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From the Chair

It has been one of the highpoints of my professional career thus far to have served as the Interim Chair of Africana Studies here at Cornell during 2016-2017. Founded in 1969, today, our unit remains committed to academic innovation and to remaining at the forefront of our field theoretically and pedagogically. We do so while sustaining our ongoing commitments to activism and community engagement. As you will see in this newsletter, our year is a testament to our continued vibrancy, relevance, and engagement. As you will see in this newsletter, this year we served as the Interim Chair of Africana Studies here at Cornell during 2016-2017.

As a result of such depth and breadth in the scholarly lives of our department’s faculty, it is little wonder that our course offerings this year attracted a strong cohort of students and our numbers of majors and minors showed a significant upward trend. We offered courses such as Professor Good’s on Hip Hop and on the Sociologies of the Black Family, Professor Grovougi taught a class on China and Africa, Professor Rooks, taught a class on Food Access and Food Movements, Professor Richardson taught a course on the Blackpopulation in Trump’s America, and populism in Trump’s America, Professor Labennett taught an Engaged Learning course on oral history and building community, Professor Stang taught a course on the history of race and the presidency, the rise of white supremacy in Trump’s America, the philosophies of the African Diaspora, The Black Lives Matter Movement, and the meaning of freedom and liberation in Cuba and Latin America.

In addition to our work with undergraduates, our doctoral program, wrapping up its third year in existence, has continued to attract a diverse group of deeply engaged students. I am pleased to report that this year, all five of the students to whom we offered admission accepted. Our graduate students are Asian, African, Caribbean, European, African American and Latin American and hail from five different continents. Their research projects and interests are equally as diverse, and our first cohorts, finishing up their third year, have all passed their A-exams and remain on track to complete their doctorates within five years.

We anticipate bringing a minor in African Studies and another in Caribbean Studies on board during the 2017-2018 academic year. We are also discussing the possibility of offering additional minors in areas of particular depth for us, such as popular culture and the Black radical tradition. Finally, we are beginning discussions of enhancing our offerings of 1 and 2 credit courses with the hope of attracting more freshmen and sophomores to Africana Studies earlier in their academic careers.

Our aim here at Africana Studies is to ensure that our future remains as bright as our past. This year shows that we are well on our way to accomplishing that goal.

Noliwe Rooks
Interim Chair, Africana Studies
Trump a 'grave danger' to U.S., Munday lecturer says

LINDA B. GLASER


In his lecture, Robinson discussed his columns and his experiences over the last decade. He began by recalling election night 2008, spent "with my family" and the emotional column he wrote the next day, "Morning in America." Robinson summed it up in three words: “It’s exciting to see students from across the country coming to hear a lecture hosted by the Africana Center. It’s exciting to see students from across the university coming to hear a lecture of this quality. It’s really a privilege to be able to sponsor this," said Reuben Munday.

During the Q&A, Robinson briefly addressed Hillary Clinton. "I’m not the most popular person in the Clinton world because I was very critical in 2008," he said. "But [the Clintons are not] the evil incarnate [that] Republicans like to make them [out to be]. My main view is that it’s simply unthinkable that Trump should be president, and that’s why I talk about him so much. I see him as a grave danger to this country.”

Robinson ended with a request: ‘Please vote.’

After the lecture, Reuben A. Munday ’69, MPS ’74, and Cheryl Casselberry Munday ’72 joined attendees at a reception hosted by the Africana Center. "It’s exciting to see students from across the country coming to hear a lecture of this quality. It’s really a privilege to be able to sponsor this," said Reuben Munday.

This article was also published in the Cornell Chronicle.

“A overt racism has made a big comeback,” said Robinson. “I look at my email, Twitter mentions, how people interact with me, and never have I seen such old-style, unreconstructed, N-word racism.”

Trump expresses the feeling of people afraid of change, said Robinson. “Make America Great Again’ is ‘let’s go back to the good old days,’ which is why his outreach to African-Americans will never go anywhere.”

Robinson said we are seeing the development of a working-class consciousness similar to what we saw in the early 20th century: “We are in the midst of a transformation from a factory economy to an information economy.”

Globalization is here to stay and has had real impact on people. “It’s why Trump is doing better than expected in Ohio – it’s why he came up with a Rust Belt strategy.”

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In the 21st century and nearly 50 years after its inception, the Africana Studies & Research Center remains committed to continuing academic innovation in this field and to remaining at its forefront theoretically and pedagogically, while sustaining its ongoing commitments to activism and community engagement. Africana has an experiential learning course called “The Underground Railroad” which offers undergraduates an experiential learning opportunity as participants retrace routes of the local Underground Railroad and abolition movement through several cities in upstate New York and Southern Ontario, Canada. This course provides an introductory examination of antebellum slavery and its abolition in the United States, including slave resistance, emancipation, reconstruction and effects of U.S. slavery on current social contexts. A gift of $100,000 will ensure limited cost to students to participate in this experiential learning opportunity.

Our faculty expertise in the global study of race and Blackness makes Africana Studies at Cornell a significant resource for people who want to engage in the interdisciplinary study of people in the Black Diaspora. The Africana Studies & Research Center remains committed to education and community building and wants to host workshops and develop resource materials for K-12 educators on creating an anti-racist educational experience for their students. Africana will partner with local organizations and school districts to set up annual workshops and events for building skills within our community through our educators to combat racism. A gift of $250,000 would ensure that the workshops would be offered consistently with the intent to build a community of awareness and action.
Faculty Activities & Accomplishments

Gerard Aching, Professor of Africana and Romance Studies, was named to a three-year term as the Provost Fellow for Public Engagement beginning July 1, 2017. Professor Aching was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in October 2016, which allowed him to visit the Colombian Ministry of Culture’s prestigious Instituto Caro y Cuervo in Bogotá, to explore new areas of scholarship on Afro-Colombian culture and literature.

N’Dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba, Professor of Africana Studies, published “Ilhary Rodham Clinton and the 1995 Faculty Activities & Accomplishments” in Dinesh Sharma in The Global Hillary published by New York, London: Routledge. Professor Assié-Lumumba received a travel grant from the Office of the Vice Provost for International Affairs and was able to visit the Confucius Center at the University of Johannesburg (South Africa) as a Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Education.

Carole Boyce Davies, Professor of Africana Studies and English, received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation of $75,000 to develop a session of “Preparing Haitian Teachers and Students for Economic Sustainability.” Professor Boyce Davies also completed the publication of a children’s book titled “WALKING” that was also published in Haitian Kreyol as EN AVAAN. This book was distributed to over 300 teachers in Haiti free of charge.

Grant Farred, Professor of Africana Studies, will publish a limited book series with the University of Minnesota Press, “Untimely Interventions” that will produce at least 5 books. Professor Farred, together with Professor Elizabeth Anker (English and the Law School), organized an international conference in honor of Jonathan Culler “Theorizing the Lyric: The World Novel” in February 2017.

Kevin K. Gaines, W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of Africana Studies and History, was the faculty liaison for the Africana Studies offices that burned to the ground under suspicious circumstances in 1970 during Homecoming Weekend in fall 2016. Professor Gaines was a panelist for the post-screening discussion of the film James Baldwin: I Am Not Your Nigger in the Willard Straight Theater.

Travis L. Gosa, Assistant Professor of Africana Studies, published the chapter “Fear of a Black President: Conspiracy Theory and Racial Paranoia in Obama America” in “Race Still Matters” edited volume by Yuya Kiuchi with SUNY University Press. Professor Gosa became a faculty advisor for the Cornell student group “Hip Hop Heads.”

Siba N. Grovogui, Professor of Africana Studies, was a panelist to discuss the impact of “Beyond Eurocentrism” on its twentieth anniversary. The panel consisted of Profs. Mahmoud Mamdani, Premesh Lalriu, Walter D. Mignolo, Okakunte George, Anna M. Agathangelou, and Kaniari Maxine Clarke and was published “N’tokhankan” in Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East by Duke University Press. Professor Grovogui was invited to be a member of the Gorki Forum at Humboldt University, organized conjointly with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Topic was World Disorder.

Salah M. Hassan, Goldwin Smith Professor of Africana Studies and History of Art, developed two projects that were fully funded by the Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE. The first is entitled The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan (1945-Present) and a major traveling exhibition entitled the Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement (1945-Present) that was inaugurated with Sharjah, UAE, on November 2016 and ended January 19, 2017. A second collaborative project entitled, When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938-1965). The project is conceived as a collaboration between Sharjah Art Foundation, Cornell’s IOM and the Visual Cultures Program at the American University in Cairo. Two major publications are forthcoming in conjunction with this project.

Oneka LaBennett, Associate Professor of Africana Studies, organized an international conference “On/By Black Women/Black Girls” at Cornell in spring 2017. Professor LaBennett designed and taught two new courses, “Black Girlhood Ethnographies,” an engaged-learning seminar that includes upper-level undergrads and graduate students. For the latter, Professor LaBennett applied for and received an Engaged Opportunity grant which was used to fund the fieldwork excursion with students in “Engaging NYC” during the 2017 spring break. This course partners students with a community organization in Brooklyn, New York (CariBeING, a cultural arts non-profit). In the “Women in Hip Hop” course, her students participated in the filming of a documentary about a pioneering woman artist and became active in national discourses surrounding hip hop music and culture.

Riché Richardson, Associate Professor of Africana Studies, published an essay in the feminist journal, Labrys, based in Brazil. Professor Richardson was the Interim Director of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship on campus, which is designed to mentor and support students who are juniors and seniors as they prepare to apply for Ph.D. programs. She also participated in a series of conference panels on the impact of police violence on black communities, including the black feminist #SayHerName panel in Boston and the landmark Westheimer Peace Symposium.
Noliwe Rooks, Associate Professor of Africana Studies and Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and the Interim Chair of Africana Studies for the 2016-2017 academic year, completed and turned in her book manuscript on the history of educational profiteering from the under education of American children who are poor, of color, or both. It is titled, “Cutting School: Privatization, Segregation and the End of Public Education in America.” Professor Rooks taught, “Race and Social Entrepreneurship: Food Justice and Urban Reform.” The course was successful, and examined food justice in Ithaca and surrounding areas and explored innovative approaches to bring about social equity and justice in relation to food availability, access and sustainability for those with low or fixed income.

C. Riley Snorton, Associate Professor of Africana Studies and Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, completed his manuscript “Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity.” It was released in November 2017 with the University of Minnesota Press. Professor Snorton delivered the annual distinguished alumni George Gerbner lecture at the University of Pennsylvania in January 2017. He also created two new courses titled “On Man: Sociogeny and Subjectivation” and “Masculinities” that were offered that year.

Olufemi Taiwo, Professor of Africana Studies and Philosophy, completed revisions for his upcoming book “Philosophy and the State in Postcolonial Africa” that will come out with Indiana University Press and for “Of Problem Moderns and Excluded Moderns: On the Essential Hybridity of Modernity,” a book that will come out with Routledge. Professor Taiwo’s book “Africa Must Be Modern: A Manifesto” was featured for a special panel discussion at the Lagos Book and Arts Festival (LABAF) held at Freedom Park, Lagos, Nigeria.

Adeolu Ademoye, Senior Lecturer of Yoruba, is President of African Language Teachers Association. Adeolu organized an African Language Workshop on Medical Vocabulary at the annual Language consortium meeting, to share Yoruba Language with Brown University—This means that when this process is completed, consistent with my teaching statement, Yoruba language will be shared by Cornell/Columbia and Brown universities simultaneously as a 21st century classroom effort.

Happiness Patrick Bulugu, Lecturer of Kiswahili, developed Kiswahili vocabulary exercises for Elementary Kiswahili (ASRC 1105) and Global Health (ASRC 1107) through Quizlet, an online learning platform. The platform will aid and reinforce usage of unfamiliar vocabulary introduced in class, amplify Kiswahili comprehension and retention, and maximize classroom time for interacting in Kiswahili confidently. Happiness is part of a committee developing World-Readiness Standards for Learning Kiswahili.

The history of the Negro is the history of America, and it is not a pretty story,” says the late writer James Baldwin in director Raoul Peck’s documentary “I Am Not Your Negro.” The 2016 film is based on Baldwin’s recollections of the civil rights leaders Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. A friend, intimate and comrade of all three, Baldwin explores race relations in America before, during and after their assassinations. His words connect race relations in the 20th century with those today as depicted by the film. In the words of Samantha Sheppard, assistant professor of performing and media arts, “he reminds us history is the present.”

Following a screening of the movie at Cornell Cinema, the first of the “Skin” series hosted with the Society for the Humanities, four College of Arts and Sciences professors gave brief talks before engaging in a Q&A with the audience. Pointing the audience’s attention to Baldwin’s complex life to reflect on our own complicated identities. He said, “The civil rights movement was also a time of tragedy and violence.” According to Games, Peck’s film also “picked up extensively on Baldwin’s writing about the role of film in brainwashing Americans, not just white, but black,” in reproducing myths and ideologies of white supremacy and black inferiority.

Faculty Critique Documentary 'I Am Not Your Negro' SASHANK VURA ‘19

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Russell Rickford, associate professor of history, said Baldwin “realized how deeply invested we Americans are in mythology of America.” Baldwin “understood if America were to be salvaged, it wouldn’t be fulfillment of some inherent democratic creed, but that it would require transformation, transformation of our political economy, and first of all our culture.”

“Americanness is blindness,” Rickford said, concluding, “this moment of self-recognition before is the recognition of our own bigotry and violence, but ‘that moment of self-recognition is not a cure of blindness.’” Commenting on the film’s unorthodox nature, Dagmawi Woubshet, associate professor of English, praised “how it uses exclusively Baldwin’s voice.” Because “it isn’t diffused, we are able to glean a portrait of the artist through his own writing.” However, Woubshet criticized the film’s obliqueness with regard to Baldwin’s sexuality. Although Baldwin was “among the first writers to broach the question of queer sexuality,” the film only mentioned this through “one reference by the FBI, introduced almost as alleged information.” He suggested, “you could use Baldwin’s complex life to reflect on our own complicated identities.”

Sheppard said the audience had witnessed “amazing cinema,” citing the film’s “power” through its use of Baldwin’s text. To sum up the film, she borrowed a Baldwin quotation: “The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.”

LEFT: W.E.B. Du Bois Professor Kevin Gaines at a screening of "Agents of Change" at Cornell Cinema.


ABOVE: (L to R) Professors Samantha Sheppard, Dagmawi Woubshet, Russell Rickford, and Kevin Games participate in a panel discussion.
During my tenure as DUS, I have noticed that our incoming students do not tend to have had much exposure to Africana Studies in high school or even teachers during their K-12 career and have parent/relations have previous involvement with Africana Studies or any of its cognates heightening their consciousness in Africana Studies. As a result, they are not as likely to take classes in Africana. It is not at the top of their agenda. This reality is exacerbated by the fact that we so often hear news about the majors that lead to the most lucrative jobs. It gets even more difficult when we factor in the word on the street—majors that pay or don’t pay—and the anxiety of their parents—what would my kid do with that? We have to push back against when it comes to interesting students in our fare. It is worth taking our courses. What we know is that Africana Studies knows is that the field provides a sound knowledge of the contributions of African and African-descended peoples to world histories, humanities, the sciences and human intellectual growth. It can therefore enhance their professional pathways in a number of fields. Race has framed and dominated the unfolding of our global history and throughout the world. Race has always been central to how life is construed and lived. One way that this has manifested is the elision, if not erasure, of the contributions of African and African-descended peoples to the evolution of life and throughout history. Africana Studies is one place where this knowledge is always available to students, regardless of their majors or minors or interests. The acquisition of this knowledge forms an important plank in the foundation of a proper liberal education. Africana Studies challenges students to critically engage dominant narratives and creatively expand their horizon both within and outside of their chosen disciplines. Our introductory course is ASRC 1500: Introduction to Africana Studies. It is required for Africana majors and minors but is open to all. It does not suppose that students are coming into it with an appreciable depth of knowledge about the global African world that is the primary focus of Africana Studies. The course is designed to take care of this absence by introducing them to the history of Africa, its Diaspora, and the place of both in world affairs and history from antiquity until the present. In addition to this general history we are also concerned with introducing students to the history of Africana Studies and how it has come to be constituted as a distinct major in the university. This history has not been without consequences for other disciplines in the liberal arts from philosophy to literature, from sociology to political science, and so on. Given the uptick in our course enrollments, I believe we are getting through.

Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò
Director of Undergraduate Studies

Undergraduate Study at Africana
Last August the Africana doctoral program welcomed our impressive fourth cohort of students. Since the inception of the Ph.D. program in Africana Studies at Cornell, the students we have admitted are poised to produce innovative scholarship on the global study of Blackness in Africa and the diaspora. In addition to the geographical diversity of the interests of our graduate students, their research spans the full range of the doctoral program’s defined research fields: Gender and Sexuality; Africana Political and Philosophical Thought; the Global Black Radical Tradition; Black Feminist Thought; Youth and/or Popular Culture Studies; and Literary, Art and Visual, Performance and Cultural Studies.

The four newest students, Alexsandra Mitchell, Kevin Quin, Lauren Siegel, and Sarah Then Bergh, have scholarly projects that span the globe. Their intellectual interests include: international relations and ethnomusicality (Sarah); African cinema and feminism (Lauren); black gay identity through the intersections of history, race, gender, and sexuality (Kevin); and artistic, spiritual, and gender identities through contemporary African Diaspora artists (Alexsandra).

These incoming students were preceded by the second year students, Zifeng Liu, Afifa Ltifi, Amaris Brown, and Natalia Santiesteban, whose intellectual interests include feminism, Blackness and religion in Tunisia (Afifa); Maoist China, international print culture, and U.S. Black liberation struggles (Zifeng); formations of gender, Blackness and race in Colombia (Natalia); and queering race and gender in U.S. Black literary studies (Amaris).

The third year students, Kristen Wright and Mayowa Willoughby, are preparing for their A exams and continue their scholarly work, respectively, on Black feminist playwrights and their interventions in literary theory and history, and research on Blackness and Arab identity in Turkey.

Finally, this year our inaugural class of students, Nadia Sasso, Kanyinsola Obayan, and Marshall Smith, all passed their A exams. Their work focuses on the tension between Afropolitanism and indigenous forms of knowledge on the African continent (Kanyinsola); literary studies of Black girlhood in Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil (Nadia); and Black literary studies in French and the Caribbean in relation to Louisiana (Marshall).

Africana students continue to compete successfully for grants and residencies and win graduate student awards on and off campus. We are enthusiastic about the progress of the Ph.D. program and the creative and innovative projects these students are pursuing. We are looking forward to their dissertations!

Kevin K. Gaines
Director of Graduate Studies
In politics and activism, popular culture and social media, “black girls and women are hyper-visible,” according to associate professor of Africana studies Oneka LaBennett. They are portrayed “as ‘at risk’ and as cultural trendsetters, yet simultaneously rendered invisible in public policy discourses.”

LaBennett planned the symposium over the last year with Judith Byfield, associate professor of history, and Samantha Sheppard, assistant professor of cinema and media studies. The work of emerging scholars and Cornell graduate students Emma Koko (English), Afi Liit (Africana studies) and Sasha Phyars-Burgess (fine arts) is highlighted.

“This is part of this yearlong conversation,” LaBennett said.

Naminata Diabate, assistant professor of comparative literature, also is among the presenters. The two-day event features a reading by poet Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon, associate professor of English; a display of photographs by Phyars-Burgess; and two film screenings.

Sponsored by Cornell’s Minority, Indigenous and Third World Studies Research Group and co-sponsored by the Africana Center, the symposium aims to bridge academic/public divides, amplify the voices of black girls and women, and foster a dialogue and networking among scholars, artists, activists and youth. With a diasporic scope, covering the U.S., the Caribbean and Africa, it also recognizes queer and trans identities as central to the conversation.

“One of the things that interests me as a scholar is how are the lived experiences of girlhood and womanhood, those two stages in the life cycle and categories of identification, conceptualized?” she said.

LaBennett has been using an illustration of Zora Neale Hurston from a 1943 Saturday Review magazine cover to promote the event. “I see Zora in some ways as the patron of this symposium – she was an interdisciplinary scholar, not just in literature but anthropology, and an ethnographic filmmaker and a playwright,” she said. “The illustration also is symbolic of what this symposium is trying to do.”

“It struck me as a very youthful image,” even though it appeared when Hurston was 52, LaBennett said. “When I came across that image I realized I had seen many photographs of her but never one in which she had looked so young, between her girlhood and womanhood.”

Students attend a conversation with Sheri Sher, a founding member of The Mercedes Ladies

Scholars, Artists Convene to Discuss Black Girls, Women

DANIEL ALOI

There has been “a growing attention to black girlhood” over the past few years, with national conferences and movements such as Black Lives Matter, and the subject has formed the basis for recent innovative work in the social sciences and the humanities, LaBennett said. In March, she participated in the History of Black Girlhood Network’s first national conference.

“Calling a woman a ‘girl’ may be a term of endearment from within the community or may be a dismissal if it is delivered from without. I’m really interested in troubling those categories and putting them in dialogue with one another,” she said.

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Maxine Waters and black women of her ilk are unmove by those seeking to hush them. In the wake of the racist and sexist comments that Bill O’Reilly made about her, California Congresswoman Maxine Waters seems to be getting the last laugh. Last week, sponsors fled his show doing so, illustrated how easily Black women are often invisible doing so because he took issue with their important contributions. They have little positive use and are almost always a distraction from issues that urgently need more attention. Next time the conversation turns to a black woman’s hair, remember: it’s not really about the hair.

This is the second round in the ongoing war of words between the popular and influential Fox host and his most recent black woman target. As you’ll recall, the first match began, ostensibly, when O’Reilly made fun of Waters’ hair. But it wasn’t really about her hair. When O’Reilly made fun of the Congresswoman’s coif, he wasn’t doing so because he took issue with her styling choices. He did it to deflect attention from Waters’ agenda, and, in doing so, illustrated how easily Black women’s concerns are silenced in the public sphere. And, he took his place in a long history of focusing on Black women’s bodies in order to ignore the substance of what they’re saying or doing. Black women are often invisible in American public life, especially in our representative politics and even when they’re seen, they’re not heard.

Waters responded to O’Reilly’s criticism by speaking out on MSNBC, on Chris Hayes: “Let me just say this: I’m a strong black woman and I cannot be intimidated. I cannot be undermined. I cannot be thought to be afraid of Bill O’Reilly or anybody.” And Waters isn’t alone in her experience, though. It’s not only in politics or the workplace where Black women face intellectual erasure, and it’s not only at the hands of white people. Internalized oppression has meant that African Americans themselves often focus on Black women’s hair rather than the content of their work. During the 2012 Olympics in London, and in the wake of the historic victory of the gymnast Gabby Douglas’s in the all-around competition, a media firestorm erupted related to alleged criticisms of her hair made primarily by black women spectators on Twitter. In the wake of Simone Biles’ historic victory as the second black American to win the All-Around Olympic title, in Rio, a similar conversation about her hair emerged, distracting attention from her extraordinary performance and outstanding achievements.

If O’Reilly was “joking” about Rep. Waters’ hair to deflect from her agenda, it’s important not to lose sight of what that agenda is. Waters is and has been a vigilant and sustained critic of President Trump’s policies, and has repeatedly suggested that his actions may lead to impeachment. It is crucial not to allow comments about Waters, and compared them to his previous comments about other Black women like Michelle Obama and Beyoncé. O’Reilly apologized to the Congresswoman—kind of. “She deserves a hearing and should not be marginalized by political opponents. In fact I made that mistake this morning on Fox & Friends,” he said. “I said in a simple jest that the congresswoman’s hair distracted me. Well that was stupid, I apologize. It had no place in the conversation.” Still, he hasn’t stopped going after her on his nightly show. Attacks on black women’s hair are by no means new, nor did they begin with O’Reilly. Too often, the media’s emphasis on scrutinizing black women’s hair has deflected attention from the important things that they were doing and saying, and from the extraordinary strides that they were making. As law professor Lani Guinier was being considered to head the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division in 1993, neo-conservative Republican opponents misconstrued her policies, stereotyped her as a “quota queen” and widely caricatured her hairstyle in political cartoons.

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MAJOR
Psychology Africana Studies
HOMETOWN
Brooklyn, NY

“I want to increase the awareness of mental health services.”

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ACTIVITIES ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF WHILE AT CORNELL?
My sessions doing play therapy with students from Cayuga Heights Elementary School are what I am most proud of. Through this work, I have learned my strengths and weaknesses as a future mental health professional. I initially thought that this field practicum course would be just another psychology class that would count toward one of my majors, but it ended up helping me define my career path. I will always be grateful to Professor Harry Segal for giving me the opportunity to not only work with him, but also enabling me to impact the lives of the local children that I interacted with.

WHAT, IF ANY, RESEARCH PROJECTS DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN AT CORNELL?
I participated in a few research projects in Professor Melissa Ferguson’s Automaticity Lab with my lab supervisor, Thomas Marin. I helped investigate the ways in which human social behavior unfolds in an unintentional manner, specifically understanding how people develop and update their first impressions, pursue goals and control their behaviors. Additionally, I was fortunate enough to publish a paper after completing an independent study in the College of Human Ecology under Professor Gary Evans, with graduate student Casey Franklin. With this research team, we were able to not just develop a sustainability app (Humble Bee) for Cornell students, but also gain further scientific insight into how college students understand and conceptualize sustainable behaviors.

IF YOU WERE TO OFFER ADVICE TO AN INCOMING FIRST YEAR STUDENT, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?
My advice would be a quote that stuck out to me as I read this prompt: “the catalyst for change is discomfort.” I do not believe Cornell is built for those who want to remain complacent in life. While some may be able to get a quality education through complacency, it is change and the trying of something new that will provide Cornellians with the best college experience they will ever have. I would tell freshmen to be willing to step out of their comfort zone and to try something new and to do something different. I would also tell them “be yourself, because everyone else is taken.”

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR; WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 10 YEARS?
Next year, I will be attending the University of Chicago Divinity School. In 10 years, I see myself teaching while simultaneously owning a non-profit organization targeted at helping young African Americans in Chicago land jobs and better their lives for the bright future that waits to be unlocked.

Anthony Halmon ’17

MAJOR
Africana Studies
HOMETOWN
Chicago, IL

“Be yourself, because everyone else is taken.”

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ACTIVITIES ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF WHILE AT CORNELL?
My belief about myself and education changed. The more I became informed about history and this nation, the more I saw where I fit in this society. My beliefs were challenged and strengthened at the same time. I began to learn what it meant to truly listen actively, provide constructive criticism and communicate effectively. I came in wanting to be an engineer, but it took me 2 1/2 years to realize that engineering wasn’t the field that I was called to. I had to learn the hard way that I had to be true to my destiny and to the calling that was placed on my life, and my purpose began to unfold before my eyes as I pursued Africana studies.

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WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR; WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 10 YEARS?
Next year, I hope to be enrolled in a pre-med postbaccalaureate program in New York City. My ultimate goal is to become a psychiatrist. I hope to use my future skills to provide mental health services for those who are disadvantaged or uninformed about the benefits of good mental health. I want to increase the awareness of mental health services in hopes that it will no longer be a taboo to seek mental health help.
“We endeavored to pair students with someone who shared similar interests,” LaBennett said. “If there’s a point of connection between the student and the interviewee, then there’s a basis for how their story will resonate. It was a complicated process, but each student came away from the interview just glowing from the experience.”

The interview subjects included community organizers and members of the arts and cultural community, a schoolteacher with Haitian immigrant parents, a Garifuna woman from Honduras, a Jamaican Cornell alumna and a Guyanese LGBTQ advocate.

“A core value of the class was how important oral history is in illuminating stories that are often not heard,” Guzman said. “It offers people a space to testify about their own place in history, like the record shop owner who’s been working with his wife for 20 years.”

Worrell, a half Indo-Caribbean Flatbush native born to immigrant parents, founded CaribBEING in 1999. In early 2015, CaribBEING House opened next to the Flatbush Caton Market, an area now facing redevelopment. She said in some ways Flatbush “is no longer reflective of what has been the culture of the community for decades. We want to preserve and protect the cultural integrity of the neighborhood, which is largely Caribbean… one of the largest immigrant groups in the city” and perhaps 20 percent of the population, she said.

Identifying the Flatbush area as the Little Caribbean promotes it as “a cultural asset or a cultural destination,” she said. “We’ve spent decades building a place in greater New York City – politically, culturally, economically.”

Seeing oneself as Caribbean embraces multiple national identities, Guzman said, even among those with “a strong national profile” in being Trinidadian, Jamaican, Haitian or of other origins: “There is an ever-expanding definition of the region and also in being Caribbean as well.”

The oral history project and field trip were supported by an Engaged Opportunity Grant to LaBennett.

“These stories are often overlooked or not told, or if they are told, they are not told from an authentic place,” Worrell said. “I feel that working with Oneka’s class really gave this community an opportunity to present their stories in a way I haven’t seen done before.”

LaBennett said the students “gained valuable skills from the experience, and the partnership with CaribBEING and with the local community represented a unique learning opportunity for them.”

The students will give a public presentation of their work May 9 at 10:10 a.m. at the Africana Studies and Research Center.

This story also appeared in the Cornell Chronicle.
Original Africana Site Dedicated at Ceremony

A plaque commemorating the original site of Cornell’s Africana Studies and Research Center at 320 Wait Ave. was unveiled Sept. 24 following a dedication ceremony with students, alumni, faculty and administrators.

“This site has such significant meaning and symbolism for the history of this university [and] the experience of African-descended people and their allies at Cornell,” said Rev. Kenneth Clarke, director of Cornell United Religious Work.

In April 1969, black student activists and university administrators signed documents on the steps of the site to end the Willard Straight Hall occupation, he said. “Several months later, Africana at Cornell came into being” on the site, and “an arson attack on April 1, 1970, destroyed the building that sat here.

On this site today, as a community, we reclaim this space as an important part of the history of Cornell.”

“For the last 46 years, these steps have been their own kind of memorial to what once stood at their apex,” he added. “Yet it has been an incomplete memorial, waiting, yearning for this day.”

Black Students United (BSU) requested the commemoration in a letter delivered to then-President Elizabeth Garrett and Vice President Ryan Lombardi in November 2015. The ceremony coincided with the 40th anniversary gathering of the Cornell Black Alumni Associates, held during Homecoming Weekend.

“So many of you, along with many others, helped to create Africana studies at Cornell in the ’60s and the ’70s, and have seen your work develop into the robust Africana Studies and Research Center of today,” said Provost Michael Kotlikoff.

The center “has educated generations of leaders,” he said, and is “a vital center for research, teaching and public engagement.”

Because of student activism at the time, he said “Black studies, so long neglected, entered the curriculum in many institutions, and higher education became more inclusive as a consequence.”

Kotlikoff also thanked members of Black Students United for their efforts to establish the commemorative site and the Ithaca community of color for their support of the project.

“Today we acknowledge a terrible event that occurred during a troubled time on our campus,” he said. “Not only offices but valuable records, manuscripts and library holdings were reduced to ashes. This was a profound loss for African-American students and faculty who regarded 320 Wait Avenue as their campus home.”

The day also celebrated Africana’s growth and development, and “the achievements of those who have studied there over the years,” Kotlikoff said. “We appreciate as well the leadership role that many students of color play on our campus today.”

“In acknowledging the history of this site, we stand with our current students and alumni and all those who want Cornell to be an inclusive and welcoming environment,” he said.

BSU co-chair Amber Aspinall ’17, joined by others from the organization at the podium, thanked “everybody who had a hand in making this demand a reality,” including Africana for handling logistics, “the organizations and the individuals who stood in solidarity with us, and thank you to the staff, who continue to meet with us.”

Thanking “the students from the late 1960s for the activism that led to the founding of the Africana Center,” Kevin Gaines, the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of Africana Studies and History and incoming chair of Africana studies, said: “They truly made a difference, democratizing higher education at a time when faculties and administrations were white male domains and curricula were thoroughly Eurocentric and male-dominated.”

“The establishment of Africana studies programs at Cornell and many other universities transformed disciplines and departments,” he said. “Teacher-scholars in Africana studies produced research that put African-Americans and Africans at the center of American history, politics, literatures and culture, and pioneered the critical study of race and racism … We owe our alumni, the student activists of that generation, a great debt.”

Also speaking were Gloria Joseph, Ph.D. ’67, former assistant dean and an African professor in 1970, who also directed the Committee on Special Education Projects, the university’s first institutional diversity initiative; Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick ’09; and Africana’s founding director, Professor Emeritus James Turner.

The student vocal ensemble Baraka Kiwa Wimbi sang “Lift Every Voice and Sing” after Kotlikoff and Turner unveiled the plaque, on a landscaped site with a wooden bench.

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By midlife, many African-Americans have experienced enough day-to-day forms of mistreatment – being followed around stores or stopped without cause by police – to make them sick: clinically, chronically and even fatally sick.

Now a research team is linking what psychology and sociology researchers call “everyday unfair treatment” with higher incidence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity and other life-limiting conditions in African-Americans.

“Chronic experiences of discrimination and mistreatment can affect health in the most insidious of ways, both because of the potential to negate the significance of personal agency and identity in the lives of marginalized individuals,” said Anthony D. Ong, associate professor of human development in Cornell’s College of Human Ecology. He is the lead author of the report, “Everyday Unfair Treatment and Multisystem Biological Dysregulation in African-American Adults,” in press at the journal Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology.

Other authors of the paper are David R. Williams at the Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health; Ujuonu Nwizu ‘17, at Cornell’s Africana Studies and Research Center; and Tara Gruenewald, at the University of Southern California’s Davis School of Gerontology.

The majority (81.1 percent) of African-Americans in the study said “race” was the basis for at least one of the unfair treatment events they experienced.

The research tested an emerging theory: That coping with chronic, everyday mistreatment triggers a cascade of psychological responses that over time may place demands on the body’s ability to effectively respond to challenges. “We were searching for the biological footprint of everyday discrimination,” Ong said.

The researchers sought to differentiate everyday hassles from experiencing what they termed lifetime unfair treatment – being denied a promotion, a loan or a lease in certain neighborhoods, for example. Everyday incidents of discrimination correlated best with the medical indicator called allostatic load (AL).

For the Milwaukee study, AL was the sum of seven physiological system risk indices: cardiovascular regulation, lipid, glucose, inflammation, sympathetic nervous system, and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis.

If individuals with heavy allostatic loads weren’t already suffering related medical conditions at mid-life, they were at markedly higher risk in the future. (AL has been shown in other studies, the researchers noted, to predict incident cardiovascular disease, decline in cognitive and physical functioning and all-cause mortality.)

Inviting further examination of the issue, the researchers said their study “points to the significance of chronic everyday discrimination in the lives of African-Americans … by illustrating how social conditions external to the individual get under the skin to affect later health and disease outcomes.”

The study was funded by the National Institute on Aging, based on the Milwaukee study, which was funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.
The John Henrik Clarke Africana Library

The mission of the John Henrik Clarke Africana Library is to provide a specialized collection concentrating on the history, culture, social and political dimensions of peoples of African descent. It functions as an information and resource center for the Cornell community at large, and for the Africana experience. The role of the Africana Library is to act as a catalyst and to seek out materials which will support those who are discovering the past when it comes to people of African descent.

In keeping with the mission of the Africana Library and its quest for knowledge, the Library has recently provided access to a digital database named HistoryMakers, thehistorymakers.org. This database contains more than 125,000 stories, which can be accessed through Cornell University Library. Over the past 18 years, HistoryMakers has collected oral histories from figures both prominent and unsung, from the oldest living Black cowboy to Barack Obama, when he was an Illinois state senator. The archive’s interviews, which are organized by keyword, are a resource on topics as varied as African-American food, fashion, culture, history and religion. “These stories are fascinating and significant not only to scholars of black history, but of American and world history in the modern era,” said Eric Acree, director of the Africana Library. "It crosses all disciplines."

GLOBAL HEALTH SWAHILI COURSE

Each summer, select students in Cornell’s Global Health Program travel to Moshi, Tanzania. In preparation for the trip, students take the Global Health Swahili Course, taught by Lecturer Happiness Patrick Bulugu, which combines language learning with cultural orientation. This classroom-based learning is applied and enhanced by experiential learning in the course of daily life abroad. The goals of the eight-week summer program in Tanzania are to enhance the cross-cultural competence of participants and to provide students with the opportunity to gain broad knowledge about global health issues in the Tanzanian context. Participants live with a local family, enroll in a local college, and contribute 160 service hours to a local non-governmental organization, hospital, government agency, or research project. This direct experience deepens students’ understanding of the health problems that disproportionately affect the resource poor.

In spring 2016 a total of 81 students were enrolled in Arabic, Mandarin, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, Spanish, and Yoruba FLAC courses at Cornell. The courses averaged 6 to 7 students per class and were focused on active discussion in the target language. Students in the Yoruba FLAC, taught by our senior language lecturer Adeolu Ademoye, have shared they find it powerful to discuss concepts such as Africentrism or migration in their native or heritage language. “We talk about issues that affect people of the African diaspora in America,” says Ololade Olawale, a sophomore in Arts and Sciences, and a participant in the Yoruba FLAC class. “This is truly a novel learning experience, as I get to discuss the stances of revolutionary minds in the African American community— in Yoruba.”

Demand for FLAC courses is strong among both faculty and students across the university. Next year, the FLAC program will expand to include courses in French, German, Modern Greek, Hebrew, Portuguese, as well as a Swahili course taught by our language lecturer Happiness Patrick Bulugu.

Languages at Africana

Formally launched in 2015–2016, the FLAC program at Cornell offers optional one-credit foreign language courses that are connected to a variety of existing academic courses offered by departments across the university. FLAC courses are not traditional language courses, as the only language issues courses are not traditional language overall objective of the FLAC program is to give Cornell students an opportunity to practice and develop their fluency in the target language.

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The Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from the humanities and the social sciences who are interested in the issue of comparative/global modernities. It aims to contribute to the intellectual environment at Cornell University through seminars, lecture series, symposia, and publications, and by encouraging related on-going initiatives and research projects.

During the 2016-2017 year, the ICM hosted a series of events, ranging in subject from the oral and written traditions that informed critical thought and philosophy on the African continent; a screening of the trilogy Egypt’s Modern Pharaohs, featuring the individual documentaries Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, and followed by discussion with the films’ director, Jihan El-Tahri; the musical and cultural revolution triggered by the worldwide recording of vernacular music beginning in 1925; the history of public perception of the US Federal Constitution; contemporary herbalism and food sovereignty movements in Tanzania; and a documentary chronicling the lives of children living in shanties at a cemetery in Veyangoda City, Sri Lanka. The ICM also provided funding and administrative support for six interdisciplinary graduate reading groups, each working on their own collaborative project and culminating in a public presentation at the end of the academic year.

The Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) addresses a key problem in the study of modern culture and society: the transnational history of modernity and its global scope. Inadequate understandings of the complex history of modernity have led to simplistic and untenable positions that unknowingly repeat colonialism’s ideological juxtapositions of “us” and “them,” with modernity (and all the positive connotations of historical progress that accrue to the term) all on one side and inscrutable backwardness all on the other. This results in ghettoized scholarship that is damaging to all.

ICM is an affiliate of the Africana Studies & Research Center at Cornell University.

The 2016 winners of the Mabati Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature have been announced by Abdillatif Abdalla, chair of the prize’s board of trustees. Fiction category winners are Tanzanian authors Idrissa Haji Abdalla for “Kilio cha Mwanamke” and Hussein Wamaywa for “Moyo Wangu Unaungua,” Ahmed Hussein Ahmed, from Kenya, received the poetry prize for “Haile Ngoma ya Wana.” Abdalla and Ahmed both will receive a $5,000 award, while Wamaywa will receive $3,000. The prizes will be awarded in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on Jan. 16, 2017.

The Mabati Cornell Kiswahili Prize was founded in 2014 by Lizzy Attree, Caine Prize director, and Mukoma Wa Ngugi, assistant professor of English at Cornell, to recognize writing in African languages and encourage translation from, between and into African languages. The annual prize is awarded to the best unpublished manuscripts or books published within two years of the award year across the categories of fiction, poetry, memoir and graphic novels. The winning entries are published in Kiswahili by East African Educational Publishers and the poetry winning entry in English translation by Africa Poetry Book Fund. The other fiction works shortlisted for the 2016 prize were “Mmeza Fupa” by Ally Hilal and “Mkakati wa Kuelekea Ikulu” by Hussein Wamaywa, both from Tanzania; the poetry work “Umalenga wa Nyanda za Juu” by Richard Atuti Nyabuya, from Kenya, was also shortlisted. The judges, in recognizing the long Kiswahili literary tradition, said that in Abdalla’s novel, “women’s issues are discussed in great depth. The imagery of woman is depicted clearly in her various roles and capacities. Oppressive traditions and patriarchy are shown to be the greatest obstacles to her progress. She fights and emerges the winner in the end.”

The prize is supported by Mabati Rolling Mills Limited of Kenya and ALAF Limited of Tanzania in addition to Cornell’s Office of the Vice Provost for International Affairs and the Africana Studies and Research Center.
Events for Spring 2018

February 3, 2018

‘Agents of Change’ Film Screening and Discussion
Call Auditorium, Kennedy Hall at Cornell University

From the well-publicized events at San Francisco State in 1968 to the image of black students with guns emerging from the takeover of the student union at Cornell University in April, 1969, the struggle for a more relevant and meaningful education, including demands for black and ethnic studies programs, became a clarion call across the country in the late 1960’s. Through the stories of these young men and women who were at the forefront of these efforts, Agents of Change examines the untold story of the racial conditions on college campuses and in the country that led to these protests. The film’s characters were caught at the crossroads of the civil rights, black power, and anti-Vietnam war movements at a pivotal time in America’s history. Today, over 45 years later, many of the same demands are surfacing in campus protests across the country, revealing how much work remains to be done.

Presented by Dr. Renee T. Alexander ’74 with special guests Ed Whitfield ’70, Filmmakers Abby Ginzberg ’71 and Frank Dawson ’72 will be present for the post-screening discussion. www.agentsofchangefilm.com

APRIL 2018

What Zora Neale Hurston Gives Black Studies: Tell My Horse, Imperial Politics, and Everyday Love

Is it possible to be human – socially and politically – in the wake of the plantation?

Professor Deborah A. Thomas argues that Zora Neale Hurston can offer us something about black life today, something about how death might be an ontological – and even hauntological – touchstone without being the definition of non-existence or absence.

Part travelogue and part anthropological analysis, Tell My Horse chronicles Zora’s experiences in Jamaica and Haiti on two Guggenheim fellowships awarded in 1936 and 1937. Thomas will discuss the two analytic trajectories that are key to a contemporary reading of Tell My Horse. The first has to do with where Zora fits in relation to a broader emergent interest among Americans, and especially African-Americans, in the Caribbean region. Where does Zora’s Tell My Horse sit in relation to work by other Americans publishing travelogues outlining their assessments of the new empire growing up quickly around them? The second analytic trajectory has to do with the vitality she brings to folk practices, and her insistence on a view of black sociality as produced through the maintenance of life.


2017-2018 POLITICAL THEORY WORKSHOP

Fred Moten Lecture (March 2018) & Juliet Hooker Lecture (May 2018)

The Political Theory Workshop at Cornell offers faculty, visiting scholars and graduate students the opportunity to present work in progress to a diverse, interdisciplinary audience. The Workshop features presenters and participants from a wide array of fields, including philosophy, history, ethics, social theory, classics, literature, and other related disciplines. Papers are distributed in advance and participants come prepared to discuss them in detail.

For AY 2017-18, the Cornell Political Theory Workshop is generously supported by: The Africana Studies and Research Center • The American Studies Program • The Department of Comparative Literature • The Department of English • The Department of German Studies • The History of Capitalism Initiative • The Department of History • The Latina/o Studies Program • The Law School • The Jewish Studies Program • The Department of Romance Studies • The Society for the Humanities
Interrupted: Caribbean Partnerships
310 Triphammer Road, Africana Center, Faculty and Graduate Students Invited by Hoyt Fuller Room
2016–2017
Hoyt Fuller Room

Food Justice & Transformation Leaders - "Disrupting the Narrative": Thursday, April 13, 4:00 PM
Women As Transformation Leaders - "Disrupting the Narrative": Thursday, April 13, 4:00 PM
Agents of Change: Film Screening

Event at 5:00 pm in the A.D. Klarman Hall, Auditorium at 3:00pm Sunday, May 28, 2017

Women Robin D. G. Meyer, Rachel Dratch, and Tracey Ullman with Ruth turkey Fey, Thursday, April 13, 4:00 PM

FILM SCREENING
AGENTS OF CHANGE

"(Africana Studies) has taught me how to critically read, think and write when analyzing issues. I found my voice in this program."
- UJONU NWIZU '17
2016–2017
CO-SPONSORED EVENTS

ABOVE: Freedom Interrupted: An Evening of Spoken Word with Porsha O.

RIGHT: Porsha Olayiwola

TOP LEFT: ‘Life Sentence’ at the Schwartz

TOP RIGHT: Rosa Clemente ’02

LEFT: (L to R) Adriana Guzman (Assistant Director/Stage Manager), Emem-Esther Ipot, Raiven Harris, Allen Porterie, Alize Hill, Alonzo Farley, Gloria Majule (Playwright/Director)

BELOW: Continuing the Dream: The Significance of Modern Political Activism and Social Justice
Amaris Brown is a second year Africana Ph.D. student from Brooklyn, New York and has a B.A. in African & Afro-American Studies and Sociology from Brandeis University. Her research interests focus on the relationship between the injustices black women face and the gendered consciousness black women’s unique oppressions establish. She focuses on black women’s experiences as represented in Afrilurism by privileging black women’s narratives, knowledge and culture in order to situate their contributions within social movement histories.

Zifeng Liu is a second-year Africana Ph.D. student from Qingdao, China and has a M.A. in American Studies from Brown University, a M.A. in International Relations from Beijing Foreign Studies University, and a B.A. in English from South-Central University for Nationalities. His research interests include Black transnationalism/Internationalism, the African diaspora, Black radicalism, U.S. foreign relations, and the Third World, and his current project examines the historical and theoretical intersections of the Black radical tradition and Chinese communism during the Cold War.

Africana and Black Diaspora studies. His research interests include 20th century African American cultural history, gender and sexuality, and visual and material culture. He is a member of the African American Intellectual History Society and contributes regularly to Black Perspectives, the leading online platform for public scholarship on global black thought, history, and culture.

Kanyinsola Obayan is a fourth year Africana Ph.D. candidate and was granted a 2016 pre-doctoral fellowship, courtesy of the West African Research Association (WARA) located in Bogotá will be published by the Centre for Afro-Diasporan Studies (CEAF) of Icesi University, from which she is an associate researcher.

Nadia Sasso is a fourth year Africana Ph.D. student and has been traveling extensively with her documentary film Am I. Too African to be American or Too American to be African? Am I the film explores the complex identity formations of young African women living in America and West Africa who identify bi-culturally. It is a multimedia intervention with a discussion on the politics of identity with respect to immigrant populations and movements back and forth of the diaspora. The film explores seven women’s histories with their bi-cultural identity and how they wrestle with concepts of race, complexion, gender, and heritage, among other issues.

Lauren Siegel is a first year Africana PhD student from Los Angeles, California. She graduated with honors from UC Santa Barbara with a BA in Black Studies. She also earned her MA in African Literature from the National University of Colombia and a BA in Languages and Sociocultural Studies from the University. Her research interests focus on everyday racism in conversation with dominant national discourses about race, gender, class and sexuality. Her (auto)ethnographic dissertation on bi-cultural identity and how they wrestle with concepts of race, complexion, gender, and heritage, among other issues.
in Ghana allowed her to work as an international baccalaureate literature teacher to students from across 16 African countries. Her research interests include black feminist theory, cinema studies and African film, gender and sexuality, and the cultural construction of the artist.

MARSHALL SMITH
Marshall Smith is a fourth year Africana Ph.D. student and was asked by conference organizers to chair a panel at the 20th-21st Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium in St. Louis. His paper dealt with the specters of the “French Transatlantic Slave Trade in Contemporary French Popular Culture and Politics.” Smith also presented a paper at the Council for European Studies at Columbia University’s annual conference, held in Philadelphia in mid-April. He also presented two papers and participated in the panel “Changing Creole Narratives in Common Places: Comparative Perspectives” at the Caribbean Studies Association conference in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in June 2016.

SARAH THEN BERGH
Sarah Then Bergh is a first year PhD student at the Africana Studies and Research Center, at Cornell University. Originally from Germany, she earned her BSc. Econ. (hon.) in International Politics and her M.A. (hon.) in International Relations on the David Davies Scholarship, at Aberystwyth University, Wales. Her current research interests are embedded in explorations of the philosophy of polyrhythmic African and African diasporic music, and its relationship to diasporic subjectivity formation; critiques of hegemonic cosmological underpinnings in the mainstream theoretical approaches to international relations; dialogical ethics in the music’s sociological settings; as well as explorations of black feminist body politics in relation to dance (and) performance.

OLUMAYOWA WILLOUGHBY
Bam Willoughby is a second year Africana Ph.D. student. In 2016 they received a summer Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship to study Turkish at Bosphorus University in Istanbul. FLAS fellowships aim to provide training in modern Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish in order to meet the national need for specialists on the Middle East region. Willoughby’s current work uses plants in particular (sub)tropical ecologies in general as a way to index otherwise histories of that which might be called “blackness” within the 20th century Turkish Republic.

KIRSTEN WRIGHT
Kristen Wright previously earned an MA in African-American Studies from Columbia University, and a BA in Theater and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship to study Turkish at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. FLAS fellowships aim to provide training in modern Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish in order to meet the national need for specialists on the Middle East region. Willoughby’s current work uses plants in particular (sub)tropical ecologies in general as a way to index otherwise histories of that which might be called “blackness” within the 20th century Turkish Republic.

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ACTIVITIES ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF WHILE AT CORNELL?
Last year, I started an organization with one of my best friends called the Pre-Med Minority Mentorship program. We came in through the Pre-freshman Summer Program as pre-med students, but as the years passed, our cohort began to decrease. I believe some students left the track because of negative experiences within rigorous science classes accompanied by the lack of a supportive network. Reflecting on our experiences as pre-meds, we decided to create the program to assist future Cornell minority pre-meds by providing peer mentorship, informative programs and resources. Our team has done a tremendous job in making what started as an idea between two friends into a fully-functioning program.

WHO OR WHAT INFLUENCED YOUR CORNELL EDUCATION THE MOST? HOW OR WHY?
Being an Africana studies major has challenged me to engage with my racial and ethnic identity in a way that I had never done before. The beauty of the major is its interdisciplinary nature. I’ve taken classes in sociology, gender studies, literature, history, and government within one major. I’ve engaged with the many facets of blackness from a local, national and global level. Additionally, the program has taught me how to critically read, think and write when analyzing issues. It pushed me to speak despite any present fear or shyness. I found my voice in this program.

IF YOU WERE TO OFFER ADVICE TO AN INCOMING FIRST YEAR STUDENT, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?
Love yourself unconditionally. Be willing and able to forgive yourself when necessary. You may have encountered some roadblocks or made some mistakes. It happens. You still deserve a full and rewarding thereafter. We can be so hard on ourselves sometimes that we forget that life is not a destination but a journey. It does not stop with a single mishap, rejection or failure. Just try your best, learn as you go and take care of yourself.

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Alumna Leads Sierra Club's Environmental Justice Efforts

KATHY HOVIS

In the late 1990s, Leslie Fields ’82 was a lawyer working for the Texas Legislative Council, drafting health and safety legislation and volunteering for the NAACP long before the term “environmental justice” was popular. But when she visited an elementary school located next to a synthetic rubber plant, with toxic gases spewing and 18-wheelers traveling down a street where children were trying to cross, she knew she had to do something.

Dashing back to the law library at the University of Texas at Austin, she discovered there wasn’t legislation on the books to fight against a situation like this.

“I was in tears,” says Fields, a history and Africana studies major at Cornell who received her law degree from Georgetown University. “There was nothing in the law to help black and Latino kids who were going to schools next to nasty facilities. That’s when the light bulb went on for me.”

It was a good time for her to join the environmental justice movement, she says. People across the country were protesting hazardous waste dumps. The landmark 1987 report, “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” put out by the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice, tied environmental issues to race and socioeconomic status for perhaps the first time. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated in Memphis in 1968 while supporting striking sanitation workers, and related movements such as farmworkers and indigenous peoples advocated for healthy environments in which to live and work.

“All of this was bubbling up at the same time and I got very interested in it,” Fields says. “Because I didn’t take environmental law courses at Georgetown, I started volunteering with the Sierra Club in Austin.”

Today you’ll still find Fields at the Sierra Club as director of its Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships Program, which works with grassroots and community organizations to address the damage, risk and discrimination facing many communities today. Examples of its involvement include supporting the sustainable rebuilding of post-Katrina New Orleans, protecting Navajo sites in Arizona and New Mexico, supporting communities fighting incinerator and gas pipelines in Puerto Rico and aiding communities in Detroit and Flint, Michigan.

Fields spends a chunk of her time working with government agencies on new rules under the federal Clean Air and Clean Water acts. The recent passage of the Clean Power Plan is “the jewel in the president’s climate action plan,” Fields says. The plan calls for reducing carbon pollution from power plants to 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

But even with the passage of laws, enforcement is sometimes lacking. “It can be very disheartening and heartbreaking,” she says, “because we now have all of these environmental laws but they’re not being enforced in communities of color and in poor communities.”

Along with her Sierra Club position, Fields also teaches as an adjunct professor at the Howard University School of Law.

“It tell my students that if they don’t love this, they’re not going to do it in practice, you’re not going to do it in the race, so take the practice seriously,” she says. “Our coach [Sharon Vassiette] told us, ‘If you don’t do it in practice, you’re not going to do it in the race, so take the practice seriously, learn your craft [and] study hard so that when the race comes, you’re ready.’” Fields recalls.

But the rewards were great. “Rowing on Cayuga Lake in the morning when the mist was lifting was a transcendental experience,” she says. “The women did not have a boat house at the time — we used the men’s facilities. We rowed in leotards!”

Her favorite class was History 314 with Professor Walter LaFeber. “I still have that notebook,” she says. “That was the best class I had at Cornell because it distilled what was going on in the present day and tied it to history. And he taught it like a tutorial; he was that interesting and charismatic.”

She found other memorable courses in Africana studies (she remembers getting to class by cross-country skiing in the winter) with professors James Turner and Manning Marable. But it was her Cornell in Washington experience that cemented her government major. “They were just starting it out, so we rented rooms in Dupont Circle,” she says. “I had an internship at the National Organization for Women and just fell in love with D.C.”

That continues today, as Fields looks forward to new initiatives and new projects.

“Everybody is getting it now and it’s very exciting to see the environmental justice movement grow nationally and globally.”
Cutting School: Privatization, Segregation, and the End of Public Education

NOLEWE BOOKS

Public schools are among America’s greatest achievements in modern history, yet from the earliest days of tax-supported education—today a sector with an estimated budget of over half a billion dollars—there have been intractable tensions tied to race and poverty.

The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOs

SAEDA HOBZEC

The last three decades have witnessed a proliferation of nongovernmental organizations engaging in new campaigns to end the practice of female genital cutting across Africa. These campaigns have in turn spurred new institutions, discounts, and political projects, bringing about unexpected social transformations, both intended and unintended.

Africa & World War II

JUDITH BYFIELD

This volume considers the military, economic, and political significance of Africa during WWII. The essays feature new research and innovative approaches to the historiography of Africa and bring to the fore issues of race, gender, and labor during the war, topics that have not yet received much critical attention. It explores the experiences of male and female combatants, peasant producers, women traders, missionaries, and sex workers.

Martin Heidegger Saved My Life

GRANT FARRED

In Martin Heidegger Saved My Life, Grant Farred combines autobiography with philosophical rumination to offer this unusual meditation on American racism. Farred grapples with why it is that Heidegger resonates so deeply with him instead of other, more predictable figures such as Malcolm X, W. E. B. DuBois, or Frantz Fanon.

African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Vol. 2

SANDRA GREENE

This volume explores diverse sources such as oral testimonies, possession rituals, Arabic language sources, European missionary, administrative and court records and African intellectual writings to discover what they can tell us about slavery and the slave trade in Africa. This book will be invaluable for students and researchers interested in the history of slavery, the slave trade and post-slavery in Africa.

Freedom from Liberation: Slavery, Sentiment, and Literature in Cuba

GERARD ACHING

By exploring the complexities of enslavement in the autobiography of Cuban slave-poet Juan Francisco Manzano (1797–1854), Gerard Aching complicates the universally recognized assumption that a slave’s foremost desire is to be freed from bondage. As the only slave narrative in Spanish that has surfaced to date, Manzano’s autobiography details the daily grind of the vast majority of slaves who sought relief from the burden of living under slavery.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Retrospect: Africa’s Development Beyond 2015

NDRI ASSÎÉ-LUMUMBA

This volume examines the impact of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on Africa’s development post-2015. It assesses the current state of the MDGs in Africa by outlining the successes, gaps and failures of the state goals, including lessons learned. A unique feature of the book is the exposition on post-MDGs agenda for Africa’s development.

We Are an African People: Independent Education, BlackPower, and the Radical Imagination

RUSSELL RICKFORD

In this groundbreaking book, Sandra E. Greene explores the lives of three prominent West African slave owners during the age of abolition. Greene emphasizes the notion that the decisions made by these individuals were deeply influenced by their personalities, desires to protect their economic and social status, and their insecurities and sympathies for wives, friends, and other associates.

Slave Owners of West Africa: Decision Making in the Age of Abolition

SANDRA E. GREENE

This book presents an intellectual history of subaltern education, a critical analysis of the fate of Black Power ideologies in the post-segregation era, and a portrait of African-American self-activity at the neighborhood level. Rickford puts forth a groundbreaking explanation of Black Power’s preoccupation with forging a new people.

The Hip Hop & Obama Reader

TRAVIS GOSA

Before the presidential candidacy and election of Barack Obama, Hip hop was clearly in trouble. Nas’s 2006 album, Hip Hop is Dead, seemed to articulate the growing concern among many performers, fans, and academics that nihilistic gangsterism and a lack of musical creativity were eclipsing three decades of hip hop’s creative innovation, as well as its dedication to counter-hegemonic movements and discourse.
An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada’s Transimperial Greater Caribbean World

ERNESTO BASSI AREVALO

In An Aqueous Territory Ernesto Bassi traces the configuration of a geographic space he calls the transimperial Greater Caribbean between 1760 and 1860. Focusing on the Caribbean coast of New Granada (present-day Colombia), Bassi shows that the region’s residents did not live their lives bounded by geopolitical borders.

Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics (New Black Studies Series)

MARGO NATALIE CRAWFORD

Black Post-Blackness compares the black avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s Black Arts Movement with the most innovative spins of twenty-first century black aesthetics. Crawford zooms in on the 1970s second wave of the Black Arts Movement and shows the connections between this final wave of the Black Arts movement and the early years of twenty-first century black aesthetics.

Gender/Class Intersections and African Women’s Rights

CARRIE PRYCE-DAVIES

African women’s rights, in its early expressions, was linked to the critique of particular economic/class systems which disempowered the majority of women in contemporary Africa. The way gender and class intersect in an African context continues to be an ongoing critical level of analysis.

Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity

C. RILEY SNORTON

The story of Christine Jorgensen, America’s first prominent transsexual, famously narrated trans embodiment in the postwar era. In Black on Both Sides, C. Riley Snorton identifies multiple intersections between blackness and transness from the mid-nineteenth century to present-day anti-black and anti-trans legislation and violence.

“Intricate Entanglement: The ICC and the Pursuit of Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Libya, Guinea, and Mali”

SIBA GROVOUGUI

International justice is not merely a function of legislation and adjudication. It depends on the extent to which it is viewed as legitimate by litigants and others based on perceptions of the relationships of the operations of existing regimes of dispensation of justice.

“Emerging States and Transnational Childhood Trauma”

MUKOMA WA NGUGI

In the fictional East African Kwatee Republic of the 1990s, the dictatorship is about to fall, and the nation’s exiles are preparing to return. One of these exiles, a young man named Kalumba, is a graduate student in the United States, where he encounters Mrs. Shaw, a professor emerita and former British settler who fled Kwatee’s postcolonial political and social turmoil.

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In the 21st century and nearly 50 years after its inception, the Africana Studies & Research Center remains committed to continuing academic innovation in the field and to remaining at its forefront theoretically and pedagogically, while sustaining its ongoing commitments to activism and community engagement.
Cheryl Casselberry Munday ’72 with Emerita Professor René Adams

Keep in Touch with Africana

Share amazing things about our students and alumni by email at africana@cornell.edu

@africanaCU /CUAfricana /CUAfricana

@africanaCU africana.cornell.edu

James Baldwin: From Harlem to Paris

Art quilt by Riché Richardson and entitled "James Baldwin: From Harlem to Paris" (Paris Series, African American Literature Series) (Composition 2012-2014)