

THE DIASPORA

Fall 2015

THE DIASPORA is a biannual publication 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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COVER ART

"I Gave Myself Space to Go Back..." (2014)
Yetunde Olagbaju

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The Diaspora, Fall 2015

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Notes from the Chair: Making Room, Holding Space

Leigh Raiford, Department Chair and Associate Professor



Photography by Rasheed Shabazz Photography

If you've visited the 6th floor of Barrows Hall recently, you may have experienced a moment of confusion when stepping off of the west elevator. Over the summer and into the early part of the Fall semester, our section of Barrows underwent extensive renovations. Our front office was completely gutted, walls knocked down and the front door moved, to create an open more functional space for our staff. The main wall has been painted a warm golden yellow and proudly displays new lettering announcing the Department of African American Studies. A number of offices were shifted and re-decorated in order to accommodate three new faculty members who arrived in July. The GSI Office was also redone to better serve the graduate student instructors, who in any given semester may work with upwards of 500 undergraduates. An old supply closet has been transformed into a small conference and break room. All of our office doors were given a facelift as well. And to cap it all off, we commissioned African American Studies alumnus Rasheed Shabazz, a talented photographer and journalist, to update our faculty photos. As the Department grows in number and in programming, the space looks and feels more truly our own than ever.

The renovations to the department seem a fitting way to describe where we are as a Department. This year we "make room" for a host of new faculty, staff and students, who are already enriching our community. And we continue to "hold space" providing unconditional support and an intellectual center for black students and the campus community at large for understanding and practicing how black lives matter.

Our semester began with a mandatory ten year departmental external review. For two days, four professors (Dr. Elijah Anderson of Yale University, Dr. Jennifer Deveare Brody of Stanford University, Dr. Jelani Cobb of the

University of Connecticut, and Dr. Catherine Cole of UC Berkeley's Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies) met with faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students to assess the health and future directions of our department. The external review committee was impressed by the top-notch intellectual program we've built here, noting excellence at all levels [measured by]. The Committee also praised the "safe space" we've created for black students who find in African American Studies respite from campus climate hostile to black students, who in our classrooms, our offices, our meeting spaces and events feel valued intellectually and personally. The final report from this review will be made available publically in the Spring.

This Fall, we've also welcomed new faculty and staff, and of course a new cohort of PhD students. Professors Chiyuma Elliott, Jovan Lewis and Tian-na Paschel are each profiled in the pages that follow. Dr. Elliott, both a scholar of African American poetry and a published poet, will add vitality to our both our humanities and creative writing course offerings. Dr. Lewis, an anthropologist of poverty focusing on Jamaica and Oklahoma, is jointly appointed in the Department of Geography and the junior fellow of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Equitable Society's Economic Disparities Cluster. And Dr. Paschel, who was a co-founder of the Afro-Latino Working Group while a PhD student in Sociology here at Berkeley, is taking a lead in reshaping our social science curriculum, and expanding the geo-political areas of study in our Diaspora program. They each bring energy, innovation and cutting-edge research programs to campus and are already strengthening our Department in ways large and small. We are so fortunate to have them. On the staff front, we were joined by Ursula Belyayev who replaces Stephanie Jackson in our front office (After 34 years at UC-Berkeley, Ms. Jackson is greatly enjoying retirement!). Ms. Belyayev has been a wonderful addition, organized, thorough and incredibly good-

humored. Lindsey Villareal received a well-deserved promotion to Policy Analyst Three, which enables her to take more of a leadership role in developing curriculum and other crucial programmatic needs. Ms. Villareal, who possesses a rare combination of broad vision, deep compassion and attention to detail, will continue her work as Graduate Advisor, but will no longer serve as Undergraduate Advisor. For this, we are thrilled to have hired Ms. Althea Grannum-Cummings, who splits her time between our Department and Women's and Gender Studies (also on the 6th floor) as our new Undergraduate Advisor and Department Course Scheduler. Ms. Grannum-Cummings brings more than 20 years of Cal experience with her, not to mention serious swagger. With Vernessa Parker still at the helm as Department and Cluster Manager, we are administratively stronger than ever.

Of course it's not simply enough to hire staff and faculty of color, but also necessary to create the conditions in which they can thrive. The recently announced African American Initiative, in large part a response to black student organizing and protest on campus last year, presents us with an exciting opportunity to create a more equitable campus. It also reminds us of the important diversity work the Department of African American Studies has performed over the course of its nearly 45 year tenure on this campus, not only providing a rigorous education in global blackness, but in recruiting and retaining black faculty, and crucially maintaining a "safe space" for black students, especially in the post-affirmative action era. We feel that we are uniquely positioned to develop, as well as model policies and practices for the rest of the campus as other units begin to envision their own roles in advancing the African American Initiative. As we welcome new people, I also want to acknowledge the incredible work of our former chair Professor Na'ilah Nasir, as she steps into a new position of Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion. I want to thank her for her excellent service to this department, marked by strengthening our ties to community and administration,

overseeing the hiring of four new faculty members, making great strides in departmental fundraising, and of course getting our renovations started. And I'd like to congratulate her on her promotion to Full Professor, one of only four black women at that rank on campus. While Professor Nasir won't be as regular a presence on the 6th floor, we are thrilled that in her new residence in California Hall will make room and hold space for the black communities at UC-Berkeley.

Finally, we welcome two "future scholars" to our community: 18 month old year old Rhys Lewis, the son of Professor Jovan Lewis and his wife Zavier Lue; and seven month old Amani Rose, the daughter of Professor Nikki Jones and her wife Heather Tirado Gilligan. AfAm loves the babies!

After eleven years as a faculty member (and the last three years as Head Graduate Advisor), I am honored to step into the role of Chair, to be a steward for the department that has nurtured and sustained me intellectually, and to continue to be a contributing member of this vibrant and vital community. Alumni, colleagues, and friends, if you find yourself near Barrows Hall, please come check us out!

December, 2015

Inside This Issue

Essence Harden, Editor and PhD Student

Welcome to the fall 2015 issue of *The Diaspora*. I have been excited to curate this issue and hope you all enjoy the following pages.

With the addition of three new faculty members Chiyuma Elliott, Jovan Scott Lewis, and Tianna Paschel you will find interviews conducted with each by current graduate students serving as a further introduction and welcome to the department. Department manager Vernessa Parker keeps us up to date with staff promotions, additions, and department changes and we meet our new PhD cohort at the end of the issue.

PhD candidate Selina Makana reflects on her ethnographic research in Angola with “*Porquê Angola e porquê mulheres Angolanas?*”: *A Woman Centered Ethnography of Militarization in Angola*. While fellow PhD candidate Kathryn Benjamin-Golden in *Sites of Contestation: Race and the Struggle for Memory in the Hampton Roads* considers the violence of confederate memorabilia in the struggle for memory in Hampton, VA. We have creative verse, photography, reviews, and critical essays on art, graphic novels, and the legacy of the iconic television series *A Different World* by PhD Students John Mundell, Malika Crutchfield, Grace Gipson, Jamal Batts and PhD Candidate Kim McNair.

In fall of 2014 Ianna Hawkins Owen in her position as editor redesigned the format of *The Diaspora*. Carefully crafted and beautifully figured Ianna’s vision perfectly captured the department of African American Studies commitment to growth and innovation. Now bound and featuring the work of local artist for the cover the reimagined newsletter aesthetically captures the spirit and intellectual work of our contributors. I am deeply grateful to Ianna for the use of her design and hope it will continue to serve the department into the future.

I am pleased to serve as editor for 2015-2016 term

and want to thank all of our contributors for their intellectual labor; Yetude Olagbaju for her incredible artwork; our chair Leigh Raiford, Professor Ula Taylor and Project Analyst Lindsey for their guidance and aide in completing the fall issue; and the department of African American Studies for your sponsorship. Enjoy!



Artist Statement

Yetunde Olagbaju, Multimedia Artist and Curator

Yetunde Olagbaju is a multimedia artist and curator that is dedicated to exploring black spirituality, honoring our connection to the natural world, and celebrating black connection to “source”. She believes that so much of our connection to source, the land, and our own respective indigenous spiritualities has been taken. Colonization, violence, and the loss of our elders makes it hard for us to reconnect to this idea of home within ourselves.

Having grown up in Minnesota as an only child, a strong source of inspiration for her stems from spending much of her time engaging in fantasy, out in nature. There she imagined worlds of black utopia, healers, magicians, folks who talked to the water, folks who communed with the land...This is when she first began to find home within her own existence.

In communion with her Yoruba and Gullah ancestry, her conceptual work often strives to explore these two closely related modalities of “spirit”. Whether this is by exploring the adornment of certain Orisha, doing performance pieces surrounding speaking in tongues, or reconstructing creation stories through sound, Yetunde is dedicated to injecting these elements of blackness and “spirit” into a brighter and blacker future.



Staff News

Vernessa Parker, Department Manager

Congratulations to Lindsey Herbert and Althea Grannum-Cummings. Lindsey Herbert was reclassified to Project/Policy Analyst 3 and is working directly with the Graduate Program and providing analysis for the African American Studies (AAS) curriculum programs. Lindsey has already made great success in her new role as AAS will start online evaluations in Fall 2016, and major changes are in progress with the undergraduate curriculum. Because of the change in Lindsey's role, Althea Grannum-Cummings was hired effective July 1, 2015 as the Undergraduate Advisor and Curriculum Scheduler for AAS. Althea is also the Undergraduate and Curriculum Schedule for the Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) Department. Althea has been working for both departments. Althea has over 25 years experience advising students and has been instrumental in the lives of students in GWS, and has already been involved with assisting students in AAS, and making creative changes to the scheduling program.

As reported in the Spring 2015 issue of "The Diaspora" Stephanie Jackson, our Administrative Assistant retired on July 1, 2015. Ursula Belyayev was hired as our new Administrative Assistant. Ursula has a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Washington, Seattle. Ursula previously worked for the University of Washington in the Anthropology Department as an Academic Advisor and the Office Assistant where she worked with students and faculty. Since Ursula's hire she has coordinated the completion of the front office renovation and our new meeting spaces. Ursula has been providing administrative support to our Chair, and maintaining our website, and coordinating the hiring of our new work-study and hires of GSIs and Readers. Ursula has been a tremendous asset to our department, and she is a great addition to our staff.



Welcome!

New Administrative Assistant Ursula Belyayev.

“Porquê Angola e porquê mulheres Angolanas?”: A woman centered ethnography of militarization in Angola

Selina Makana, PhD Candidate

The first part of my title “Why Angola and why Angolan women?” precisely captures what brought me to Angola in late August for a three month fieldwork research to carry out in-depth interviews with former women combatants in the liberation war and the post-independence armed conflict. “Porquê mulheres Angolanas” was a question I encountered repeatedly every time I introduced myself to Angolans I encountered on the streets. My study is a woman-centered ethnography conducted by a woman, studying the different ways women’s lives were militarized from 1961 to 1990. It is an exploration of how women were mobilized as resources of war in the fight for Angola’s liberation from Portugal and the conflict that immediately followed the proclamation of independence in 1975. I believe that any work that focuses on the involvement of women in war both as agents and victims of war calls for a woman-centered approach that privileges the voices and experiences of women.[1] In conducting interviews with former combatants, one finds that the experiences of survivors of war and their identities are complex and often contradictory.[2] In other words, looking at women combatants as a monolithic group obscures the nuanced ways women are militarized and the differences in the ways they are impacted by these wars. As one informant, Isabela Correia told me, “Não ha uma mulhere combatante” There is no one woman combatant.”[3] Her remarks were a caution to me to avoid generalizing Angolan women’s experiences of war, and instead dig deeper into each of the former combatants’ lives in order to find out how each one of them was involved in the war. Scholars who work on gender and militarization remind us that the process of militarization is always gendered;

and because war privileges masculinity, women are militarized differently (Enloe 2007; Mama 1997; Cockburn 2007; Decker 2014; Cock 1992).

I. “Mas, quem é voce?”: Navigating the insider-outsider position in vulnerable spaces

There is no doubt that fieldwork is not only an exciting and humbling experience, but it can also be an isolating and a lonely one. For me this feeling of isolation was compounded by the fact that I was in a Lusophone country, separated from friends, family; yet despite some cultural similarities between Angolans and Kenyans, I could not escape the feeling of being the “Other.” This feeling of “otherness” became real whenever I was confronted with the question, “Mas, quem é você?”/But, who are you?” I first got this question from a driver who had been sent to pick me up from the airport upon my arrival in Angola. When I asked him the reason behind his question, he frankly replied that he was expecting “uma branca” because “we are not used to having black people come here as researchers.” It then dawned on me what a big impact my cultural, national, racial, gender, and class background would have on my fieldwork experience.

Given the sensitive nature of my topic, I came to the field with the awareness that undertaking a study on involvement of women in wars and conflict has consequences for both researchers and participants. Yet, a few weeks into my fieldwork I couldn’t help but feel unprepared for the challenges that arose. Angola is a highly militarized society with the constant presence of military police or armed security guards on the streets.

Even though I had no prior knowledge of the political terrain of the country, I could sense that fear was a predominant feature in the lives of most Angolans.[4] The people I interacted with in the first few days reminded me that with only just fifteen years of experiencing peace after almost three decades of decades of war and conflict, it was understandable why the government had tight control on the citizens' freedom of expression. It also started to make sense to me why at the beginning of every interview my interviewees repeated the question "quem é você?" I knew that they deserved full disclosure as to I am and my purpose of being there. I had to constantly reassure them that I am not a journalist and that I did not work for any political organization.

This was one of greatest challenges I encountered. How was I to navigate this politically charged environment characterized by fear, suspicion and mistrust. Since the end of the conflict in 2002, many Angolans still carry with them the painful memories of war. Therefore, the concern over the precarity of their lives is real, especially for most of my informants whose personal and political lives are interwoven. In this politically volatile situation, I had to quickly learn how to negotiate my positionality as an insider (being an African woman) and outsider (being a non-Portuguese speaking student at UC Berkeley). I had to improve my interpersonal skills and in the process I was able to establish both social and political establish networks that proved to be crucial to my research. For example, I would attend weddings and birthday parties my host invited me to, attend church services, and even volunteered to teach English at the local primary school. Through these events and networks I managed to secure interviews with some high profile political women including the president of LIMA and OMA.[5] In my interview sessions with women political figures, I was advised to emphasize my positionality as an outsider—that of a student studying in the United States—because my outsider position reaffirmed my political neutrality. In other settings, my positionality as

a woman who is committed to telling stories of Angolan woman helped in building trust with my interlocutors.

It is worth pointing out here that a few weeks into my fieldwork I discovered most of my interviewees were welcoming and cooperative based on the credibility of my gatekeepers. Although I presented all my interviewees with Informed Consent Forms, which they had to sign individually at the beginning of the interview, five out of the fifteen interviewees I spoke with in the month of September refused to sign the consent form. Their deep sense of fear and lack of trust is revealed in a comment made by Maria Esperança "if you want me to sign this form, it means you don't trust me. So, why should I trust you?"[6]

Underlying this lack of trust and fear to share information was the fact that most of my interviewees did not want to feel vulnerable. Some of them needed to know who I was in order for them to feel safe in my presence. But, the line between safe and unsafe spaces is quite blurry. Although I had done my homework on the ethics of conducting ethnography prior to my fieldwork, I felt completely unprepared when it came to handling painful memories brought up during some interview sessions. For instance, what is one to do when an interviewee breaks down in the middle of an interview? I doubt any amount of preparation in a methodology class would have prepared me well enough for this scenario. For many women ex-combatants, recounting experiences of war leaves them with feelings of vulnerability and mixed emotions because as combatants they were both agents and victims of the war. Despite this difficulty, I felt that I had to make each interview session a radical space of vulnerability where my interviewees would feel safe to share their stories. It was reassuring when at the end of the interviews many of the ex-combatants said "obrigada" for giving them a chance to share their experiences, because their personal memory constituted the nation's collective memory.

[1] I deliberately employ the term “woman-centered” as opposed to “feminist” because the latter term in the Angolan context is fraught with debates. Most of the women I interviewed did not refer to themselves as feminist and some felt uncomfortable with the term “feminist.” Many of them preferred to be seen as women activist. For example one interviewee felt attacked when I referred to her consciousness as feminist.

[2] In this article, I only cite and use the actual names of women who agreed to be on record and those who wanted to have their stories heard and recorded. All the participants were provided with both oral and written consent forms. During the course of my fieldwork, I talked to former combatants and militants who requested anonymity and asked not to have their actual names recorded for both personal and political reasons

[3] Interview with Isabela Correia recorded on September 8th at her place in the Bairro of Maianga, Luanda

[4] Since the detention of fifteen youth activists earlier this year, the Angolan government has continued its crackdown on freedom of expression and the right to assemble in the country. See the report from Amnesty International on how the freedom of expression and peaceful continues to be restricted in Angola. Punishing Dissent: Suppression of Freedom of Association and Assembly in Angola (Index AFR 12/004/2014)

[5] The League of Angolan Women/LIMA is the women’s organ of the main opposition party, UNITA; while the Organization of Angolan Women/OMA is the women’s branch of the ruling party, MPLA.

[6] This interview with Maria Esperança da Costa was done and recorded on September 23rd at Kinaxixi in Luanda.

Sites of Contestation: Race and the Struggle for Memory in the Hampton Roads

Kathryn E. Benjamin-Golden, PhD Candidate

In the heart of downtown Portsmouth stands a 35-foot granite obelisk honoring the Confederate soldiers of Norfolk County, Norfolk City, and Portsmouth City in the Hampton Roads, southeastern Virginia. Located in the town square between High and Court streets, the monument occupies one of the oldest and most historically important spaces in the city of Portsmouth. From 1876 to 1893, the Monument Association and the Ladies Memorial Aid Association worked to complete its construction following the South's then new tradition of honoring the Confederacy's role in the Civil War and memorializing if not heroicizing the Confederate soldiers. The monument sits centrally in the town square, facing the 1846 built Portsmouth Courthouse and the Trinity Episcopal Church dating from 1828.



For 139 years, this monument, like so many others throughout the South, has stood throughout the change of time as a proud reminder of the Old South, the Confederacy and the Confederate cause in the Civil War. It stood throughout the Jim Crow era where descendants of the enslaved living in the Hampton Roads region were terrorized by KKK rallies and open, often violent racism enacted by descendants of Confederate soldiers and their supporters. It stood during the Civil Rights movement, as a cemented dictation of white power and supremacy amid the struggle for Black franchise, freedom, and equal access to power, resources, and opportunity. In 1997, under the National Historic Preservation Act, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources designated the monument in the National Register of Historic Places. By 2005, the monument had been subject to numerous attacks of protest, said Linda Holmes, Museum Services Supervisor at the Portsmouth Community Colored Library Museum. That year, someone painted the faces of the Confederate soldier statues on the monument with black spraypaint. Nancy Perry, Director of Museums for the City of Portsmouth reported that the city spent almost \$44,000 for renovations to the monument the following year.

On June 17th, 2015 the racially motivated killing spree of 9 African American congregants at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, sparked renewed fervor in the debate over the memorialization and commemoration of the Confederate flag, flown smugly by killer Dylann Roof. Protests erupted throughout the South, and many targeted monuments dedicated to remembering and honoring the Confederacy by painting the slogan, "Black Lives Matter" on sign posts or on the

Portsmouth. Groups like the United Council for Equality, the Portsmouth Chapter of the NAACP, and independent groups of largely African American residents of Portsmouth and Norfolk cities rallied against the monument and its commemoration of the “Confederate Dead,” urging the city of Portsmouth to remove it from this central location.



For these groups, the monument incites pain associated with the history of slavery and its legacies of forced legal segregation and racial inequality as ongoing living realities. To remember and commemorate the Confederate soldiers or to fly the Confederate flag in the present means remembering with honor the Confederacy and its causes not only as they existed in the past but also honoring the causes of white supremacy and Black subjugation and disfranchisement in the present moment. It is to honor the living history of anti-Black racial violence that Dylann Roof reminded us remains the coin of the realm. These links between the historical and current significance of the Confederate monument are embodied within it. For many Hampton Roads communities and especially for Black

communities, the Portsmouth monument is a site of active contest and struggle for its represented meaning because its very existence risks upholding racist paradigms which have real and lived consequences on present day circumstance, experience, and distribution of power and resources.

But for many descendants of the Confederates and other sympathizers, the monument is “just history.” Bill Moody, Councilman for the city of Portsmouth, stated, “I consider it really a grave mark of the many of those who lost their lives during the war. I’m a native of Portsmouth. As young as a little kid, I can remember driving by that monument, so it’s part of our history; you don’t undo history.” Many white residents of Portsmouth and Civil War enthusiasts throughout the Hampton Roads protested the appeals to remove the monument by petitioning the Portsmouth City Council to “Save Portsmouth’s Confederate Monument!” and by expressing their anger over the prospect of the monument’s removal in blog posts and online message boards. White residents of Portsmouth gathered at a city council meeting in July in support of the monument. Together they held the Confederate flag along with signs bearing the slogan, “Stop the Dixiephobia.” One public message board for the petition to save the monument called for the removal of the Portsmouth Colored Community Museum, one of just two sites commemorating Black historical experiences in the city of Portsmouth, as retaliation against the possible removal of the Confederate monument downtown. A police car was stationed at the museum this July as a result of the threat and the overall climate of anti-Black violence this summer.

Confederate memorabilia and mementos of the Old South can be seen all throughout the Hampton Roads. The Confederate flag flies tall on the front drive of the cotton farm neighboring the Great Dismal Swamp Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Suffolk, VA, just 15 miles southwest of Portsmouth. Refuge to much more than fish and wildlife, the swamp provided a haven for

200,000 Africans and African descendants in flight from enslavement and hundreds of resistant, permanent maroon communities in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Another major site of contested meaning and representation in the Hampton Roads, the Dismal Swamp is largely remembered as a space for nature conservation, hunting, and recreation in the heart of proud Dixieland and is hardly remembered or commemorated as a space of Black resilience in the midst of the racist and violent South.



A Black lawn jockey sits on white residents' home lawn on a heavily travelled main street, Holland Road in the city of Suffolk. Therbia Parker, born and raised in Jim Crow Suffolk, pointed it out to me in January of 2014. He said that it is well known and has stood there for years. The jockey upsets many Black neighbors, including Mr. Parker, but no one has successfully appealed for its removal as it sits on private owned land. I revisited Holland Road in August 2015 where the jockey continues to represent the living history of

Jim Crow racism and white nostalgia for the Old South.

It took 9 innocent black lives to be hatefully taken from this world by a man who, like many others have throughout the last 150 years, appropriated Confederate imagery as emblems of white supremacy and black suffering and death, for this country to take seriously the debate over the memorialization of Confederate symbolism in public spaces. Especially offensive to African descendants in this country, whose ancestors' blood enabled this country's economic competency and has served as the bloody foundation by which current patterns of power and distribution of wealth and resources continue to privilege whites, the monument in downtown Portsmouth commemorating the Confederacy of the Old South is one of many contested sites in the struggle of race, power, and representation.

Commemoration efforts represent our deepest desires and the ways we, or those who lead such efforts, want to view ourselves and articulate our identities in the present. This monument celebrates not only the Confederate soldiers who gave their lives to protect their slavocracy, but it also heroicizes slave owners and celebrates slavery as a southern way of life lost now except in "our" fond memories. It is publicly memorialized southern white nostalgia for the 'good ol' days' - days of unquestioned white privilege and power enforced through terror and anti-Black violence. If America truly stands for liberty and justice for all, this monument is un-American; otherwise it is very American, which is no good thing. And if there is any doubt in our minds that these Confederate symbols offend a considerable sector of our society, we all share a duty, black and white alike, to challenge and eradicate all desiring and longing for such a deeply horrific past in public spaces we all have to share if we truly desire and long for a different, more equitable present and future than the one led by the Confederates and their descendants not too long ago. But for now, contestation over historical significance, representation,

and memory at these sites means at the very least some dialogue and conversation about how we remember our racist past and the meaning of race and difference in racialized experiences in our present and in our future.

Opening Celebration, Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art

Jamal Batts, PhD Student

Yerba Buena Cultural Center for the Arts' opening celebration for the exhibit *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* featured a number of captivating performances from established, obscure, and emerging black artists. Performer and artist Maren Hassinger activated Senga Nengudi's panty-hose sculpture, *R.S.V.P.* She lifted, stepped on, stepped over, and contorted her body through the nylon ligaments and bulging mounds of Nengudi's sculpture—made by and for touch. Surrounding the day's performances were installations that would remain throughout the exhibit's stay. Many of these pieces could be considered performances in their own right. They included emerging artist Jacolby Satterwhite's moving 3D animations, featuring black queer voguing cyborgs, and London-born Satch Hoyt's sculpture, *Say It Loud*, composed of a tall circular stack of books on blackness that blared James Brown's "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud," muting the word "black."

This gallery space of not so quiet contemplation was further disrupted by the energy of black queer punk musician, artist, and dancer Brontez Purnell barreling through the halls, as part of artist Pope.L's durational performance *Costume Made of Nothing*. Covered from head to toe in a tight black and white bodysuit, Purnell's energy was punctuated by his heavy breathing, the sign of his body's exhaustion. Shaun Leonardo invited the exhibit's patrons to participate in his energetic and bittersweet performance *The Eulogy*, which began with a raucous dance into the streets of San Francisco, following a New Orleans-style brass marching band. The piece soon involves all in a process of questionably collective mourning for the loss of unarmed black people killed by the police, as Leonardo delivers an

amended eulogy from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Theaster Gates's installation *See, Sit, Sup, Sip, Sing: Holding Court* is a portable classroom structure composed of the desk and chairs from a closed public school on the Southside of Chicago. At the opening, this installation accommodated a lesson from the show's curator Valerie Cassel Oliver and legendary photographer Carrie Mae Weems. At one point, on the verge of tears, Weems told her audience of students, "All I know is that I'm just trying to—every day I get up—make... work that...registers the depth of our humanness."

Since the opening in June I have been haunted by a short video I saw at the exhibit, Senga Nengudi's *Hands*. I believe Weems's deep desire to represent the black as human registers my own inability to stop thinking about Nengudi's short clip. It features stop-motion still photographs of one human's two black hands making various signs, some familiar from childhood games. Jazz vocalist Nancy Wilson's song "Save Your Love for Me" plays throughout, and the line "Wish I knew / why I'm so in love with you" seems to speak not only to a fraught self-love but also to a mimetic love for other (black) hands outside (and inside) of the frame. The hands speak to themselves and others. As the fingers grip and tangle one another the line "Runway / If I were wise I'd runaway" captures the thought of escape from the binding of these hands' black bottom (maybe a desire for the racial ambiguity of their upward facing palms). But Nengudi's *Hands* take us to another plane all together. In the end, one of the hands appears alone—palm now painted bright blue—holding a heart-shaped and blossoming brown and green potato. An unexpected if not radical presence indeed.



(Left to Right) Performer Maren Hassinger activates artist Senga Nengudi's panty-hose sculpture, R.S.V.P., Visual Artist Carrie Mae Weems, microphone, teaches a lesson in Theaster Gates's portable classroom, "See, Sit, Sup, Sip, Sing: Holding Court"



Video still's from Senga Nengudi's Hands (2012)

The Future Through the Story of 'Concrete Park'

Grace Gipson, PhD Student



Imagine a future where there are slave ships that are space ships, and where fantasy is colored in rich blackness. And, then picture streams of light which illuminate the metaphysical sounds of Sun Ra and the upbeat, radical artistry of Janelle Monáe. These are just a few of the elements that project what many call Afrofuturism. This growing literary, cultural, and artistic movement uses elements of science-fiction, fantasy and magic realism to examine narratives from the African diaspora and construct stories of the future. Afrofuturism serves as a way to break through time and go beyond the existing realms of the present and give voice to people of color, particularly Black people, to simultaneously critique and revise present-day quandaries and historical events of the past. So it should be no surprise that these days everyone is

dipping into the fantasy world within popular culture, particularly through television, film, comic books and graphic novels. More specifically, this afrofuturistic narrative can be found in the graphic novel, **Concrete Park**.

Released in late 2012, *Concrete Park* is a critically-acclaimed new sci-fi graphic novel series from Dark Horse Comics. Co-created by screenwriter Tony Puryear (Eraser), actress Erika Alexander (Living Single), and her brother Robert Alexander, the series is an Eisner Award winning anthology that through its colorful pages deals with issues of race, sexuality, poverty, and exile. Originally pitched as a movie/TV show, Puryear and Alexander would be told “Black people don’t like science fiction — they don’t see themselves in the future.” As a result of this asinine assumption,

Concrete Park was born. Alexander and Puryear were motivated by what they have witnessed from the under-told stories in popular culture to urban street culture. From a female gang leader uncertain of her love and her power, to a teenager given to the street who is living for the protection of his young sister, this is the story of people we know without often seeing.



Volume 1: You Send Me and 2: R-E-S-P-E-C-T covers of Concrete Park

Concrete Park marks screenwriter Tony Puryear and actress Erika Alexander's debut in comic books and graphic novels. Upon first glance, Concrete Park depicts as a dark and provocative near-future story that follows a group of Black and Latino teenagers in a tempestuous mega metropolis, "Scare City" (think Cairo or Rio in 2020) on a distant desert planet. Readers engage in a story of these teenagers from the violent streets of Scare City and who are eventually removed from their homes on Earth, as it appears society is no longer 'willing' to deal with them. With each page, **Concrete Park** questions the nature of what it

means to be human beings, and the determination of these teenagers to maintain a sense of survival, power, hope and of course, love. This gritty and gorgeously drawn science fiction, graphic novel is reminiscent of a mash-up between the critically acclaimed film "City of God" and TV series "Firefly". Main characters Luca, a troubled gang leader; Lena her other-worldly lover; Isaac a violent young convict; and Silas, an alien who holds the fate of this world in his hand explore through their narratives what it means to be identified as "alien" or "other" as seen through a cultural lens of comic art/sequential art and speculative milieus. In this city, these young teenagers who are exiled from Earth must fight to make a new world in this new space, in which an epic and extraordinary story comes to life. In essence, they are "young, violent and ten billion miles from home." When left to their own devices, a story arises that questions the nature of human life, particularly those who have succumbed to the worst of human nature. With the story being affixed by seven characters, readers travel with them as they strive for power, hope, survival, and love. According to Puryear, "Concrete Park is a sprawling epic... It's the sci-fi story I've been waiting to tell."

To some, **Concrete Park** can be likened to an urban culture mix of HBO's Game of Thrones and the widely discussed film and book series The Hunger Games. However, what makes it unique from the above is that instead of armies and castles, there are favelas, aliens, cops, cyborgs, and futuristic ghettos and gangs. So far with two volumes released through the "Dark Horse Comics Presents" series creators Puryear and Alexander are building a rising empire within the home of some already successful comic titles that include 300, Hell Boy, and Sin City. As a part of the creation process, co-creator Tony Puryear cites Jack Kirby, co-creator of The Fantastic Four; and science fiction novelist Octavia Butler among others who have inspired his work. In particular Puryear goes on further to discuss his connection with acclaimed author Toni Morrison,

“...I love the way she writes...the emotion with which she writes. ‘Beloved’ is a book that has the magic realism of a Gabriel Garcia Marquez book. With ‘Beloved’ she is taking ordinary life and making it magical.” Puryear and Alexander do just that with their ground-breaking graphic novel series. This magic realism, which Puryear admires in Morrison’s writing, can also be found in the pages of **Concrete Park**. While reading **Concrete Park**, I found it very intriguing how it uses an “exiled gangsters in space” narrative to call attention and speak to matters such as alienation, tribalism and internal conflict in marginalized communities, and the forced displacement and resettlement of whole cultures.



A sneak peek into the pages of Concrete Park

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While fantasy as a category seeks to expand the cultural norms, there is still much to be desired in terms of character diversity. **Concrete Park** is more than just a fantasy housed in a graphic novel, but a story of hope and redemption in which people of color attempt to start anew on a cruel, mysterious planet where the odds are not always in their favor. As a whole, **Concrete Park** remixes historical perceptions while re-imagining racial and sexual identities. With each panel there appears to be some sense of hope that goes beyond the colorful pages and potentially translates into today’s reality. **Concrete Park** is a creative and thought-provoking tale of redemption that aims to deconstruct racial and gender stereotypes by using stylish storytelling within a graphic novel realm. **Concrete Park** is brilliant with its use of unforgettable protagonists, a colorful supporting cast, nonstop action and all of it presented in an exceptional, vibrant style.

When all is said and done, will the characters in the story “reproduce the violence and the tribalism they left behind, or will they make something new in this harsh new environment?” You will have to read and find out.



*Husband and Wife Team of Concrete Park l-r Tony Puryear,
Grace Gipson, and Erika Alexander at AstroBlackness 2014*

Retro, Reality and the Reel black college experience

Kimberely McNair, PhD Candidate

In 2015 black academe and black America became immersed in two major events: #ConcernedStudent1950 at the University of Missouri (Mizzou) and the return of *A Different World* (NBC, 1987 – 1993). These events not only circulated the web and the airwaves, but also reintroduced the public to black college life as both political and cultural phenomena that resonate across generations.

Viewers witnessed the spread of protests across the country on television and the Internet, amidst and in response to racial hostility and micro-aggressions on campuses nation wide. This time Mizzou, a Historically/Predominately White Institution (HPWI), served as a catalyst for black students nationally. These events follow a recent trend in the use of social media campaigns that helped foster inter-campus dialogue and collaboration among black collegians. For example, the “I, Too, Am...” and the “Being Black at...” visual campaigns and hashtags proliferated student Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages over the past two years. UC Berkeley extended their support in their own campaigns “I, Too, Am Berkeley” and #BlackatCal. #ConcernedStudent1950 is the latest in what has become a tradition in youth protest culture – that is, connecting the institutional inequalities faced by black and brown students on campus to the systemic injustices present off campus in neighboring Oakland and cities like Ferguson, Missouri (e.g. the 2014 #Ferguson2Cal protests). The coincidence in location for Ferguson and Mizzou, provides a relational understanding of how black bodies are perceived in the classroom and in broader society.

This year also saw the return of the popular 1990s television series *A Different World* to audiences via the online streaming services Netflix and Hulu as well as cable channels like Logo and TV One.

The show was a spin off of the *Cosby Show*, and also created by Bill Cosby. The first season follows second eldest Huxtable daughter Denise, as she leaves home to attend Hillman College in Virginia. Though Hillman is a fictional Historically Black College (HBCU), in the first of its six seasons Hillman was depicted as an institution with very mixed demographics, and even featured future Oscar winner Marisa Tomei who played one of Denise’s two roommates. After the first season there were major changes, as new series director Debbie Allen sought authenticity in the depiction of black life. Allen, a graduate of Howard University in Washington, DC, used live footage of “Hillman College” filmed on the real life campuses of Clark University and Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia. The director even went a step further and required her actors to visit the campuses of both Spellman and Morehouse College (also in Atlanta, Georgia) annually. They observed college life, fashion, and dorm atmosphere. They also spoke with students and administrators to get a sense of the climate and current issues that mattered to the broader campus communities. For seasons two through six the series began to focus more on the coupling of and eventual marriage of Whitely Gilbert and Dwayne Wayne. The reunion shows on both the TV Land and the OWN networks were immensely popular; and thousands have binge watched the series in its entirety. The show has gained a new audience and reinvigorated longtime fans of the series. Debbie Allen has teased a reboot since 2014, and there is an active fan based movement to bring back *A Different World* on platforms like Facebook (Bring Back ADW) and there is even an online apparel store HillmanBookstore.com. It seems that for some Hillman was and is “The HBCU We Can All Call Our Alma Matter.” These illustrations of black

collegiate life and black youth at the crossroad of reality and fiction provoke questions about what it means to be young, black, and on college campuses today in the age of Black Lives Matter. What does it mean for black youth to view this show about black college life first airing over twenty years ago, while their lives are currently being threatened and devalued on college campuses in real time? For students at HPWIs viewing *A Different World*, the specificity of black college life on a black college campus may differ tremendously from those on a predominately white college campus. The burden of representation, academically and socially, can have lasting affects on ones worldview, political engagement, and professional lives. A more illuminating take on these two events, troubles our understanding of “the black college experience.” The key element here is anti-blackness on both black and non-black (majority) campuses. The experiential connections and disconnections among black collegians are at center, not their relative institutions.

The politics of respectability on both HBCU and HPWI campuses creates political culture(s) that can ignite student activism and lull students into apathy. Even as the events at Mizzou and campuses across the country unfolded, and #BlackOnCampus gained momentum, the HBCU vs. HPWI debate added to the growing tensions on Black Twitter and popular blogs among African Americans educated at four year colleges and universities. Speculation as to whether Mizzou students could have avoided mal treatment by attending HBCUs, diverted away from the issues of black life in white controlled spaces. Attending Howard, Clark, Spellman, or Morehouse are surely beautiful and unique experiences. And attending the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Missouri, or Cornell University is also a beautiful and unique experience. Black is a country, and our campus communities are villages. The existence of Black Cultural Centers and campus units that support African American students on HPWI campuses that lose accreditation and public and private funding.

Whether the environment is racially welcoming or racially hostile, both of these experiences can politicize you – hopefully toward investment in all black people, not some black people depending on where they did or did not attend school.

To think of *A Different World* in retrospect, as one who straddles the Hip Hop and millennial generations, I am hopeful about the possibilities a reboot would bring. Web series like *Awkward Black Girl* and *RommieLoveFriends* and production companies like *Black & Sexy TV* have all found their way to the television and cable markets. Perhaps an ADW – Dormtainment TV collaboration is a possibility? Netflix recently revived the 1980s sitcom *Full House*, so a new life for ADW is definitely possible. The “very special episodes” of *A Different World* were ahead of their time. With good writing, studio backing, and exposure a majority black television show, set on a college campus (HBCU or HPWI), with episodes addressing: rape culture, trans identity, micro-aggressions, mental health and emotional wellbeing, ICE raids and immigration, and the movement for black lives would be as impactful for audiences now as those episodes were for audiences then.



*Image Credit:
The Cultured Savage
Apparel Company*

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Tianna Paschel

John Mundell, PhD Student

On a Tuesday afternoon in October, Dr. Tianna Paschel welcomed me into her office to sit and have a conversation about her academic and personal journey, the grateful eeriness of finding herself back in Barrows Hall, but now sitting on the other side of the desk. I claimed the best seat in the house: a grey armchair by the window looking towards the Campanile where the light refracted on the meticulously organized books, boxes still being unpacked, a painting propped against the wall, and a newly arrived professor more than willing to chat.

We started with the basic academic interview civilities—how are you?, where are you from?, how was grad school?, what are your current projects?—all of which I will here shortly reveal. Yet, underneath, lied an exuberant and earnest commitment to scholarship and mentorship: a desire to work with and support students from all backgrounds on research and academia’s life lessons, just as she had felt privileged by some faculty to do while learning from difficulties caused by others who had failed to encourage her and her work.

Born in Flint, Michigan, Dr. Paschel moved at a young age from a predominantly working-class African American community to a more diverse upbringing in Sacramento, California. In the shared experience with other working-class students of color in Sacramento—Filipinos, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Central Americans, and their descendants—her initial interests in Spanish burgeoned while also immersing herself in Bay Area hip hop culture. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Business and Economics with a Minor in Spanish from the University of California, Los Angeles, later receiving a Masters of Arts in Latin American Studies from the same institution. Due to

the UC system’s overcrowding in the early 2000s, she was encouraged by UCLA to study abroad, choosing to spend a semester in San José, Costa Rica and another six weeks in Brazil.

It was while in Costa Rica that Dr. Paschel’s then unknown interest in Afro-Latin America began to surface. Walking along the streets of San José, she was often confused for Afro-Costa Rican Creole stating: “To be read as Afro-Central American but to not be from there was a crazy idea to me, to think about embodying a set of meanings but not be completely knowledgeable about what those are. ... At that point, you start to realize that it is a whole world that has not been taught to you. There is a whole set of questions that are familiar in certain ways, like the relegation of blackness to specific spaces, the problematic hierarchies, and all kinds of things that are being read on your body that you don’t know the history of.” This self-discovery led her to deepen her knowledge in the quintessential Afro-Latin America so often glorified in Black Studies: Salvador, Brazil.

With this foundational point of our academic and personal upbringings in common, we reminisced on both Salvador’s alluring and not-so-enchanted qualities: the profound presence of not only embodied blackness, but also African influences in religion, food, and language opposite the glaring and violent inequalities of a majority black city whose political and economic elite were not black. Brazil, for obvious numerical and cultural reasons, thus became one of Dr. Paschel’s sites of research on the African diaspora and its social movements in the Americas. Nonetheless, she critiques Brazil constructed by theorists as “the proxy through which we see Afro-Latin America, which is strange given how different Brazil is from the

rest of the region, given how insular the country is, if we think about how little Brazilians think about themselves as Latin Americans.” For this, before having set foot there—further inspiring an academic expansion beyond Brazil—Dr. Paschel sought out Colombia and Afro-Colombian social movements as a second research site. Through previous work at a Washington-based think-tank on Latin America, she had interacted heavily with Afro-Colombian activists, either visiting the U.S. or here as refugees, whose violent realities of having achieved rights to land and to organize via racial classification yet receiving constant threats on their lives from the right-wing brought forth a paradox. As such, Dr. Paschel’s work crucially engages and questions the irony of several Latin American states’ recent legislative embrace of racial difference over historic colorblindness and how social movements influence and live out these decisions.

The manuscript for her book on this research, *Becoming Black Political Subjects*, has recently been turned in to Princeton University Press and will be published in June, therefore much deserved congratulations are in order. This book starts by looking at the shift from colorblindness to black rights in Colombia and Brazil by first describing how in the legal and formal sense, black populations were unmarked, de facto second-class citizens to how they become subjects of rights as collective groups and individuals. The second part investigates what it actually means to be a black political subject and the quotidian exercise of rights. She has two other book projects in the works: the first is a co-authored book with Petra Rivera-Rideau (a graduate of our program) and Jennifer A. Jones on transnational and diasporic blackness in the Americas; the second is a book tentatively called *Exporting Racial Paradise* on questions of racialized nation-making from within and beyond the actual confines of the Brazilian nation, and certain transnational agents who influence this (e.g. diplomats, writers, artists, tourist

agencies, etc.).

The conversation shifted then towards current issues of racial violence in the American and Brazilian media, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and whether this is an opportune moment for Afro-Brazilians to reassert their right to difference. As strides towards political and socio-economic equality for people of color have been made in the Americas during political openings, such as the military dictatorship’s loosening grasp in Brazil in the mid-70s or the U.S.’s war on drugs in Colombia in the 80s and early 90s, we asked each other if the current corruption scandal surrounding the Brazilian state oil company, Petrobras, and the post-World Cup recession were an optimal time for Afro-Brazilians to gain further access. We continued by comparing Brazil’s age-old colorblind state to the U.S.’s “post-racial” state and the fight against de facto segregation and police brutality, where Dr. Paschel reflected on Brazil’s long-standing movement *Reaja ou Será Morto/a* (React or You Will Be Killed). Performing similar work to BLM in localized, grassroots organizing with a somewhat decentralized organization for almost 15 years, Reaja is just one of the most recent iterations of black political organizing around police violence and the genocide of black people in Latin America that have come to fruition in the past century. She highlighted the transnationalisms rarely discussed in these debates: “Reaja was making contact with all kinds of people some of which are now organized under BLM before BLM existed as such. The arrows of influence get all jumbled up in interesting ways.” I asked if there were lessons or even power in sharing these experiences to which she replied that connections are saturated with power, furthering that, even if no lesson is gleaned, her sense is that “the energy of it all will produce something that leaves these spaces [of mobilization] energized.” Like other movements before Reaja and BLM, black movements in the Americas have continuously sought out solidarity and

collaboration.

In reflecting upon our conversation, I conclude by saying I learned a great deal not only about Dr. Paschel, but about the Department and the graduate school experience at Berkeley. Having completed her PhD here in Sociology, she often looked to our department for support, founding the Afro-Latino working group with other students from our doctoral program, seeking out guidance from faculty so as to create a safe and generative space that fostered her growth and learning. She joked about how it is strange to return as a professor, particularly in that she “had a ball” here as a graduate student: “You’re paying me to read books?! What?! Who?! The jig is going to be up! This can’t be real. I cannot believe that this is actually a thing!” We shared a good laugh at the expense of her retrospect, but this outlook is to be admired and emulated. In that, Dr. Paschel has reminded me that I do, in fact, feel incredibly lucky to be here.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Tianna Paschel back to Berkeley and as a member of our Department faculty!

"A Commitment to Better Understanding": An Interview with Dr. Jovan Lewis

Charisse Burden, PhD Candidate

I first met Dr. Jovan Lewis in Spring 2014 during his job talk in the African American Studies Department for the Haas Economic Disparities job search. I was immediately drawn to his discussion of "sufferation," a concept that had political economic, anthropological, sociological, and cultural implications. Having decided for myself that his work was decidedly transdisciplinary—that is, work that traverses, and indeed challenges, disciplinary, methodological, and conceptual boundaries to answer multivalent questions and interrogate complex phenomenon—I asked him during the Q & A period whether he would consider himself to be an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary scholar. Despite their cachet and ubiquity in the academy, Dr. Lewis eschewed all of these labels, maintaining that his work is committed to understanding the problems that affect dispossessed populations. So whatever described that orientation is what he was. I next encountered professor Lewis at the job talk luncheon during which he was expected to interface with graduate students in the Department. Here, Dr. Lewis thoughtfully and patiently engaged my (somewhat aggressive) challenges along with those of other graduate students. Never hostile or defensive, he eloquently discussed the nuances and contours of his research and graciously received the critiques offered by graduate students. Based on these interactions, I was happy to learn that Dr. Lewis had accepted the position and had been appointed to African Diaspora Studies and Geography. He is a tremendous addition to the department, not only because he is affable, approachable, and has a genuine interest in mentorship, but also because his work brilliantly articulates cultural studies to the political economic and

structural realities of conditions throughout the Black Diaspora. With the addition of Dr. Lewis (and Dr. Tianna Paschel, who also joined African Diaspora Studies in 2015), the Department now has a balanced representation of faculty who focus on the humanities, and faculty whose work critically engages the social sciences.

What is your educational background and what influenced you to choose this field/area of inquiry?

I was trained in anthropology from undergrad through to the PhD, which I did at the London School of Economics. My PhD work was on economic 'ethics' that operated in the social sphere of the economy and market in Jamaica. In particular, these were 'cooperation,' 'rights,' and 'radical accumulation.' This work came about because of my interest in the use of the term 'sufferation' in Jamaica to describe one's economic, but also sociological, and at times psychological condition. Sufferation became a lens through which to understand the economy of the poor (and invariably black) in Jamaica. I felt that the respective methodological and theoretical approaches and analytical frames of anthropology were well, if not best, suited to this interest.

How do your research interests and areas of specialization contribute to the project of African Diaspora Studies?

My work forwards a generative definition of the economy, in which the experience of many, contemporary inequality, poverty and race inform its articulation and spatial organization. For me, it's critical to understand

how all three become conflated, and how that conflation is acted upon within society generally, and particularly within those communities of the raced poor. Given the inherent comparative interest and approach of anthropology, I am interested in scaling that analysis upwards and outwards to multiple spaces of experiential black poverty. I have done this by working in both Jamaica and Oklahoma. What becomes possible is a generation of theory around the question of black poverty and inequality, its vicissitudes across space and historical circumstance. So I am able to take sufferation, which I worked on in Jamaica, and see similar logics of race and poverty in Tulsa, OK, and note similar characteristics that read as particular to the black experience, diasporically construed.

How does the African Diaspora as an analytic/concept figure into your work?

As I mentioned, I work in Jamaica and the US on issues of black poverty and inequality and the ways they're co-constituted through lived experience and historical construction. However, contemporary black poverty and inequality are products of a continued experience of black economy. The economic experience of blackness, though perhaps most significantly experienced on a local scale, remains intrinsically global, when we begin to think about the circuits and streams that feed into it. The idea of a diaspora, whether as an analytic, or phenomenon—or even phenomena, if we consider the African Diaspora as operating as constructed of multiple diasporas—is a necessary, and extremely useful means of examining that broader process. Additionally, I'd like to think that in my work, I am working toward a black/African diasporic theory of political economy.

How does your work incorporate an interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary/transdisciplinary approach?

I maintain a commitment to better understanding the problems of racial inequality and poverty. This commitment is unbiased in its orientation and willingness to work toward solutions. As an anthropologist, of course I seek any opportunity to bring what I think are my discipline's extremely valuable insights to bear on that process of problem solving, especially into the space of policy. However, there are limitations that inevitably occur with any practice of singular disciplinary. And so I draw from a broad range of areas to think and work through these questions around poverty and race. Examples from two extremes could include my using economic search theory from economics, or the great work around blackness and aspirational humanity from literary criticism/studies folks. Fundamentally, working on issues on, or tangential to, blackness requires this kind of latitude, otherwise you are doing your scholarship a disservice, and in a sense fail to honor the complexity and complications of black life.

How does the African Diaspora Studies department at UC Berkeley provide you with a unique opportunity to pursue your research interests?

What's so great about being in Af-Am here at Berkeley, is the diversity in thought and method among the faculty, but that in that diversity there remains a singular concern and interest in best understanding blackness. And the concern is so genuine, that concern is lived. So for me coming from the UK, and London, in particular, where discussions around blackness were difficult to arrange, much less have, it's personally nourishing to be in such a place as this, and of course great for my research, in that there is a facility for discussion around aspects of my work, that I have not had

access to before.

What is one course you will teach in the Department? What are some of the texts you will be using? Why is this an important addition to the African Diaspora Studies course catalog?

I will be teaching Race and Economy in the Black Diaspora as a grad course in Spring 2016. The course examines the central place of race within capitalist economies, largely overlooked by mainstream economic analyses and unpack its implications for equality in wider capitalist markets, state systems, and development initiatives. The readings will be diverse and include texts like Williams' Capitalism and Slavery, Gilroy's Darker than Blue, Janet Roitman's Fiscal Disobedience, and Michael Ralph's Forensics of Capital. The class will be useful—I will leave the designation of importance to time—because it serves as an opportunity for ADS students to see how blackness and economy are co-constituted. Additionally, the readings are geographically drawn from across the diaspora, and so it allows for an examination of multiple forms of blackness.

What are some of the advantages of having a joint appointment in African Diaspora Studies and Geography? What are some of the struggles?

There really aren't any struggles, although I realize it's de rigueur to have a little moan about administrative commitments, so I'll just say they are the most difficult part, in terms of time, but they're really not burdensome. But I also know that I am shielded by our chair from the full brunt of what those responsibilities could be (thanks Leigh!) The advantages are many, and goes back to the concern with problem solving. Having two departments provides Having two departments provides double the resource in considerate

colleagues, their time, and their varied perspectives. Also, the relationship historically between Af-Am and Geography has been one of keen solidarity, and that's something I hope to continue to foster in my appointment; beginning with the cross-listing of my courses and the coordination of colloquia/ invited talks in ways that folks in both departments could appreciate.

How do you like the Bay Area? How does it compare to Montego Bay and London?

The Bay Area is great; no need to point out the one obvious drawback. I'm also sure you mean East Bay, because what's interesting, or perhaps telling, is that since arriving and driving through San Francisco, I haven't been back across. But the Bay Area (Oakland/Berkeley) doesn't really compare to London and Montego Bay, honestly. It has its own character, which I'm still getting to know as I make my way around.

What has been your best experience in the Bay Area thus far?

This might be a bit pedestrian, but spending time at Cal has been my best experience. Maybe because it's my most common one! But the campus has a great energy and its sheer scope is highly impressive.

What is something interesting that you would like the readers to know about you?

Well, it's not really about me. But I'm working on a pet book project about the cultural politics of whiteness in the Jamaican 1970s, with my mom's experience participating in the 1971 Miss Jamaica contest as the motivation.

Meeting Our New Faculty:

An Interview with Chiyuma Elliott

Essence Harden, PhD Student

Chiyuma Elliott is Assistant Professor of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Her scholarly work and teaching focus on poetry and poetics, visual culture, and intellectual history from the 1920s to the present. Before joining the Berkeley faculty, Elliott was a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford, and Assistant Professor of English, Creative Writing, and African American Studies at the University of Mississippi. A Cave Canem Alumni Fellow, she has also received fellowships from the American Philosophical Society, the James Irvine Foundation, and the Vermont Studio Center. She earned her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Warren Wilson College and her Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin.[1]

Congratulations on your recent publication “California Winter League.” Can you tell us some about the process and the thematics of this collection?

California Winter League starts with a group of persona poems written from the perspective of Leroy “Satchel” Paige, and its epigraph is from him: “Don’t look back. Something might be gaining on you.” The book is all about looking back—its dangers and possibilities. It’s also about time. In the middle are a bunch of autobiographical poems about my uncle Jim’s murder. Those were really hard poems to write. It took me a decade to even begin to put words to what happened to him, and to my family in the aftermath of his death.

What are some particularly pertinent aspects within the current state of poetry and African Diaspora/African American Studies?

I’m really interested in the hybrid literary critical works that people are making now—for example, Rowan Ricardo Phillips’s *When Blackness Rhymes with Blackness* and Kevin Young’s *The Grey Album*, as well as video pieces and drawings by Terrance Hayes that I think also fall in this category. There’s a terrific blurring of some of the conventional boundaries between criticism and poetry, and this gives us readers an opportunity to revisit questions about why scholarship exists, and who it’s for, and how it operates. Ditto with poetry! Because I’m a formalist, I’m having a field day thinking about all this beautiful new work.

In terms of your own research how has the department of African American Studies at U.C Berkeley been a stimulus?

One key resource here is The Black Room collective. Both the speakers they bring to campus, and the conversations this group helps facilitate, are gifts. In one week, I went to talks by Shawn Michelle Smith (whose work I’ve been a fan of since *American Archives* came out), and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby (whose new book on Sojourner Truth and photography is so innovative and important). And I also had these terrific conversations with Black Room colleagues in the audience, which ended up turning into lunch dates,

which ended up helping me think about how I'll eventually teach Claudia Rankine's new book *Citizen*, and how to be conceptually bolder in my own literary critical work on poetry and analogy.

Can you give a few words of advice for newly minted Ph.D's in African Diaspora Studies?

In new faculty orientation, there was a panel where experienced Berkeley professors shared their tips for junior faculty. I'm going to pass on a piece of advice that really resonated with me (because it's hard to follow): don't go after the shiny penny. Meaning, new projects are fun, but success hinges on being really thoughtful and disciplined about what work you can actually bring to fruition in the first few years on the job.

Favorite moment thus far at U.C Berkeley, specifically and the Bay Area in general?

I was sitting with one of my students at a Holloway reading, which started with a performance by the Baha'i jazz combo Positive Knowledge, and ended with a reading by Ronaldo Wilson (during which he placed a bunch of wigs around the stage, and DJed, and freestyled, and read new poems). It was a really unusual event. Afterward, Ariya turn to me with this stunned look on her face, and said "That was AMAZING!" That made my week. Because I totally agree—it was magic, and so much fun. I wish everyone in the department had been there!



photography + diaspora

Malika Crutchfield, PhD Candidate

My photography examines ephemera in the natural world, urban life in the 21st century, and the intersection between the two. I am interested in looking closely at urban and organic landscapes to find messages, meaning, communication, and language that is transmitted through various means, almost always impermanent. My work deals with themes of ecotone, silence, voice, visibility, blindness, surveillance, representation, secrecy, Diaspora, hegemony, and authenticity. I've had work published and in shows consistently over the past 2 years, around the Bay Area and nationwide, ever since being diagnosed with epilepsy in 2014. After my diagnosis (and three grand mal seizures) the content, imagery, context, makeup, and themes that make up the fabric of my work transformed dramatically. I am currently showing in a year long exhibit in Basel, Switzerland called "Lettered Art" at the Hotel Teufelhof, Basel. My work can be seen online at www.bodhizwanya.com.



"Night Whispers"
digital photography printed on canvas, 24 X 24 inches, 2014



"Survival"
digital photography printed on canvas; 24 X 24 inches, 2015

Preta

John Mundell, PhD Student

To me, you are Brazil
 at the brightest of dawns:
You leave home headlong,
 and in your eyes, honey,
The Amazon's ocher flows and
 the rubber tree's sap drips
Ruby-red palm oil on puckered lips,
 redeeming atop the foothills along the Guanabara
Portuguese, Castilian, German, Italian
 Kongo, Zulu, Mongo, Hutu
Xokó, Guarani, Pataxó, Tupi
 sun-scorched, blue tar, burnt cinnamon, or dusky
Chocolate charlatans, mulattoes, tawny and brown ones, or blacks,
 oh, Miscegenation that gladdens but separates and cracks!
In all of them there is a country to be re-constructed
 with your swelling vigor, shuffling towards
Your home of fervent blackness—
 to me, you are Brazil.
From the other side of the street,
I see it all in you, my love,
so naïve but never still.

Meet the 2015-2016 First Years



Cherod Johnson is a PhD student in African American Studies and alumni of Bowling Green State University (B.A. in Print Journalism), the University of Pittsburgh (M.A. in Rhetoric), and the University of Wisconsin (M.A. in Gender and Women's Studies, with an emphasis in Art History and Visual Culture).

The questions that sustain his work emerge from an abiding interest in queer theory, psychoanalysis, and feminist studies. In particular, he is interested in articulations of blackness in twentieth century American literature and visual cultures (from photography to film), and how sociopolitical claims of personhood and rights discourse are initiated by and especially worked out through iterations of antiblackness. More specifically, his line of inquiry has focused on the ways in which the black body troubles traditional understandings of the archive, memory, and subjectivity, and how the visualization of the sexed and raced body may potentially call out for a public reckoning.



Nicole Ramsey graduated from the University of California Santa Cruz with a B.A. in American Studies and minor in Sociology. Nicole also received her MA in African American Studies at UCLA where she developed research interests in race, gender and social movements. Her Master's thesis looked at Caribbean radicalism, political and labor unrest in early 20th century Belize (British Honduras). Nicole is from Los Angeles, California and is currently a first year in the department.



Malika Saramaat Imhotep graduated Magna Cum Laude from Brandeis University with a B.A. in African/Afro-American Studies (Highest Honors) and Socio-Cultural Anthropology with a minor in Creative Writing. Her Honors thesis used the relationship between Ghanaian Hiplife and Hip-Hop to explore themes of migration, nationalism, authenticity, and the cyclical nature of cultural production within the African diaspora.

Malika's work is currently engaged in understanding the potential, politics and necessity of black pain and joy as accessed by women through diasporic processes of creative expression. Under this intentionally broad umbrella falls a specific interest in the way contemporary popular music of black and African origins communicates and scripts the performance and presentation of black female desire.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks to Ianna Hawkins Owen for the use of your design for *The Diaspora*; Yetunde Olagbaju for your artwork; all our contributors; and the Department of African American Studies for your sponsorship.