new ways this semester. We held finals week study jam sessions in the department, thanks to the hard work of our Clark Scholars, Peace El-Henson, Erma Sinclair, and Maya Lefao. We opened the



department offices, conference room, and lounges and provided dinner, snacks, and coffee to fuel student study sessions until 2 am for several nights of finals week. Hope it paid off in excellence on finals!

We are also preparing for our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Renaissance Gala this spring, scheduled for February 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 6 pm at the Memorial Stadium Field House. The Gala is a fundraising dinner to celebrate the spirit of renaissance and African American excellence on the UC Berkeley campus and in the broader community and to raise funds for the department and for scholarships for African American scholarships on campus. But the Gala is also an opportunity to be together, celebrate our community, and enjoy an evening of wonderful food, talks, and entertainment.



It is a space of celebration and community. This year we will be joined by scholar Trisha Rose, talk show host Tavis Smiley, soul food vegan chef Bryant Terry, and one of the first black women journalists, Belva Davis. We will also enjoy a musical performance from songstress Imani Uzure. For tickets or donations, contact Kihana Ross, kihana@berkeley.edu.

I am particularly grateful this semester for my wonderful faculty and staff colleagues, who have reinforced for me this fall how important honesty and mutual respect is in creating a safe, collegial spaces that nurture us all. I am truly honored to share and create space with such strong, heart-centered, giving people.

And I am increasingly committed to continuing our work in creating spaces of community – intellectual and psychological—on the Berkeley campus. It is a challenging time for African American students on this campus, a time of low numbers, shrinking resources, and I am incredibly proud of the work staff and faculty in the department do to contribute to spaces that nurture, sustain, and build critical knowledge for us all.



## Words of Welcome

*The Department of African American Studies, U.C. Berkeley would like to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Nikki Jones, our newest faculty member.*

Jones, when asked about her recent appointment, said "I am thrilled to be joining the department. I have a deep respect for the history of the department and am honored to be part of its future."



Nikki Jones is an associate professor in the Department of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. She is also a faculty affiliate with the Center for the Study of Law and Society. Her areas of expertise include urban ethnography, race and ethnic relations and criminology and criminal justice, with a special emphasis on the intersection of race, gender, and justice. Professor Jones has published three books, including the sole-authored *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner City Violence* (2010), published in the Rutgers University Press Series in Childhood Studies ([betweengoodandghetto.com](http://betweengoodandghetto.com)).

Her research appears in peer-reviewed journals in sociology, gender studies, and criminology. Jones' next book, based on several years of field research in a San Francisco neighborhood, examines how African American men with criminal histories change their lives, and their place in the neighborhood once they do. Her current research draws on the systematic analysis of video records that document routine encounters between police and civilians, including young Black men's frequent encounters with the police. Professor Jones is the past-Chair of the American Sociological Association's Race, Gender and Class Section (2012-13). She also serves on the editorial boards of the *American Sociological Review* and *Gender & Society*. Jones has received awards for her research and publications including the William T. Grant Award for Early Career Scholars (2007-12) and the New Scholar Award from the American Society of Criminology's Division on Women and Crime (2010) and Division on People of Color and Crime (2009). Before joining the faculty at Cal Professor Jones was on faculty in the Department of Sociology at UC-Santa Barbara (from 2004-2013). She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology and Criminology from the University of Pennsylvania.

# “Being Uncomfortable to Get Comfortable”: Maximizing Networks and Carving out a Niche

An Interview with Grace Gipson

by Amani Morrison



*Grace Gipson is a first-year student in the African Diaspora Studies Ph.D Program at the University of California, Berkeley whose research focuses on the interplay of race and gender in comic book characterizations. She received her M.A. in African American Studies from Georgia State University in May 2013, and she earned her B.A. in Psychology and Biology from Clark Atlanta University. Grace is a regular contributor to two blogs—Black Girl Nerds and The Berkeley Graduate—and she also maintains a personal blog entitled Black Savant Cinema.*



**You’ve had quite a busy year: you finished up your Masters at Georgia State, moved and started here at Berkeley. How has your transition been? Have you seen your research interests shift at all since starting the program, or are they relatively unchanged?**

I’ll answer the second one first. The research hasn’t really shifted or changed as much; if anything it’s become more narrow. When I came here I was thinking very broadly—race and gender—and although I want to stick with that, I actually want to get more specific and look at specific characters within comic books versus just as a whole. I think I can get more fruitful information this way as opposed to looking at it broadly.

As far as my transition—that’s been interesting. It’s a whole new world out here, coming from the South to the West Coast. I will say that there were moments when I was kind of feeling like “why did I come out here and what am I going to do out here?” but with each passing week things have been changing and getting better. The adjustment is slowly coming

together. I still miss the South, but you know—I guess that’s expected.

**Definitely. Transitioning can be tough. I think it’s really interesting that you said your interests have gotten narrower already. You said that you want to look at specific characters in some comic books—who are some of those characters?**

One in particular is this character named Martha Washington, who is a Dark Horse Comics character—which is one of the more independent labels versus Marvel and DC. She’s kind of seen as this black American icon, so she’s definitely somebody I want to look at. Of course, Storm, because Storm is my favorite character anyway,



so I definitely plan on looking at her. I have a few others in mind: Vixen from DC Comics, and also Misty Knight who is a Marvel comic, and others who are of independent labels. If I had to name specific characters, those would be the ones as of right now.



**Your work has caught quite a few people's attention recently. You were interviewed for Huffington post in February and for NPR in October. Congratulations!**

Thank you, thank you.  
**That's quite impressive. And good interviews, too; I had a chance to read the transcripts. How did those interviews come about?**

The Huffington Post came from my thesis chair—he had just done an interview with the Huffington Post on black males in comic books, so the interviewer had asked him if he knew anybody dealing with female characters because it's not something that's really being addressed, and he said, "Yeah, my student does." So the connection was made, and that's how the Huffington Post came about. As far as the NPR, someone read my Huffington Post interview, and so they wanted to talk about this in addition to black geek culture. They had read the Huffington Post and wanted to do a continuation from that. In addition, I also got a chance to be interviewed with PBS as well in between those two, and that was made from a friend of mine who's a professor in Buffalo and was like, "Yeah, she's doing work with this, so you might want

to add her to this panel." This interview was a panel responding to a documentary on Wonder Woman and how women of color are underrepresented in comics. A lot of the people on the panel were people whose work I've used, so it was just an amazing experience. I was kind of uncomfortable, but I've learned that sometimes you have to be uncomfortable to get what you need. It's a matter

of being uncomfortable to get comfortable.

**So aside from the great work you're doing, it seems networking has definitely worked to your advantage.**

Absolutely.

**Do you have any tips or advice for networking within and beyond the academy?**

For me, I've realized that regardless of what a person's research interest is, they can always play a role in your academic success, or your success period. Often times I would meet people who— we had no shared interests, but somehow they would connect me, like "I know someone who does this." The people that we know and we connect with, they know people on the outside, and they may not have a specific expertise but they can always refer. So that has always seemed to be the trick for me— these referrals have been coming in, and then social media has also played a part, as well.

**Nice. I understand that you're doing everything that you're doing here alongside blogging. Could you talk some about that? And in what ways do you feel your online presence has enhanced your research and your professional opportunities?**

Definitely. The online presence has made my research become more accessible. It's also made it more known, because



nobody was really talking about it in the academic sense. So I get to use a social avenue to talk about something academic, which—you put those two together, it's a pretty good combination. And I think for me, blogging has given me the chance to do what I love and then improve upon things as well. Because you have to write—you can't just throw something up there, so it's helped with my writing skills as well. Knowing that other people on the outside are reading this, I have to make sure that it's legible and readable.

**Now you also will be teaching this summer..?**

Yes. I was afforded an opportunity to do an online course with the University of Oklahoma. Very exciting—that was also through a network, as well. I sit on the National Council of Black Studies board, and one of the members heard about my research and was like “We need to get a class,” and from there it just kind of happened. I'm very excited because it's my first online teaching course. I've taught classes before, but never in the online format, so this is definitely new and yeah—it's going to be quite an experience.

**What would you like your students to be able to take away from your course?**

As I'm still formulating the syllabus—I will take this class in a broader approach, looking at

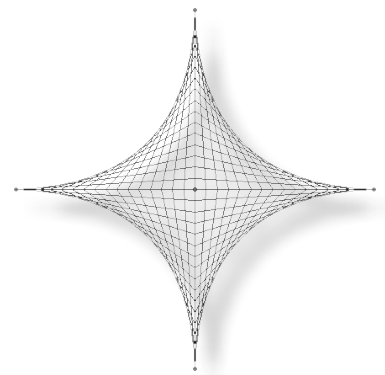
race and gender in comic books and graphic novels. I'm kind of wanting students to go beyond the traditional ideas and norms of what they see in comic books—or what they think they see in comic books and graphic novels—and to introduce them to characters who they may not otherwise have heard about, thought about, read about, seen in the movies. I want to consider the well-known people, but at the same time there are other people who I think have an impact overall in pop culture that are much more worthy of interrogation than Storm, Wolverine, and all of that. As of right now, that would be the goal. I'd also like to explore how race and gender play a significant role in the comic book medium. I think a lot of people just see it as colorful pictures on pages and not realize that there's actually some social and political commentary that goes along with it.

**Great, great. So how do you see all of these things that you're doing tying into your larger research project and where you're headed?**

This is good that all of this is happening now, because it's helping me to narrow down my research. I think I'm still new or somewhat of a novice and still figuring out specifics, which is probably normal. But all of this has helped my professionalism as far as what to expect once becoming a professor, because

that's the ultimate goal. I also have to say that each of these opportunities give me a new layer of what to expect, because I didn't really know what to expect coming to Berkeley, so I was really a blank slate—truly, a blank slate. It's kind of adding new character to who I am as a budding scholar and someone who has a lot to contribute. And it's given me some confidence as well. All of these confirm the reasons why I'm doing what I do and motivate me to continue my work.

*Amani Morrison is a second-year student in UC Berkeley's African Diaspora Studies Ph.D Program.*





# **and Alan and Oscar and Kenneth and Casper, too**

by ianna hawkins owen

The helicopters sit on our heads  
panting a choppy siren song  
apartment windows can't keep out  
and shop glass can't withstand.

The panting reminds us  
a child is dead  
and the chanting reminds us  
a child is dead  
and the old woman without busfare reminds us  
a child is dead.

Does she need some money? The seated man asks.  
No, I think someone else just got it. The standing man answers.  
You can't take it with you. The seated man says.  
And they speak of other things  
without saying a child is dead  
or that old men are taken, too,  
because no one has to.

The mechanically beaten air,  
warrish, summons  
as surely as the posters do.  
A siren song bouncing off the low ceiling  
of the Oakland sky,  
between buildings,  
promising zipties  
and a little release.

# Reflections from a newly-minted Ph.D.:

## Ronald Williams II

by Christopher Petrella



**Christopher Petrella:** Thanks for sitting for this interview, Ron.

Ron Williams: Of course, no problem. You know I love AFAM.

**CFP:** What is your current title?

RWII: I'm Assistant Professor of African American Studies in the Department of African American and Diaspora Studies at UNC at Chapel Hill.

**CFP:** What courses are you teaching this semester?

RWII: This past semester I taught African American Intellectual History. The course went really well; I had a great semester. I had eight students in my class, which is a good number. It's large enough to spark conversation but small enough to attend to individual

student needs. The course was fantastic because it also helped me to revisit some texts that I had read a long time ago, to rethink through some ideas, you know?

**CFP:** Yeah, I've always enjoyed the processes of redigesting ideas. Sometimes they metabolize a bit differently the second or third time around. I get it. Is UNC at Chapel Hill like U.C. Berkeley? What are some similarities? Differences?

RWII: Well, both institutions are public and so they both carry public school type challenges and opportunities. Students in my classes have vastly different levels of preparedness than one another—the gap can be large. I think UNC at Chapel Hill and U.C. Berkeley also boast a large number of non-traditional students. For example, I had a student in my class last semester that was in his thirties.

**CFP:** What are you teaching this spring?

RWII: This spring I'll be teaching African American History: 1865-Present and Black Intellectuals in the Age of the Internet. One of my interest areas is African American political thought and so I tend to teach courses in line with that, framed around black intellectuals and people in political thought

connected to intellectual history. I will explore the ways in which television and the Internet have reframed political issues and the role of the black intellectual. I ask the question "what does it mean to be a black intellectual today?" I'm excited for that course, and next fall I'll be teaching African American History since Emancipation and African American Politics.

**CFP:** Are you currently working on any research projects?

RWII: Absolutely. I'm in the process of finishing an essay on African American women and U.S. foreign relations. Once that piece is done I'll pick back up on my book project (hopefully in January) called *Black Embassy* which examines the history of the African American foreign policy lobby through Transafrica.

**CFP:** That's sounds great. I remember your dissertation while at U.C. Berkeley was on Transafrica and so I'm glad to see you picking up where you left off. Let me ask you just a few more questions. What are some professional challenges that you've faced as a first year professor?

RWII: Well, I think a lot of first-year difficulties are attributable to the expectations

we set for ourselves. I constantly remind myself that it's okay not to get everything done at once, to pace myself, to appreciate the journey. I'm recognizing that this career isn't a sprint and that it's best to take the "marathon approach" to promotion and tenure. "Nothing is going to happen overnight" is a refrain that I often repeat. I'm also recognizing that I cannot work 24 hours a day and that work-life balance is critical for long-term happiness and professional success.

**CFP: What advice would you give to ABD grad students or those who are currently on the job market?**

RWII: 1) Finish strong! By that I mean do your very best to finish with the highest quality product possible. 2) Be open to where you might end up, geographically or otherwise. This is not a regional occupation. And 3) try not to get discouraged if your job search isn't panning out as you planned. Be open, embrace the unknown, take the long view. Finally, to graduate students I say this: try to look at experiences in their totality. Some months are better than others and that's okay. Keep working hard and leave without regrets; being in African American Studies is an experience you'll be very glad to have had.

## NEW FACULTY PUBLICATIONS





# Meet the New Fall

## Grace Gipson



Grace earned her BA in Psychology and Biology from Clark Atlanta University where she graduated magna cum laude. Grace also received her MA in African American Studies at Georgia State University in May 2013. While at Georgia State, Grace served as a Graduate Representative/Liaison with the College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Council at Georgia State University, a Dr. Tsehloane C. Keto Graduate Student Leader Representative/ Board Member for the National Council of Black Studies, and the Graduate Student Representative for the University Film and Video Association. Her area of research interests include (mis)representations of race and gender within black popular culture specifically in comic books and film, gender and sexuality, and performances of blackness. Throughout her academic career so far, Grace has been published in the *FCH Annals: Journal of the Florida Conference of Historians* (2011); and has a forthcoming chapter on Janelle Monae's blend of black feminism and afrofuturism in an edited anthology *AfroFuturism*. She is also a regular film and pop culture blog contributor for the sites *Black Girl Nerds* and *Medium Rare TV*, as well as her own blog *Black Savant Cinema*. In addition to academic pursuits, Grace enjoys movies, collecting comic books, trying new restaurants, rock climbing, and travelling.

## Mariko Peggs

Thirty-one years after graduating from high school, Mariko earned her A.A. degree magna cum laude from West Los Angeles College in 2009. She transferred to UCLA in 2011, and in 2013, she graduated cum laude with a B.A. in History and a minor in African American Studies. While at UCLA, she worked in the Afrikan Student Union's student-initiated, student-run program called S.H.A.P.E. (Students Heightening Academic Performance Through Education). As a Site Coordinator, she provided tutoring, counseling and mentoring to underrepresented middle and high school students. As a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow she examined the intersectionality of single African American welfare mothers in the Reagan Era and conservative rhetoric that portrayed them as "unAmerican." Through her graduate research, Mariko investigates the impact of public policy as it relates to access within higher education. By deconstructing the dynamics of race and class within education, Mariko seeks to explore the stratification of college opportunity for low-income & first generation African Americans. Furthermore, she is interested in identifying whether college access indicates the trajectory of generational access given other variables related to the marginalization of African Americans in the United States.



# 2013 Graduate Cohort

Gabriel Regalado

Gabriel received his B.A. in Psychology and Pan African Studies from the California State University of Los Angeles in May 2013. Originally from the Philippine Islands, Gabriel migrated to the U.S. at the age of eight and has since lived nomadically throughout various parts of California. He views his intellectual project as two pronged. He is deeply interested in issues of non-western development and how it has been shaped by theories and movements of nationalist resistance to western imperialism. On the other hand, he has a fervent interest in social movements in the United States and how they have transformed the American political architecture while overlapping with the politics of the African Diaspora and "third world" in general. As a community organizer from Los Angeles who is grounded on the dynamic synthesis of scholarship and activism, he is no less concerned with finding transformative ways to engage projects of social change in the local community. Gabriel is currently a first year in the African Diaspora Studies Ph.D. program at the University of California, Berkeley.



Fayia Sellu



Fayia Sellu migrated to the United States from Sierra Leone, where he covered that country's civil war as a journalist, in 2004. He double-majored in both Film Studies and African American and African Studies at the University of California, Davis. His engagement with youth and human rights activism in his native country--with a robust international community presence--and in the West Africa sub-region, arm him with a globalized perspective.

As a McNair Scholar, his work focused on Black representations in popular film, masculinity and hip hop. He also hosts a talk show on Africa and its Diaspora. He comes to our department very invested in theorizing the African Diaspora that he is part of.

Olivia K. Young

Olivia earned her BA in both African American Studies and Sociology from Emory University where she graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2010. Upon graduating she became a member of the International Sociology Honor Society and was selected to Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges for her campus leadership and scholastic achievement. Olivia is currently a first-year doctoral student in the Department of African Diaspora Studies at UC Berkeley where she is interested in exploring the intersection of visual (mis)representation and contemporary articulations of racial ideology. Olivia joined her sister in Berkeley from Cleveland, Ohio after working as a licensed financial representative for three years.





# *Congratulations*

Congratulations to Kia Middleton and Amani Morrison who earned the Masters of Arts Degree December 9, 2013.



*Kia Middleton*



*Amani Morrison*



# *Congratulations*

Dr. Ivy Mills and Sidy Dieng had a baby boy...



Abdou Akim Dieng  
Born: September 27, 2013  
in Berkeley, CA  
Vitals: 7 lb 1 oz, 20.08 inches

# Reflections of a recent graduate of U.C. Berkeley's African American Studies Undergraduate program

By Naomi Mae Wilson



When I first matriculated to UC Berkeley I thought I knew it all, and believed I knew *exactly* what I wanted to do. As most of us eventually discover, our thoughts, ideas, and expressions of who we thought we were often change within the first

semester of college. Berkeley, being the place that it is, forces you to change in ways you never thought imaginable and makes you rethink your major and more importantly, your purpose. The African American Studies department helped me hone in

my passions and what I wanted to do for our world. It sounds cliché and a little farfetched for a department to do such a thing, but if you majored in African American studies at Berkeley you would know exactly what I am describing. The department and its' professors push you beyond your limits and inspire you to find out what you want to do and how you want to do it. Although I am not completely sure what my life will look like post-graduate school, I do have a general idea of where I want to go.

I know that I want to inspire as much as I am inspired. I know that I have to work for my community and use my skills and knowledge to uplift us. I know that the department of African American Studies at Berkeley helped illuminate my path. Once I entered my first class in "Afro" I knew that I had to major in it. Then, when the VèVè Clark Scholars was founded I knew I had to become a part of the cohort. These entities, and the people within, pushed me (quite literally) into my potential. I often doubted myself because I came from a low-income neighborhood and the education was not the best, but the department helped

me believe in myself. They inspired me to see that I was an intellectual and, even more than that, a scholar activist.

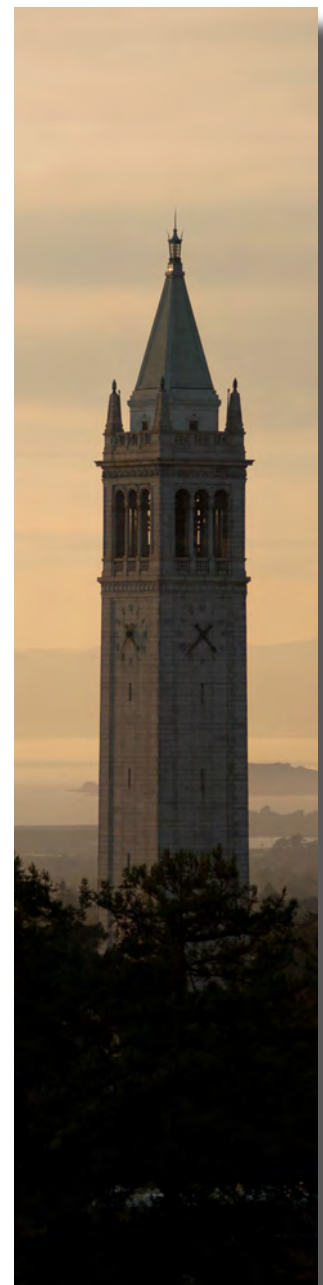
I can remember being in one of the VèVè Clark cohort meetings going over a piece by VèVè herself. If it is not known, she is an amazingly intelligent and yet challenging theorist to read. Her piece had all of the scholars astounded by her theories and the ways in which she framed them. I remember walking into the meeting, not quite sure if I understood everything I read, but knowing that I discovered something in her work. In her article, I was able to embark upon my own ideologies and founded a new framework for myself. Not that I can remember it today, but I remember the *feeling*. I felt as though I was an actual scholar and the support of the program gave me the impetus to explore my theories further. We all sat around the table and discussed the ways in which we felt and how we all wanted to grow in our own intellectual paths. It was from that one meeting that I knew one day I would pursue a PH.D. I never considered the doctorate route before, but once in the department and involved in groups such as VèVè Clark, I founded a new dream of mine.

These anecdotes I have written about in my many experiences with the department

have undergirded my confidence and success within graduate school today. **I am now a first year Master's student at New York University studying educational leadership, in part, because of the African American Studies Department at Berkeley.** Due to the professors believing in me, challenging me, and encouraging me, I was able to apply into one of the top graduate schools in education and get accepted. Moreover, writing an undergraduate thesis in African American Studies helped me to develop research method skills. Due to this training, I am ahead of a lot of my peers, and am currently working on an independent research project with my professor that will be used by the New York Department of Education. I am also the youngest scholar in my program. My department does not typically accept students straight from undergrad, but because of my experiences and my work within the major they accepted me as the youngest in the cohort.

My accomplishments would not be as great if it were not for the Department. Yes, I participated in a lot of extracurricular activities, but my academics prepared me for my graduate study. I no longer feel as though I have not been prepared because my work within African American studies has equipped me to become a

graduate student. The papers we have to write, and the research we have to conduct, are the exact same types of tasks that graduate school calls demands. If you ever thought that African American Studies can not get you anywhere... well then you just have not visited, taken a class, or majored in my African American Studies Department at UC Berkeley.





## Fall 2013 Department of African Diaspora Studies Speaker Series

By: Grace D. Gipson

What do “sugar” and “armed resistance in Mississippi” have in common? These would be the two highlighting themes of the Fall 2013 African Diaspora Speaker Series. Part of the mission of the speaker series is to facilitate dialogue on various issues and topics of interest to the African diaspora. The speaker series is open to all UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff, and the general public.

The first talk took place on November 12 with historian, professor, and organizer, Akinyele Umoja, from Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA discussing his groundbreaking book, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement*. In his lecture, Dr. Umoja examined how armed resistance, particularly self-defense during the early 1950s through the late 1970s, was a significant factor in the challenge of the descendants of enslaved Africans to overturning fear and intimidation and developing different political and social relationships between Black and White Mississippians. Through the use of oral history, archival material, and scholarly literature

Umoja’s historical narrative shows armed resistance was used as a tool to challenge racist terrorism, segregation, and fight for human rights and political empowerment. This talk was in joint collaboration with UC Berkeley’s History department.



(l-r Charisse Burden-Stelly, Professor Ula Taylor, Grace Gipson,  
seated Dr. Akinyele Umoja)

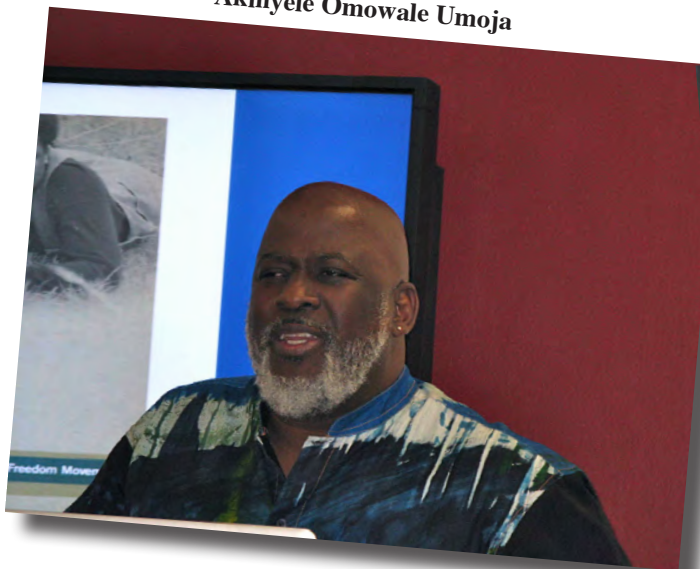
As part of the UC Regents Lecture series and in collaboration with Department of Dutch Studies our second speaker was Black Surinamese writer and activist Cynthia McLeod. The daughter of the first democratically elected president of Suriname, Johan Ferrier, Cynthia McLeod spoke about her award-winning novel, *The Cost of Sugar*. This candid exposé tells the story of life in the Dutch slave colony of Suriname when sugar ruled as king - and the tragic toll it took on the lives of colonists and slaves alike. With the success of her book *The Cost of Sugar*, it became a “main gateway” to literature in Surinamese schools. In addition to her talk, McLeod presented the audience with the trailer of the forthcoming film based on her novel.



(first row l-r Amani Morrison, Charisse Burden, Professor Na'ilah Suad-Nasir, Professor Leigh Raiford, Kathryn Benjamin, Cynthia McLeod's son  
seated l-r Grace Gipson and Cynthia McLeod)

Both speakers were a true delight to the department as well as the university. The success of this year's speaker series would not have happened without the assistance of our wonderful African Diaspora Studies department, the students, and this year's co-chairs Charisse Burden-Stelly and Grace Gipson.

Akinyele Omowale Umoja



Cynthia McLeod





# ASALH, 2013

Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference  
by Charisse Burden

The 2013 Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference, held in Jacksonville, FL from October 2-6, 2013, was the organization's largest in nearly thirty years. This year's theme was "At the Crossroads of Freedom and Equality: The Emancipation Proclamation and the March on Washington," and many distinguished scholars and burgeoning intellectuals who study the African American experience were in attendance to share their work and research. Several students from the African Diaspora Studies department at UC Berkeley presented interesting and engaging papers on three distinct panels organized by Dr. Ula Taylor. Aside from scholastic engagement, the ASALH conference provided a space for fellowship, socializing, networking, and professional development.



(pictured l-r Ianna Hawkins Owen, Mario Nisbett, Charisse Burden, Professor Lia Bascomb, and Ameer Loggins)

The first panel, comprised exclusively of past and present Department graduate students, was entitled "New Direction in African Diaspora Theory," and included presentations from Mario Nisbett, Ameer Loggins, Ianna Hawkins Owen, and Charisse Burden. Professor Lia Boscomb, a recent alumna and new professor at Georgia State University, served

as the chair. Paper themes included Jamaican maroons and their contribution to conceptualizing Diaspora; theorizing Diaspora as a carceral class; Diaspora as loss; and re-centering political economy and critiquing the cultural turn in Diaspora theory. The next panel of Department graduate students, entitled "Commodification and Cultural Representations of Blackness," included Jasminder Kaur, whose presentation was named "Spectacular visualization of abjection: The critical practices of diaspora and queer;" Kimberly McNair who presented on protest, performance, and the commodification of radical icons in Black T-shirt culture; and Christina Bush who presented on the marketing of Black masculine rebellion, using the Air Jordan Banned sneaker as a lens. The



(pictured l-r Kimberly McNair, Jasminder Kaur, Christina Bush, and Dr. Brittney Cooper)



chair for this panel was the Crunk Feminist Collective's Dr. Brittany Cooper. Finally, Jarvis Givens and Shaun Ossei-Owusu made up the third Berkeley panel, "Education and Social Movements: African American Educational Thought and the Black Freedom Struggle," chaired by the prodigious Dr. Gerald Horne. Jarvis offered insight into schooling and the African Diaspora while Shaun's presentation focused on legal advice columns in the *Chicago Defender* from 1914-1917 as a means for Blacks to get civic lessons and advice about the law. Also presenting at the conference outside of the aforementioned panels were U.C. Berkeley graduates Dr. Jessyka Finley and Dr. Ronald Williams III.

In addition to the impressive scholarship emanating from the Department, the ASALH conference also provided a panoply of exceptional research on topics including new negro culture and identity; organizing black power on the campus and in the community; God-politics and civil rights; Black club women and the struggle for human rights; and Black feminist thought in hypertext. Other remarkable events included a brownbag lunch with graduate students and junior faculty hosted by Dr. Darlene Clark Hine of Northwestern University and Dr. John H. Bracey of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; a heartwarming session commemorating the contributions

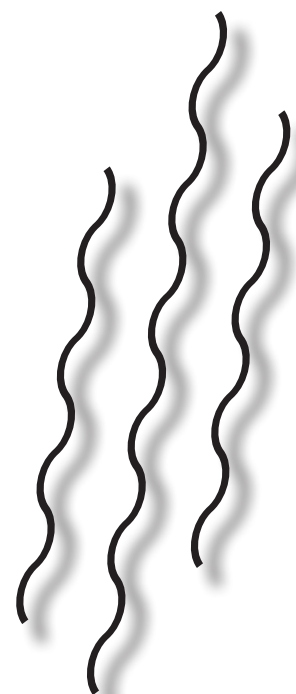


(pictured l-r Prof. Ronald Williams, Charisse Burden, Prof. Ula Taylor, Ameer Loggins, Kimberly McNair, Mario Nisbett, Ianna Hawkins Owen, Jasminder Kaur, Christina Bush, and Jarvis Givens)

of Dr. John H. Bracey to the field of African America Studies; and, notably, a viewing party for ABC's popular political thriller *Scandal*. Current and past graduate students from the Department also got a change to socialize and engage in convivial exchange at a lovely brunch organized by Dr. Taylor.

The 2013 ASALH conference proved to be both intellectually enriching and socially fulfilling. Through intellectual exchange and communal consorting, scholars of all levels and interests were able to build networks, strengthen research, and gather tools essential for a sustained interrogation of the Black experience.

ASALH



# Critical Mass in Black Sexualities Research

Ianna Hawkins Owen

The African Diaspora Studies program of UC Berkeley represented in force at the **Black Sexual Economies** conference held at Washington University Law at St. Louis during September 27-28, 2013. The BSE Project is part of WUSTL's Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Work and Social Capital. The first session of the BSE Project convened in May 2010.

Past and present members of U.C. Berkeley's Diaspora program delivered individual and collaborative papers on topics ranging from critiques of feminist new materialism to the branding of the Barbados. Assistant Professor of Women's Studies at Penn State University, **Ariane Cruz** (class of 2010), spoke on "Playin' Race: Race Play, Black Women and BDSM" and Spring 2013 graduate **Lia Bascomb**, now Assistant Professor of African American Studies at Georgia State University, delivered a paper titled "Barbadian Sexualities: Sex, Popular Culture, and Representation of the Nation." Carter Woodson postdoctoral fellow at University of Virginia **Zakiyyah Iman Jackson** (class of 2012) delivered "Organ(ic) Matters, Genealogical Mutations: The Art of Wangechi Mutu" on a panel shared with current graduate student **Ianna Hawkins Owen** who



(pictured l-r Prof. Xavier Livermon, Prof. Ariane Cruz, Dr. Zakiyyah Jackson, Prof. Lia Bascomb, Prof. Matt Richardson, Ianna Hawkins Owen, and Prof. Marlon Bailey)

offered a paper titled, "Searching for the Black Asexual." Our own Associate Professor **Darieck Scott** delivered a talk on "Big Black Beauty: Black Male Figures in Gay Erotic Comics" with critical close readings of page borders.

**Matt Richardson** (class of 2005), Associate Professor of English and African and African Diaspora Studies at UT Austin, and **Marlon M. Bailey** (class of 2005), Associate Professor of Gender and American Studies at IU Bloomington, collaborated on "Why Keep on Trippin'? Queers are the Future: Constructing Blackness, Regulating Gender" with commentator E. Patrick Johnson. The audience was even treated to a bit of a cappella. **Xavier Livermon** (class of 2006), recently hired as an Assistant Professor of African and African Diaspora Studies at

UT Austin, collaborated with conference co-convenor Mireille Miller-Young on "Black Stud, White Desire: Black Masculinity in Cuckold Pornography and Sex Work," receiving comments from Dwight McBride.

Alumni also arranged dialogues on teaching and research methods, allowing attendees to share strategies and professional guidance. **Matt** engaged LaMonda Horton-Stallings and Jeffrey McCune on the subject of "Black Sexualities Pedagogies," while **Xavier** spoke with Felice Blake on "Creating a Black Sexualities Syllabus." And finally, **Marlon** and Mireille discussed "Black Sexualities Research Methods: Archives and Ethnography."

Alumni enthusiastically attended each other's panels, offering encouraging and challenging feedback from the stand-out critical dispositions cultivated by the department. The Diaspora program's role in shaping the future of black sexualities research couldn't have been made any clearer.



## Editor's Note



I'm pleased to introduce to you the most recent issue of *The Diaspora*, our semi-annual newsletter. In this edition you'll find a cornucopia of imaginative articles, profiles, vignettes, reflections, musings, and poetry written by past and present members of our departmental community here at U.C. Berkeley.

The theme of "transitions" best reflects the collection of work in this issue of *The Diaspora*. As our department takes both projected and unanticipated twists and turns we remain tethered to the ideals of fortitude *and* flexibility that have brought us this far. Work appearing in this edition of *The Diaspora* embodies the Department's commitment to producing politically-relevant, socially informed, ethical, and

emancipatory scholarships with manifold applications.

At both the undergraduate and graduate level, the Department of African American Studies at U.C. Berkeley is best characterized as an experience in calisthenics. In multifarious ways the Department teaches us—its students—how to bend, how to stretch, and how to reach.

Having spent nearly five years in the Department as a doctoral student I'm convinced that African American Studies is fundamentally about learning through reaching, and reaching in three directions: in, out, and up.

Opportunities for in-reach allow us to create, test, circulate, and revise our core values in an unpredictable—and often unjust—world. Questions with first-order ethical implications—What does it mean to be Black? Human? American?—foundationalize our shared inquiry. Our Department also prioritizes out-reach, as it helps to cultivate and fortify our passion for bridging the chasm between scholarship and solidarity, between the seminar and the streets. And finally, up-reach reminds us of the importance of pursuing causes greater than ourselves and our own sub-disciplinary interventions.

Poet, philosopher, and Civil Rights activist, Howard Thurman once wrote, "Don't ask yourself

what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Our Department embodies Thurman's call to come alive, to come alive in scholarship, activism, and service. My modest hope is that you'll find the intersection of these themes reflected time and again as you leaf through the pages of *The Diaspora*.

On a more personal note I'd like to take one final opportunity to thank the Department of African American Studies—my colleagues, friends, and advisors—for your love and support throughout this journey. I will not soon forget your kindness, generosity, and your unflagging faith in the notion that a better world is possible. **One Love.**

*Christopher Petrella is a candidate in UC Berkeley's African Diaspora Ph.D. program.*

