

# THE DIASPORA

Department of African American Studies • University of California, Berkeley



Spring-Summer 2014

Through the Muck and Mire

Practicing Vulnerability

One Proud Mom...



## 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

## Lessons from Maya Angelou

I've been thinking a lot about Maya Angelou since her passing. We have lost many leaders and cultural icons this year—Amiri Baraka, Ruby Dee, and Nelson Mandela, to name just a few. But Maya's passing struck me in a very special way. I mourned as if I had known her myself, and it was occasion to reflect on all that she taught me. It is inappropriate, perhaps to say that she taught me when I never knew her, but she did; in part because she chose to be a teacher and a leader for an entire generation. She led by loving herself and loving others.

I read every one of the books in her autobiographical series when I was a teenager. Her words and her life made an indelible impression on me, even before I understood that I was crafting myself and my sense of Black womanhood. I resonated with the way that she took on the world heart first, the way that she gave voice to her triumphs, but also to her disappointments and failures, and I found peace in her strength. This may be hard to believe when you read my academic writing now, but there was a time when I imagined myself to be a poet, to spin worlds of beauty that reflected upon life. As a teenager and young adult, I wrote poetry and I modeled my work after Maya Angelou and June Jordan and Nikki Giovanni. As I grew older, and made my way through college and the PhD, I stopped writing poetry (and for that matter, even reading fiction). But what stayed with me was the inspirational example of such powerful and self-assured Black women. I did not have grandmothers who I was close to, or that I saw as an inspiration,

and Maya became that for me. She was someone that folks my age could look up to, could aspire to be, could find a future self in the image of. I can't really articulate what it meant to have found such a model in her, nor what it means to lose her.

But I will try to do so, as I take a moment to share with you the lessons that I learned from Maya, and to reflect a bit on her example, on her spirit, and on what she represented for me, and for countless others.

### **Lesson 1:**

***Don't be defined by your mistakes.***

Maya made mistakes. Lots of them. She had a child out of wedlock. She was a sex worker. She was married at least three times. She was fully human. To have made mistakes is perhaps not at all extraordinary—in fact it is the very definition of ordinary. What is extraordinary is that she claimed them as a part of her legacy. That she stated them to the world, matter-of-factly and without shame. And in doing so, she taught me that one did not need to be perfect to be valuable. Despite the errors and missteps and at times downright stupidity, I still had a contribution to make, even when I failed. Part of this lesson was about not being defined by others—not taking external definitions of success at face value. The journey is one's own, distinct from anyone else's.

### **Lesson 2:**

***Live. Unapologetically.***

Maya embraced life fully, packing in a multitude of experiences and adventures into one lifetime. Our time in any life phase is short; Maya was an example of fully being wherever you are. This also meant fully engaging the political and



social struggles of the day; she sat with Martin and Malcolm, and stood up and engaged with the struggle for civil rights for African American people. She danced and sang and prepared beautiful food and shared it with others. She experienced heartache and motherhood. She loved. She engaged the world with an open heart, finding the courage to love in her personal life and as a cultural icon. She modeled for us that tragedy and sadness happen, but we still can live with open minds and hearts.

### **Lesson 3:**

***See everyday as a day to practice being more in line with your spirit.***

Maya's ability to move past pain and disappointment, to transcend the woes of daily life, was facilitated by her deep faith in a God that much bigger than her. Academics often don't like to talk about God, because we fear being in deference to the imagined, and we fear that it diminishes us. But for Maya a belief in God made her stronger, bigger, more fierce, more committed. Because she saw the light of God shining in herself and in others. And for me, in times when fear threatens to take over, I can remember that my journey here is not about whether

I look good to others, but rather is about the path that my spirit is on to give, to grow, and to leave this place wiser and more open that when it arrived. The goal from that perspective then, is to let this place called earth break us until we open to our external and internal destinies of greatness.

#### **Lesson 4:**

#### ***Lead with love.***

Maya was a leader. Not because she was an award-winning poet and writer, nor because, she gave talks all over the world, or because she had a radio show, or because she participated in protests and movements. She was a leader because she chose to give. What struck me at her funeral was the number of grown people, even famous grown people—Michele Obama and Oprah Winfrey and Bill Clinton-- that identified her as a mother, as a grandmother, as an auntie, as a sister. Being mother/grandmother/sister/auntie to so many must have been incredibly taxing. Mothering is a largely unidirectional relationship. But Maya gave so that those folks could give their gifts to the world more fully. She chose to mother an entire generation, encouraging us to live the best version of us, to find our own internal rhythm, to find and support the best in others.

Part of what it means to lose Maya is to realize that the generation before us has done their work; and this it is time to do ours. She has passed the torch, and there is something gravely important about realizing that we are ready, that it is time for us to step up and not only embrace the responsibility, but to relish in the chance to grow our hearts, and to do the work we were born to do.



## Reflections on Tavis Smiley's Contribution to the Renaissance Gala

by Jared Brown



This year the UC Berkeley Department of African American Studies hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Renaissance Gala. Distinguished guests, including renowned journalist, political commentator, and best-selling author Tavis Smiley, were honored for their commitment to community development and transformative change. Mr. Smiley traveled from Los Angeles to attend the Gala and he arrived a day early to engage in an informal discussion with students. He opened the discussion by asking, "What is leadership?"

The key takeaway from the discussion was that leadership is service to others and that service to others is love in action. Mr. Smiley concluded by saying that a purposeful life is achieved when a person's talents and gifts are used to meet the needs of others and to co-create a more just world. The discussion was personally a reminder of why I'm pursuing a PhD in African American

Studies. It encouraged me to reflect on the words of Carter G. Woodson, who concurred more than 80 years ago that "if we can succeed in translating the idea of leadership into that of service, we may soon find it possible to lift the Negro to higher levels."<sup>1</sup>

I left the discussion feeling energized and committed to sharing the knowledge that I'm acquiring, and to addressing the socio-economic and political realities of blacks in the United States and across the Diaspora. I share this commitment with the students who demanded Black Studies more than forty years ago, with thousands of others who have received formal or informal training in the discipline, and with countless men and women who have committed, in both big and small ways, to the humble work of public service.

<sup>1</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro* (Trenton, N.J. : Africa World Press, 1990), 90.



# Through the Muck and Mire

## Excavating the Living History of the Great Dismal Swamp

by Kathryn Benjamin



Digging through the muck and mire of southeastern swampland, a great deal more than the physical artifacts maroons and their communities left behind are excavated and brought to life. Quite literally, getting your hands dirty digging, sifting, and searching for traces of the dead and the lives they created in the heart of a swamp unearths a wealth of information about the ways black people asserted their freedom and struggled to survive in the midst of American slavery. But digging through the muck and mire is also a labor that means dirtying your hands in the difficult terrain of race, place, and memory. Here, discourses about the past that are colored by race and racism influence the ways living descendants of a people once enslaved perceive of themselves and their places in the world around them. Digging, sifting, and searching here excavates memories of the buried history and heritage of black agency, resistance, and marronage and the stakes

remembering or forgetting has on local, regional, and national identity. A story is unearthed – but not just a story about the United States maroons. Digging here excavates the living history of black agency, community, creativity, survival, and resilience. It is a story about how both the burial and uncovering of the social history of a swamp shapes memory, and how this in turn influences local identity in the swamp communities.

The Great Dismal Swamp, a huge morass of swampland straddling the eastern seaboard of Virginia and North Carolina, served as a haven for at least two thousand black men, women, and children from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the Civil War. These maroons, those who took flight from enslavement and created new lives in the refuge of the swamp's interior, established communities within the swamp that defied dominant slaveholding society and its notions of black humanity and self-determination.

American University historical archaeologist Dan Sayers sparked national attention to the swamp and its human history for what is perhaps the first time in U.S. history. Dr. Sayers and his team of archaeologists excavated features of several structures (likely cabins) thought to have sheltered and protected the maroons. Additionally, they have unearthed various other artifacts dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, all found on one of the most remote and elevated mesic islands in the heart of the swamp. These include knife blades, a few British gunflints, iron nails, clay tobacco pipes, and strong soil evidence of a controlled fire pit.

As a participating graduate researcher in Dr. Sayers' 5<sup>th</sup> annual Great Dismal Swamp Archaeology Field School, I was witness to the excavation of some of these archaeological swamp findings. The experience also afforded me the inimitable experience of actually traversing through the mud, the muck, the snake and mosquito infested waters, and the overwhelmingly thick underbrush of the Great Dismal to attempt to understand more fully the experiences of the maroons. What did survival require for those in flight from enslavement seeking refuge in and about the swamp? And what kind of experiences could the enslaved in the Dismal Swamp counties have suffered to motivate them to consider this swampland, once ten times larger, deeper, and more treacherous before 18<sup>th</sup> c. canal draining, preferable to life on the plantation?

Since, I have been invited to serve as a graduate researcher on the Department of Anthropology at American University and the National Endowment for Humanities

Dismal Swamp Landscape Study under the direction of Dr. Sayers. Begun in 2002, this study is an interdisciplinary research project composed of several scholars from around the U.S. focusing on the recovery of the social history of the swamp and its importance to contemporary people or communities located in the greater swamp region. I quickly learned that my contribution to the project meant traversing another kind of muck and mire. This time, I was to dig for knowledge and memory about the Great Dismal as I navigated the metaphorical swamp of race and racism tangled with silences about the past, erasures of black historical contributions inscribed in the very land the communities I was to work with live, widespread social forgetting about the extent of black survival and resiliency of past and present, and various forms of individual and group identification that result.

My task was to speak with and interview community members in several of the Dismal Swamp counties to find out how the human history of the swamp and marronage in particular lives today. How are the swamp's histories commemorated, remembered, or forgotten? My objective was to survey local understandings about the swamp in order to assess the social consequences of archival, institutional, and discursive practices of representation and to begin to fill in the silences and gaps surrounding these histories with any surviving oral history, local memory, or folklore that may exist. I was particularly interested in the ways in which local black communities, most of whom continue to suffer from the consequences of slavery in terms of poverty and inequitable opportunity, think about and identify with the swamp and the histories of their

ancestors' tremendous freedom struggle and resilience in and around the Great Dismal.

I met Charlene Christian-Andrews who grew up right next to the swamp a block away from White Marsh Road, the main road to the only entrance to the swamp, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge, on the Virginia side. Charlene shared that as a child her mother would not allow her to play in the swamp, but that she and her friends would do so anyway. She explained that her mother viewed the swamp as a dangerous wilderness to avoid. Booker T. Washington school, the oldest black school in the area still standing and functioning since segregation, is located directly across the street from Charlene's mother's house, the house she grew up in. The school was the entry point

belonged and was supposed to be, but the swamp which was spatially so closely connected to the school was a forbidden space that symbolized backwardness and stood as an antithesis to upward mobility. In this way and in the context of segregation, the school, which practically sat atop the swamp, and the swamp itself were both racialized spaces of blackness. The swamp was seen as cultivating backward blackness and perhaps defiance or resistance against staying in one's place while the school afforded blacks social currency, opportunity, and was understood as a place of black pride. Prior to our conversation, Charlene, like most, was unaware of any "runaway slaves" moving in and through the swamp, and did not know that any black people



by which she would enter pockets of the outskirts of the Dismal Swamp that were located behind it heading toward White Marsh Road. Charlene made associations between the racialized space of the segregated school and the swamp itself – the school was where she

had made a home or community within the swamp. She did not understand the swamp as a locus of black freedom struggle and creative survival and therefore was unable to view it as a space that she could derive pride or a richer sense of her own identity. But she was able to



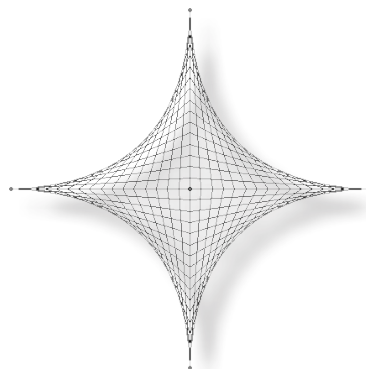
impart a great knowledge about the muddled and difficult nature of the relationships between race, place, memory, and identification.

I also had the pleasure of meeting Dolly Williams, a rebellious and honest spirit who spoke passionately and with great conviction about the injustices and racisms she witnessed and experienced throughout her 73 years. Born to sharecroppers in Holland, VA, she recalled that her father used to tell her, “Don’t be going in the dismal,” because, she explained, black people were getting killed there. Dolly shared that she used to spy and eavesdrop with her siblings on conversations her father would have with “the white man,” and explained that that is how she discovered that her father, who she called an “uncle tom,” did white peoples’ “dirty work.” She said, “he helped white folks fill the holes in the swamp from buried bodies... in order to stay in good favor, because he did everything the white man asked him to do.” These bodies were black people who had been killed in the Jim Crow period, she explained. For Dolly, the first time she understood the roles black people played in and about the Dismal Swamp was in this context of white violence and black suffering and death, or as the case of her own father would indicate, in the context of the threat of white violence, black suffering, death and the will to survive.

Dolly also recalls a wealth of stories her mother, born into slavery, told her about the Underground Railroad and black resistance in the area during slavery. She said that her grandmother recalled that their master “buried 2 or 3 people in the swamp,” “dumped them” for trying to run away. Here, she explains that the swamp was used and understood as a wasteland or dumping ground for devalued black bodies, but also as a space that black people have historically understood as a place

of resistance and as a pathway to greater assertion of agency, independence, and freedom.

Dolly also tells the story of one Hezekiah Johnson, an old man when she was in her 20’s, who told her how he had survived in the swamp during the times of slavery. Hezekiah and his uncle would hide in a tree at night where they had made a bed he described as a “cocoon” and would walk about the swamp and pillage and gather to survive. She explains that this story sparked her interest to understand the social history of the Dismal Swamp, and motivated her decision to collect various local newspaper clippings related to slavery, flight, and marronage in and through the swamp. Interestingly, Dolly has fished in the swamp and visited the Fish and Wildlife Refuge for purposes of recreation. She said, “White people think they own the swamp,” as she explained her views on who lays claim to both the physical swamp and its greater historical and social significance. Her words and stories lend important knowledge about the mired terrain of ownership, representation of the past, memory, race, place, and belonging but also stand as testimony to the possibilities for excavating and unearthing new ways of knowing and remembering the swamp’s past in the present.





## “I stared down a bare-breasted young girl”: The male gaze, lactating women and Othering in Richard Wright’s *Black Power*

*Editor’s note: The following is a transcript of a paper presented by Selina Makana at the 22nd Annual St. Clair Drake Research Symposium*

I begin this presentation with some early representations of African women in during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, including fragment of quotes from Richard Wright’s travelogue *Black Power* (published in 1954):

“...their breasts hang down below their Navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost to the ground, that at a distance you would think they had six legs.”<sup>1</sup>

“admired the quietness of the poor babes, so carr’d about at their mothers’ backs . . . and how freely they suck the breasts, which are always full of milk, over their mothers’ shoulders...”<sup>2</sup>

“the bus stopped and I stared down a bare breasted young girl who held a huge pan of oranges perched atop her head. She saw me studying her and she smiled shyly, obviously accepting her semi-nudity as being normal. My eyes went over the crowd and I noticed that most of the older women had breasts that were flat and remarkably

elongated, some reaching twelve or eighteen inches..., hanging loosely and flapping as the women moved about.”<sup>3</sup>

“most of the women not only carried the inevitable baby strapped to their backs, but also a burden on top of their heads, and a bundle in each hand...coming toward me was a woman nursing a baby that was still strapped to her back; the baby’s head was thrust under the woman’s arm and the woman had given the child the long, fleshy, tube like teat and it was suckling. (There are women with breasts so long that they do not bother to give the baby the teat in front of them, but simply toss it over the shoulder to the child on their back...)”<sup>4</sup>

“A fat woman sat nursing a baby at her right breast while she idly and unconsciously, staring off into space, toyed with the teat of her left breast with fingers of her left hand.”<sup>5</sup>

The above quotes from Richard Wright’s 1954 travelogue *Black Power* are just a few examples of and from a larger narrative and long history of the humiliating ways in which black female bodies were perceived in the West. Like most travellers to the continent in prior centuries, Wright carried with him images of the black female body as not only naked, but also a dark, voluptuous body of taboo and excess. Indeed, for centuries, African women have been visually, textually, and verbally trapped in the aesthetic primitivism of Western photographers, literary artists and anthropologists. In *Eating the Black Body: Miscegenation as Sexual Consumption in African American Literature and Culture*

(2006), van Thompson reminds us that historically, black women and their breasts and other parts of their bodies have always been available for consumption by western males, particularly white males. He further notes that black bodies, more specifically black female breasts, have been sucked and milked dry by the greed of white males in their journey to amassing tremendous wealth. So what questions can we draw from these hegemonic graphic representations? A response to this question begs further questions: a) What makes an African, at least in the western imagination? b) What does it mean that iconographies of African women carrying children on their backs, women breastfeeding their sons while balancing pots on their heads, half-naked, fertile women with their hands in water or mud, and pounding *fufu*, continue to dominate every anthropological study and literary imagination of the West even in the twenty-first century?

In thinking through these questions I invite us to ponder ways in which the dark black skin female body continues to be presented as a hyper-racialized, hyper-sexualized and gendered Other; and how this repetition simultaneously reinforces White supremacist ideologies about black womanhood. Through these half-naked maternal figures of lactating women presented to us in *Black Power*, I hope to open a dialogue on the centrality of the dark black skin female body as the ultimate site of desire, and racial and sexual difference. I posit that Wright’s othering of the African and his fascination with bare and long breasted women is an example of how African women “under Western eyes” (to borrow Chandra Mohanty’s

1 Some twenty years after the first Englishmen arrived and settled in the Caribbean island of Barbados in 1627, Richard Ligon made this observation of the African female slaves on the island. See Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*, 1657

2 This description appears in John Barbot’s travel writing. The Frenchman wrote his travelogue after taking two slaving voyages to West Africa with the aim of educating his readers on the ‘proper’ way of trading with Africans without being ‘cheated.’ See John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South-Guinea*, 1732

3 Richard Wright, *Black Power*, p. 42

4 Ibid, p. 53

5 Ibid, p. 75

phrase) are entities perceived exclusively through the viewpoint of the desire and/or disgust of their corporeality. Through a postcolonial feminist critique of the historical misrepresentation of the black female body in Western cultural imagination, I argue that Wright's narrative perpetuates the colonial ideologies that coordinated the voyeuristic representations of the African female as both inherently primitive-and-sexually-available. In her essay on "Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling images" Patricia Hill Collins, states that stereotypical or "controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of social injustices appear to be natural, normal and inevitable part of everyday life" (1999:77). Like Sarah Baartman's body, known to the Western literary imagination as the Hottentot Venus, which was trapped in the white European male gaze, Wright turns the "half-naked, long-breasted women" of the Gold Coast into objects of curiosity and knowledge. Wright's visual depictions of the woman conveniently play into the stereotype of the highly sexualized colonized woman who poses a threat to the Western male. The emphasis on the semi-nakedness of these women underscores the violence enacted on black women's bodies in Africa and its diaspora by the Western male gaze. Film theorist Laura Mulvey in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' defines this "male gaze" as the way in which women are relegated to the status of erotic objects. She further argues that this 'male gaze' reduces women to passive objects for male fetishistic gazing and desire. While men become active agents.<sup>6</sup> As

6 In addition, Mulvey views this idea of 'pleasure in looking' wherein the image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man, as serving the ideology of the patriarchy.

possessors of the gaze, these men are representatives of power. It is curious that throughout his encounters with the locals, Wright hardly gives voice to the people. Rather, he lets the images of the "tribal" and "child-like" Africans he records be open to multiple mis/interpretations. The maternal bodies and semi-naked women he is fixated on lack the power to capture their own words, remain speechless. He takes pictures but rarely listens to those voices he came to record. Nor does he interrogate the smiles of the bare breasted girls who shyly try to avoid his gaze. Isn't this gaze on the African other not, as Foucault observes, a structure of domination or a technology of modern power (1979:136)?

Of course, there is a difference in contemporary Western imagination between the proudly dark black skin female body (of let's say supermodel Alek Wek and/or actress Lupita Nyong'o), Wright's bare-breasted women of Accra, and the victimized and dehumanized Baartman. Nonetheless, all these women's bodies are trapped under the western and patriarchal gaze in which they are both objectified and—albeit in different ways—oppressed through the processes of racialization, eroticization and exoticization. Hence, reducing them to spectacles of the voyeuristic western male gaze.

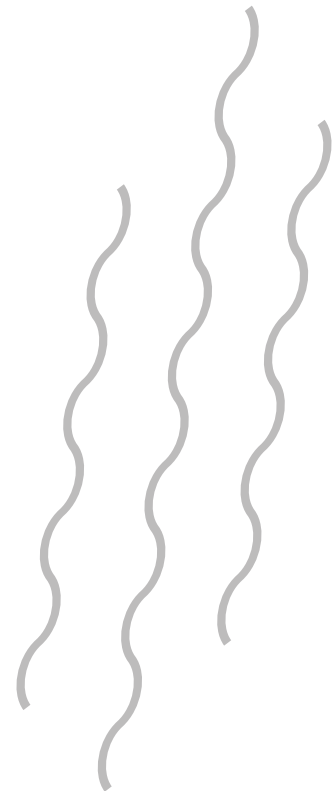
In conclusion, what Wright's narrative demonstrates is the extent to which the West fails to see Africa. In fact the following satirical words of the Kenyan literary critic, Binyavanga Wainaina, serve as a reminder that Africa and its dark bodies will remain the absolute other in the Western imagination.

Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must

include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.

Describe, in detail, naked breasts (young, old, conservative, recently raped, big, small) or mutilated genitals, or enhanced genitals. Or any kind of genitals. And dead bodies. Or, better, naked dead bodies. And especially rotting naked dead bodies. Remember, any work you submit in which people look filthy and miserable will be referred to as the 'real Africa', and you want that on your dust jacket. Do not feel queasy about this: you are trying to help them to get aid from the West. The biggest taboo in writing about Africa is to describe or show dead or suffering white people.<sup>7</sup>

7 Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write About Africa", *Granta* 92, Winter 2005.





# Practicing Vulnerability: The Conference Experience

by Kianna M. Middleton

Aside from the tease of spring weather and summer rest, the beginning of May brought the refreshment of intimate conference spaces. I first attended and presented at the University of California, San Diego's annual graduate student conference, "f/a/q: A Salon Series on Feminist and Queer of Color Critique." And the next week I attended our department's 22<sup>nd</sup> annual St. Clair Drake research symposium entitled, "Finding a Way In(terdisciplinarily): (Re)searching for Meaning in the African Diaspora."

My conference reflections are driven by a few words on vulnerability that Professor Sharon Patricia Holland (UNC Chapel Hill) gave as a keynote to the f/a/q conference. She pined that black vulnerability is caught up in a variety of restrictive mechanisms and that rarely are we allowed to choose vulnerability for ourselves. She interrogated the academy as a place where investments in blackness as static keeps us vulnerable and closed off from the dynamisms of black life—gender, sexuality, and intimacy included. And it is here that I find the moments of connection between the conferences: vulnerability and intimacy. Though f/a/q provided a space to specifically address queer of color subjectivities in the academy and the Drake encompassed a variety of diasporic positionalities, both welcomed interdisciplinary methodologies and vulnerable (re)tellings of those whom we identify as and speak alongside of.

At f/a/q, feminisms of color were put into beautiful conversation as projects on Native feminism, self-determination, and settler colonialism sat side by side a project

combining the Middle Passage, Oceanic and Maritime Studies, and the lives of Black women at sea. If anything, feminisms of color were explored for their durability and constant motion. Black feminist praxis underlined many Drake presentations as well. Grace Gipson introduced the audience to the cool fluidity of Janelle Monáe's music, lyrics, and album visuals to express that there is so much to experience when the convergence of black gender, sexuality, race, and music occur. Gipson holds Monáe as embodying a revolutionarily audible position as an afro-futuristic being, moving against static notions of identity with style. Selina Makana presented the sexist objectification of African women's bodies by the late African American intellectual and writer Richard Wright. Makana reminded us that language can be a tool of violence and colonization even when wielded by the oppressed. Mariko Pegs, likewise, shared the testimonies of black mothers who were welfare (CalWORKs) recipients and students. The women Pegs interviewed claimed that language, again as violent and blanketing, reinscribed racist and sexist claims based on assumptions about welfare. What Pegs sought, then, was ways of undoing the harmful welfare narrative and ways of sharing the structural challenges that some black mothers in higher education face.

From black motherhood to black childhood these conferences centered particular life stages as intimately bound to theoretical and educational production and control. Specifically, black girls and the search or recovery of black girlhood was a crossover theme. A f/a/q presenter argued that what

black feminism often fails to do is recognize black girls, the diversity of girls, and black girl knowledges as critical components of black female survival, empowerment, and artistic production. Her genealogy of black female poetics developed a vulnerable archive of black childhood to let the girls themselves speak and reimagine a space of black childhood that is so often denied. And at the Drake, Kenly Brown centered the classroom as a space of disproportionate discipline, violence, and erasure for African American girls. *Adultification*, Brown cited, may be an appropriate way to describe the impact of adult responsibility and reprimand on black girls. Both of these projects question the educational system broadly as a space that loses black girls and black girlhood.

To some extent, equitable classrooms begin with liberatory pedagogical interaction and vulnerable teachers. Jarvis Givens presented the narrative of Mrs. Paige, a black woman who dedicated her life to educating black children about their history. Mrs. Paige's pedagogical strategies based on communal empowerment and lived knowledges from the segregated South gave generations of black students tools for understanding their connections to history and their role in the present as part of that history. Likewise, my own talk at f/a/q was a meditation on quotidian racisms and erotic longings as teachable moments based primarily on pedagogical readings of Sharon Holland's *The Erotic Life of Racism*. I claimed that black queer women as educators utilize strategies of embodiment and contingency to move forgotten queer of color

subjectivities into contemporary classroom settings. In a sense, our presentations on pedagogy made clear that embodied knowledge is a critical aspect of African American educational practice and that generational achievement cannot come at the expense of forgetting the past.

And forgetting and remembering the past was also a widespread touchstone. I felt death, resurrection, and mourning underpinning some presentations. From Kim McNair's t-shirt culture as a means of carrying slain black youth on the chests of the living to the calling of names of murdered black women as a eulogistic opening to a stirring discussion on "womb culture" and safe spaces for black women, again, these conferences mourned our closeness to the dead and the courage of the living to refuse that the dead go by forgotten.

Sharon Holland asked what our lives and our work could look like if we choose our own risk instead of letting others curtail our vulnerability. And I ponder upon vulnerability as an access point to new depths of black life that can break open our intellectual projects. I regard these two conferences as beginning to answer Holland's call and as beginning my practice in vulnerable intellectual sharing, listening, and meditating.

*Thank you to the organizers of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual St. Clair Drake: Amani Morrison and Charisse Burden as well as the presenters. Another thank you to the organizers and sponsors of UCSD's f/a/q conference and to Sharon P. Holland for her patience and kindness.*

*Kianna M. Middleton*

*Department of African American Studies*

*DE Gender, Women and Sexuality*

## Departmental Citizenship: Thinking Beyond the Curriculum Vitae

by Charisse Burden

One of the biggest myths regarding graduate school is that it has to be an isolating. Although writing and knowledge production can be—indeed, in some instances are required to be—solitary endeavors, neither of these makes up the totality of the graduate school experience. Depending on one's time management and organization skills, it is possible to maintain a fully functional social life, both inside and beyond the academy, and still produce good scholarship. One way to bridge the intellectual and social aspects of being a graduate student is to get involved in events and activities put on by the department (and the larger campus generally). Though these things indeed look good on curriculum vitae, this pales in comparison to other potential benefits.

It wasn't until my fifth year of graduate school that I decided to become a better departmental citizen. In prior years, I had little interest in participating in the academy beyond my required duties of attending classes, teaching, and passing my exams. There is nothing wrong with that path per se, but I started to feel that if I left the academy at any given time, there would be little trace of my having been there. In addition, I felt like it was necessary to contribute to the department that had done so much for me. Below I will discuss five positive features of departmental citizenship based on my experience this past year. What I have learned overall is that it is never too late to get involved, and that participation in these events and activities can enhance your scholarship and intellectual development.

### 1) Meeting important people.

This year I have met a multitude of people outside of the department with whom I would not have otherwise had contact. Through attending job talks, organizing lectures, and attending social events,

I met both professors and students whose scholarship is related to or interesting for my own. I have also met people with whom I have nothing in common academically, but we have nonetheless cultivated relationships that impact my life positively. Whereas previously I was hard-pressed to find someone to discuss my ideas with, I now have individuals in a variety of different positions that are part of my intellectual and social community.

2) **Building networks.** Related to meeting important people is building viable networks. Admittedly, networking has been my weakest skill as a graduate student, as I am more prone to stick with the people I know. However, organizing and attending events and activities opened up new avenues for me to make connections. For instance, at one of the job talks I became acquainted with a professor in another department, and because of our relationship I am now attending a prestigious summer school in Europe that will be attended by many prominent scholars and other graduate students whose research is similar to my own. As we are all aware, who you know can be equally important to what you know, so building networks can be essential to securing opportunities in higher education.

3) **Cultivating trust.** When one participates on a planning committee, there are attendant expectations. Deadlines need to be met, communication must be consistent, and events should be implemented professionally and effectively. When all of these areas are met, faculty and staff can see you as dependable and responsible, and may begin to extend privileges based on that fact that. If those in positions of power can rely on you to perform important tasks, they



may be more apt to reciprocate by considering you for sought-after roles within the department.

**4) A feeling of belonging.**

When you put time and effort into the things that go on in the department, you start to feel a sense of belonging and interest in what is going on. You also develop an informed awareness of things that are going well and things that can possibly be improved. Further, in times of hardship and doubt, a sense of connection with your department can help you to stay focused and persevere, and provide a level of comfort in reaching out for support. In turn, those in the department will readily respond in kind.

**5) A sense of accomplishment.**

When you get involved in planning and enacting events and activities, you can look back on the year and feel like you've made a positive contribution to the graduate school experience. Even if you did not make as much progress as you would have liked on your dissertation; get through as much of the Masters reading list as you anticipated; or complete every single for your classes; you can nonetheless take pride in the fact that you had a balanced approach to graduate school. To be sure, academics are extremely important—that is why the vast majority of us are in the academy—but if it is that the graduate school is a microcosm of the real world, we have to make room for other facets of life. Being a good departmental citizen is a great way to engage with the academy beyond academics.

What I have mentioned are just a fraction of the benefits of developing an extracurricular relationship with the department. The people you meet, the events you attend, and the activities you plan will help to enrich your graduate school existence and reinforce why you chose to be a part of your program. Having a strong relationship with your department is one way of combating the isolating tendencies that need not characterize your journey in the academy.

## “Accounts of Discovery and Camaraderie”:

### Review of an Ethnography Conference at Yale

by Kenly Brown

In April 2014, Elijah Anderson, the William K. Lanman, Jr. Professor of Sociology at Yale University, organized a conference titled “Ethnography: A Conference and Retreat” at Yale. This conference continues a tradition from 2002 where Jack Katz and Robert Emerson held an ethnography conference at the University of California, Los Angeles. Ethnographers and their graduate students were brought together to learn more about the Chicago School’s field research traditions. The conference agenda was designed to highlight the ethnographic projects of graduate students, junior faculty, and senior scholars. Among conference participants were Dr. Anderson and his graduate students, Scott Brooks, Raymond Gunn, and Nikki Jones, who were inspired to host a version of this conference at the University of Pennsylvania in 2003. Presentations by graduate students and faculty at the 2003 conference were published in a volume of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Anderson continued to host the ethnography conference after his move to the Sociology Department at Yale in 2007. Conferences held in 2008 and 2010 produced two volumes of ethnographic work in *Ethnography and The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

This conference provides a space to present contemporary ethnographic work and develop a network of scholars, especially scholars of color, that includes senior faculty, junior faculty, post docs, and graduate students. A roundtable on the importance

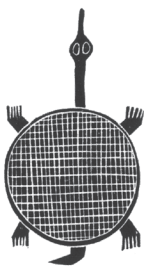
of doing fieldwork inductively comprised of a group of esteemed ethnographers including Elijah Anderson, Mitchell Duneier, and Jack Katz. Anderson emphasized the discovery of local knowledge and the revision process of hypotheses we have as ethnographers. He also highlighted the importance of posing good questions in order to capture experiences and realities of people in our fieldwork. Overall, the panel stressed the significance to stay close to the data in the field and report on the life experiences and idiosyncrasies, or negative cases, that arise throughout the fieldwork process.

The spirit of this ethnography conference highlights the discrete and innovative ethnographic research that embraces three themes from the Chicago School of field research: collect original ethnographic data; discovery; and loyalty to the data (Pearson and Sherman, 2004). The April 2014 conference continued this tradition as 38 panelist expanded current conversations in contemporary ethnography, and it also highlighted the work of African American scholars. Zandria Robinson, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Memphis, presented her recent research from her book, *This Ain't Chicago: Race, Class, and Regional Identity in the Post-Soul South*. Robinson examines how intersectionality of place with race, gender, and class inform African American identity in southern culture. Aasha Abdill, a doctoral candidate in Sociology at Princeton University, followed Dr. Robinson with her work on how fathering behaviors among Black men in low-income communities

are in the private and public sphere. She emphasized how they negotiate between contradictory expectations of manhood and fatherhood communicated by their peers, families, local organizations, and the public media.

The way African Americans navigate international cities like Beijing, China and dealing with the aftermath of violence were also presented. Esther Kim, a doctoral graduate from Yale University, examined how discriminatory comments and practices against Black people living in China are justified and understood through micro-level interactions. Jooyoung Lee, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto, presented his work on gunshot victims and the issues they grapple with to live including deficiencies in health insurance, PTSD, and chronic pain.

As I reflect back on the conference, Anderson's commitment to develop scholars of color, especially of African descent, in the study of ethnography makes this conference a memorable one for myself. This is the first conference I have attended where a number of African American scholars presented work on the lived experiences in a variety of Black communities. As a Black female, it is inspiring to see their work and use of in-depth accounts of people and communities that are authentic to their realities. By the end of the conference, I gained a network of mentors whose work I can look to and wisdom on how to navigate the ivory tower.



## One Proud Mom...



African American Studies Department Chair, and UC Berkeley Graduation master of ceremonies, Dr. Na'ilah Nasir, pictured here with daughter and UC Berkeley 2014 graduate, Leya Andrews, B.A. American Studies and Film Studies.





# Recap of the 38th Annual National Council of Black Studies Conference

by Grace D. Gipson

*Sunshine. Beaches. Enticing Academic conversations. Rallies for Justice. All of this took place at the 38th Annual National Council of Black Studies Conference in Miami, Florida hosted by University of Miami College of Arts & Sciences.*

The National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) is a guiding organization of Black Studies professionals in the world. Over the past thirty years NCBS has been at the forefront of driving the development of Black/African American/Africana Studies as a respected academic discipline. NCBS members include many of the top scholars, community leaders and students, focused on a variety of issues related to the African World experience. This year's themes included "Challenging Racial Terrorism: Black Resistance and Community Building Across the African Diaspora" and "Reconfigurations of What it Means to be Black: From Antiquity to 21st-Century Meanings of Blackness." Both themes were fitting considering a number of recent events including the Trayvon Martin and Marissa Alexander cases and the 'Stand Your Ground' law in Florida; mass killings of Chicago Black males; numerous attacks and murders on residents in Somalia and Nigeria; redefinitions of Blackness and Black beauty, etc.

To kick off the conference, participants and guests took part in the opening event "A Dialogue on Race" featuring University of Miami(FL)School of Law professor Donald M. Jones and Florida State University, Department of English professor David Ikard. This dialogue examined a myriad of issues including the discipline of Africana/Black Studies, exploring the Black experience locally, nationally, and globally from a variety of perspectives, and interpreting numerous



multi-layered framework and methodologies.

As it related to conference presentations, topics included: *Anti-black Prison Violence as Excess; Re-Visioning Diaspora: An Interrogation of Memory and Identity; Crises within Black Communities: An Analysis of Space and Transformation; African Community Healthcare; Women of the Diaspora and the Ivory Tower; Great Minds of the Renaissance Era; The Hoodie and Social Media*, among many others. Not only would this conference include a plethora of diverse panels, but it would also recognize and celebrate the achievements of the Undergraduate and Graduate Student Essay winners. Essay contest winners would have a range of topics varying from "*The Making of the Black Teenage Canon*" to "*The Lens of Blackness: An Anthro-Political Perspective*" and even "*The Invisible (Wo) Man and Miley Cyrus: Toward a Definition of Ratchet*" for the undergrad students. And graduate student topics including, *The*

*Mysticism of Erykah Badu*" to "*Unearthing Afro-Dalit Unity: W.E.B. DuBois in Conversation With B.R. Ambedkar*", to "*My Word is My Bond': Feistiness as Strategy of Resistance in Toni Cade Bambara's, Gorilla, My Love.*"

In addition to the panel presentations, roundtable discussions, and recognizing student achievement, this year's conference included two plenary sessions. The speakers and their topics included Barry University's Dr. Marvin Dunn discussing being "Black in Miami" and also Drs. Valerie Grim (Indiana University), Maulana Karenga (California State University-Long Beach), and Ricky Jones (University of Louisville) examining "The State of Black Studies".

And in the spirit of looking toward the future of African American/Africana/Black Studies, this year would have a healthy number of undergraduate and graduate student presenters—one of the largest to date. More specifically, there was a strong representation from UC Berkeley's

department of African American Studies. The panel presentations would include first-years doctoral students Grace Gipson, Mariko Pegs, and Jared Brown; and PhD candidates Charisse Burden and Mario Nisbett, tackling the topics “Musical Activism, Socioeconomics, and Diaspora: Dynamic Approaches to Engaging the “Black Question” along with department alum Asia Leeds moderating the panel.

Overall, this year’s conference was very successful. As another conference came to a close, NCBS continued with its tradition to provide “a forum for the dissemination of scholarship and a venue for mentoring students who wish to pursue a career in Africana Studies.” As academic scholars, students, researchers and the like traveled across the US and abroad to Miami, many of the participants expressed their excitement with the variety of the panel presentations and discussion topics so much so that the enthusiasm lingered in the air as many people projected their excitement towards the 2015 conference.

The 2015 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will make its way to the West Coast, as it will be held in Los Angeles, CA.



## ...two-day strike by Academic Student Employees



The GSI union strikes to speed up negotiations for better working conditions. Members of the diaspora program participate in various forms, from rallying to canceling classes to honor the picket line. April 2, 2014.



# *Congratulations*

## Justin Gomer

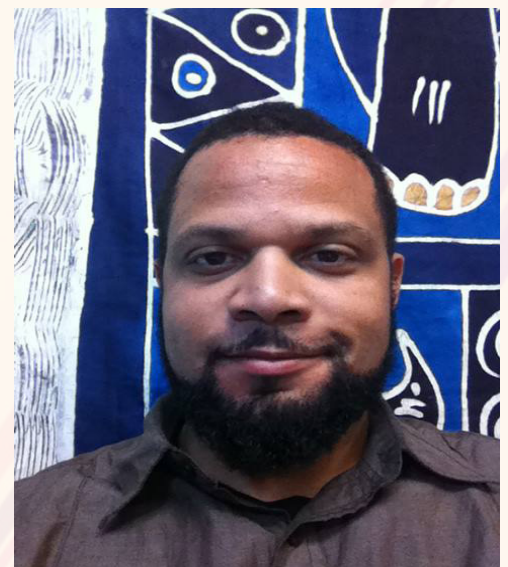


The Department of African American Studies is pleased to congratulate Justin Gomer on his successful completion of the requirements for the doctoral degree! His dissertation entitled, “Colorblindness, A Life: Race, Film and the Articulation of An Ideology” offers a cultural biography of the racial ideology of colorblindness, focusing specifically on the role of Hollywood in framing colorblind discourse in the decades after the civil rights movement. In the Fall Dr. Gomer will begin as a Lecturer in American Studies here at UC Berkeley.



## Reginold Royston

The African American Studies department is pleased to congratulate Reginold Royston for successful completion of the requirements for the doctoral degree! Dr. Royston’s dissertation is entitled “Reassembling Ghana: Diaspora and Innovation in the African Mediascape.” Dr. Royston has received a C3 Mellon Foundation Postdoctoral fellowship and will be teaching and doing research at Williams College (MA) for the next two years. He will teach courses in Black cyberculture, and continue research on digital diasporas and information technology in Ghana. His dissertation will be the basis for several courses in contemporary and historical tech literacy and practice.





# *Congratulations*

## Kathryn Benjamin



Congratulations to Kathryn Benjamin on completing her Qualifying Exams in the areas of Race and Representation in Public History and Collective Memory; Geographies of the Enslaved; Cultural History of U.S. Slavery; and United States Slave Historiography on the 1st of May. She submitted the following papers in partial fulfillment of the PhD Qualifying Exam in African Diaspora Studies:

“African Diaspora and Consciousness” and “United States Slavery: Resistance, Agency, Representation, and Memory”



## Zachary Manditch-Prottas

Congratulations to Zachary Manditch-Prottas on completing his Qualifying Exams in the areas of The African American Freedom Movement: Post WWII through Black Power; Blackness and Masculinity in African American Literature; Harlem Renaissance Through Black Arts Movement; and Black Culture Studies: Theorizing Black Subjectivity and Productions of Black Otherness on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March. He submitted the following papers in partial completion of the PhD Qualifying Exam in African Diaspora Studies:

“Lustfully Watching the Wall: Black Power/Black Arts and (Un)Making the Black Masculine”

“This House is Not a Home: The Limits of the ‘Host Nation’ and the Prospects of Black Cultural Nationalism within Theories of the African Diaspora”





## *New Graduate Student profile: Kenly Brown*



**Kenly Brown** graduated summa cum laude from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a B.A. in Sociology and minor in Political Science. She went on to pursue a doctorate in Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) where she developed research interests in race, gender, and juvenile justice. Kenly earned an M.A. in Sociology from UCSB in 2013. Her Master's thesis looked at the participation and transformation of justice-involved and high-risk youth in a cognitive-based mentoring program. In January 2014, she transferred to the University of California, Berkeley as a first year doctoral student in the Department of African American Studies with her advisor, Dr. Nikki Jones. Kenly has published an encyclopedic co-authored piece with Dr. Joanne Belknap, in *Sexual Violence and Abuse: An Encyclopedia of Prevention, Impacts, and Recovery* on false rape allegations. She also published a co-authored encyclopedia entry on women of color in the development of feminist theories with Dr. Hillary Potter, in the *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Kenly's current work examines how perceptions of Black girls and exclusionary forms of discipline (like suspension and expulsion) sanctioned against them are informed by the intersectionality of race, gender, and class.

### **Contact Information:**

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# Tips for the Socially Awkward and Ambitious Grad Student:

## Professional Etiquette with Mary Mitchell

By Ianna Hawkins Owen

Sure, your research is stellar. It should speak for itself. But sometimes we have to do a little speaking ourselves. The Visiting Scholars and Postdoc Affairs office invited Mary Mitchell to host a workshop called “Schmooze or Lose” to provide a few mechanical pointers on how to mingle and make a favorable impression while advancing your professional agenda in a social setting. Mitchell offered advice ranging from the mindset to the handshake to construct a more confident presence.

### Mindset and Mechanics

Before arriving at a professional event, restore yourself the night before rather than pulling long hours. Take inventory of your mood and be mindful of what drains you and what gives you energy. Imagine the scene and rehearse for it. You might ask yourself questions as though preparing for a performance: Am I at a poster session or a dinner? Who is my audience and what do I want from them? Who do I hope to impress and how?

In the digital age it can be difficult to pull yourself away from your devices. If you can’t manage to turn off or stay off your cell phone, Mitchell recommends scheduling tech breaks so that when you’re with colleagues and attendees “you truly are with them.”

The body is perhaps even more difficult to manage. Rather than a compulsion to check texts or Facebook, you are dealing with unconscious manifestations of body language and years of habitual movement. What is your default body position? Mitchell notes, “there’s no position less comfortable than standing with nothing in your hands.” When making an entrance, consider these six pointers:

1. Arrive five minutes within the scheduled start time.
2. Enter slowly, smile and take in the room.
3. Don’t show up hungry, it will distract you from making the most of the opportunity at hand: rather than bee lining for the refreshment table, focus on initiating and nurturing new contacts.
4. If you choose to eat, select user-friendly foods.
5. If you choose to drink, hold the glass in your left hand so you can continue shaking hands. Also, skip the ice (it makes the glass sweat).
6. Put your name tag on your right shoulder so it remains in the sight line of those you shake hands with.

### The Handshake

Mitchell shares that the handshake is the only acceptable bodily contact in the US professional world. Would you shake your own hand? Remember your grooming and clean those nails before making contact.

The ideal handshake involves locking the soft tissue of your hand (between your thumb and forefinger) with the other hand’s soft tissue. This facilitates a strong grip without causing pain. Avoid the “gloved handshake” (when you use a second hand to grasp the other’s hand from the outside while shaking with the first). This type of shake appears needy. Plagued by clammy hands? Mitchell deftly passed her hand over the side of her thigh before grasping the other’s hand, stating with a laugh, “a good swipe will get you far.”

If you are read as female, you might have to deal with masculine contacts who try to grasp your hand in a feminizing way (taking the tips of your fingers such that your own hand fits limply/daintily and vertically into their own). If you want to turn this into a proper handshake, grab the other’s arm above the wrist and slip your hand into theirs for a traditional soft tissue to soft tissue embrace. Be advised that this play asserts dominance, but maybe you want that.

### Introductions and Conversation Starters

Do you find it hard to talk about yourself in low-stakes scenarios like at birthday parties or in your OKC profile? Mitchell offers five ways to prepare yourself for introductions in the high-stakes scenarios of the professional and networking world:

1. Think about what you actually **do**, as opposed to the titles on your CV. Consider what will help others to understand how to engage with you.
2. Draw yourself up to your full height.
3. Speak your name slowly and clearly.
4. Never introduce yourself with your own honorific (Dr...)
5. Hand your card to people with the text oriented toward the recipient so they can read what it says.

The hardest part about approaching a stranger can be finding something to talk about. Mitchell recommends encouraging the other person talk about themselves. You can ask questions along the lines of, “What does your average work day look like?” “What are the most interesting aspects of your work?”

Or sharing an observation and asking for their thoughts, “On the way over here I noticed...” Avoid participating in gossip or trashing people/organizations. It creates doubt in the mind of the listener as to whether you would do the same to them later.

Cutting in to a conversation can be intimidating, but if you don’t want to let the opportunity to meet an influential figure slip by you, try finding a buddy to come with you as you broach the person. If you don’t want to take the target away from their current partner, you can try a quick in-and-out intervention with a line like, “Dr. \_\_\_, I’m \_\_\_ and I do \_\_\_. Your work has influenced mine. May I have your card?” and arrange to be in touch with them after the event instead. If you’re up for a longer conversation you could lead with an honest, “It’s taking a lot of my courage to interrupt you but, I don’t want to miss the opportunity to meet you.”

What if, instead, you’re dealing with a hanger-on that won’t let you circulate? Rather than hoping someone else will rescue you, try closing the interaction with a warm and generous, “I’m so glad we had the chance to connect. I learned something. If you’ll excuse me there are a few more people I want to touch base with before the event ends.”

### **When It’s All Over**

Jot down notes on the backs of all the business cards you received so that you can recall these connections and effectively use them later. Send a thank you email or note on nice stationary to the host and to any other meaningful connections you’ve made. Such a note should include the honorific of the addressee. An effective note should briefly accomplish the following: be specific about what your note is acknowledging, remark

on the significance of it for you and how you will put what was gained to use.

*Ianna Hawkins Owen is a doctoral candidate in African Diaspora Studies with a designated emphasis in Gender and Sexuality.*

This piece was originally published in The Berkeley Graduate at: [www.theberkeleygraduate.com](http://www.theberkeleygraduate.com)



## ***Editor’s Note***

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce this latest issue of The Diaspora, the department’s official newsletter! Each piece that you find here both bespeaks and contributes to the productive and creative tenor of this department. This Spring 2014 semester the department celebrated the success of the Second Departmental Renaissance Gala. Additionally, this year marked the 22nd year of the St. Clair Drake Research Symposium, a tradition of showcasing the individual and collective intellectual work of the department’s faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students, as well as that of our colleagues across campus and throughout the country. The contributions to this issue—which include conference presentations, research trips, formal intellectual projects, and informal meditations, as well as personal insights and advice—attest to our department’s encouragement of intellectual curiosity and exchange. They also showcase the dynamic and robust intellectual life that is incubated and palpable within, but not bound by, the walls of Barrows. As you take the time to peruse the pieces in this issue, I hope that the hallmarks of our community—provocation, support, accountability, and scholarship—are legible and resonate with you. Finally, I would be remiss not to close my notes with a word of gratitude. This issue would not be possible without the skillful and tireless work of Glenn L Robertson. Thank you for all that you do! And thank you to all of the contributors and to you, the reader. I hope you enjoy!

—Christina Bush  
Editor



# Cluster Staff News

by Vernessa Parker

There have been a lot of challenges in the Administrative Cluster this year largely related to the transition of Human Resources, Information Technology, Financial and Research Administrative functions moving from the departments to Campus Shared Services (CSS). The staff and I have been meeting with CSS to discuss plans for when and how these services will transition. The transfers will be complete on July 31, 2014.

Eric Fong and Glenn Robertson, our Computer Resource Specialists, transitioned to CSS on February 24, 2014. Eric and Glenn's positions in the departments were at 50% but with their transition to CSS they are now 100%! Eric is now located at 4<sup>th</sup> Street exclusively. Glenn, however, is located half-time in 670 Barrows and is available in the afternoons for computer assistance on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The Ethnic Studies Department and the Asian American Studies Program celebrated Eric's department service on February 19, 2014. As background, Eric graduated from UC Berkeley in 1991 with a double major in Political Science and Asian American Studies and a minor in Ethnic Studies. Shortly after graduation, he started working for the Department of Ethnic Studies in April 1993. He held the position of Assistant II. Eric started performing computer related work and then was reclassified to Computer Resource Specialist in April 1994. Eric also performed functions as the scheduler for the department up until 2011. During that time, his position was reduced from 100% to 50% due to reorganization. Since that time, Eric mainly focused on computer customer service issues for staff and faculty within the Cluster. The

Department would like to thank Eric for his service and congratulate him on his new position.

A breakfast was held on February 18, 2014 to honor employees within the Cluster who had service milestones for 2013. Althea Grannum-Cummings received a service award for 25 years. Laura Jimenez-Olivera received a service award for 20 years. Eric Fong received a service award for 20 years. Dewey St. Germaine received a service award for 20 years. For the previous year in 2012, I celebrated 25 years of working at UC Berkeley and the Office of the President. Lindsey Herbert also celebrated 10 years. In September 2014, Jeannie Imazumi-Wong will celebrate 35 years of service!

Eileen Andrade, who had been on leave, returned to her academic personnel position full time in April 2014. Welcome back Eileen! Sharon Lyons-Butler who handled the academic caseload for 6 months while Eileen was on leave will take on a new position of Director of Administration for Political Science.

Professor Khatharya Um nominated Dewey St. Germaine for a Star Award and Professor Ula Taylor nominated Lindsey Herbert for a Star Award. Congratulations to Dewey and Lindsey!

For the Winterfest 2014, the Division of Social Sciences, College of Letters and Science honored me for the Distinguished Service award along with other Managers from the Social Sciences Division. In addition, Ethnic Studies Professor Shari Huhndorf received the 2014 Distinguished Teaching Award.

Francisca Cazares welcomed a new baby boy to her family. His name is Silvio Huitzilli Bastos and

he was born March 24<sup>th</sup> at 6:22 a.m., weighing in at 9 pounds, 2 ounces. Francisca will be on leave for several months. I am happy to announce that Maria E. Castelli has temporarily accepted the full time position as the Graduate Student Advisor for the Ethnic Studies Graduate Program, and coordinate the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality (DEWGS) through the Gender and Women's Studies Department. Please welcome Maria to the Cluster.

Our amazing Administrative Assistant for Ethnic Studies and financial assistant for the Cluster, Angelica Gonzalez, accepted a new position with CSS on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Angelica worked with the Ethnic Studies (ES) Department and the Cluster in a career position since February 2012. Angelica was instrumental in coordinating the renovation of the ES front offices and conference room. She coordinated numerous events for the ES Department and assisted with the Gala for African American Studies. She oversaw and executed a major departmental project to digitize course evaluations for ES Faculty, Lecturers and GSIs. She also assisted with financial transactions for the Cluster and summer hires. We congratulate Angelica on her new position but we will miss her. Congratulations Angelica!



# 2014 UC Berkeley Black Graduation recognizes triumphs, academic excellence, perserverance

*Reprint of article posted at Onyx Express.org by Rasheed Shabazz | May 30, 2014*

Celebrating family and friendships, recognizing triumphs over tragedy, and the substance of sacrifice, the Department of African American Studies hosted the 2014 Black Graduation at UC Berkeley on May 23.

Hundreds of family members, friends, and classmates came and celebrated the 85 Black students graduates participating in the ceremony. This year's Black Graduation theme was "Liberating Our Dreams."

The ceremony began with traditional "Pomp and Circumstance," but quickly transformed to the sounds of James Brown's "Say it Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)."

The party vibe of the graduation punctuates a challenging year for Black students at UC Berkeley. Black enrollment at the university is dismal, graduation rates for Black student-athletes have received criticism, and one student-athlete died tragically in February, and "many unanswered questions" remain.

In this context, "You should all be incredibly proud of what you accomplished," said Dr. Na'ilah Nasir. "You are graduating from Cal in the face of many difficulties: financial hardship, the challenges of getting into classes, managing complex work and school schedules, running multiple student organizations and clubs. And for many, all of this while juggling commitments to family, raising kids, supporting siblings, and being a resource and support for others."

For Nasir, the graduation held extra significance this year. In addition to serving as faculty advisory for an African American residence hall which graduated, her eldest daughter, Leya Andrews, received her Bachelors in American Studies and Film Studies. Twenty years earlier, the two walked the same stage together during Nasir's graduation.

Shaun Ossei-Owusu urged graduates to recognize the hard work and sacrifice that others made for them to have success today. He encouraged attendees to not only seek professional success, but to give back to their families and communities.

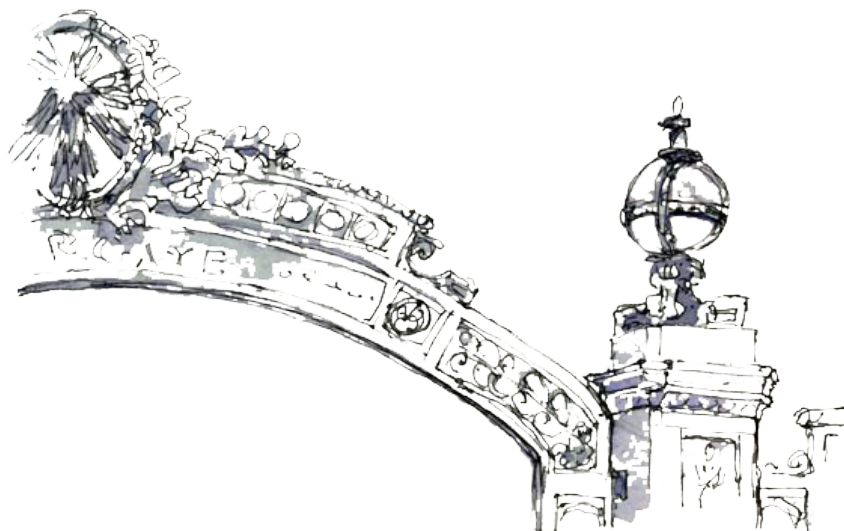
Oakland-native Shanika Blunt was this year's valedictorian. "I studied African American Studies to prepare for medical school," Blunt said. Last fall, Blunt studied in Senegal and worked in a health clinic there, as well as Peru.

Keynote speaker Bryant Terry, food activist and author, encouraged graduates to follow their passions, to engage in spiritual practice, dream big, and actively work to improve the lives of Black people across the globe.

"First, it's important to be still, be aware of our inner voice, connect with your ancestors, do whatever works for you," Terry said. In addition to dreaming big, and not allowing people to discourage graduates from their life journeys, he called on graduates to remember where they came from.

"Whatever your interests are, keep one eye on changing the conditions of our people," Terry said before concluding with a poem. "We need your brilliance, your bravery, your creativity, and your commitment to developing your highest potential, but your commitment to improving the plight of all African people."

*OnyxExpress.org is the online newsmagazine dedicated to the Black Community. Produced by Afrikan and Black students at the University of California, Berkeley. - See more at: <http://onyxexpress.org>*







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