

⌘ The Griot ⌘

Africana Studies Department Newsletter

Wellesley College's Africana Studies Department

Have a vision. Be demanding. - Colin Powell



For the past 37 years, the presence of a Department dedicated to "the intellectual expression of Africana peoples" has graced Wellesley College's campus. Formerly known as "Black Studies", the Department was officially established in 1972.

In the premier issue of the Africana Studies Newsletter,

Griot, we have featured articles by professors and an article on what people have done with Africana Studies degrees. We are pleased that you have taken the time to read this newsletter and hope that you enjoy it, for it was truly a pleasure to put this newsletter together.

-Alexandria Barnes *Editor '12*



Explanation of Newsletter's Name

"Griots fulfill a variety of roles – genealogist, historian, spokesperson, diplomat, musician, teacher, warrior, praise singer, master of ceremonies, advisor – and are unique to Africa."

Taken from Hale, Thomas A. *Griots and Griottes Masters of Words and Music*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998. Print.

Fall 2009

In this issue:



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The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education recently published Robert Fikes Jr's article "What Can I Do With A Black Studies Major? 222 Answers." that describes the many things one can do with a Black Studies major.

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We are not makers of history. We are made by history. – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Greetings From the Chair!

"The hunter in pursuit of the elephant does not stop to throw stones at birds"

An African proverb, quoted by Hailmatou Dioula, an Africana major

It is good to be able to re-issue our newsletter. It allows us to communicate with our various constituents and give them a sense of what is taking place in the Department.

The academic year 2009-2010 promises to be an exciting time for us. After graduating 12 majors last year we are working hard to increase the number of new concentrators and to make the Department more exciting for all of our students. This year, the Department's Common Text is Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*. It is a text that all of our concentrators are required to read as a part of their graduation requirements

The excitement around our discussion is intensified because President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2009.

There are other initiatives. This

semester the Department will meet with several members of the College's faculty who teach courses that are related to our Department so that we can coordinate these activities better, prevent the duplication of courses and, most of all, allow our students to benefit from the multiple offerings that are related to Africana Studies. It will also allow us to work more closely with these faculty members.

Three of our concentrators will be writing theses: Laura Adamson, Halimatou Dioula and Allison Hitzeman. The titles of their thesis topics give one the breath of interests in the Department. Allisa's topic is "Dancehall Culture and its Effects on Young Jamaicans"; Halimatou's topic is "No Longer a Question of Independence but Autonomy: Using

Niger as Window to Understand the Geopolitical Order in West African Francophone Nations;" and Laurie's topic is entitled "The Performance of Black Sexuality."

The Department will also continue an initiative that was started last semester in which we requested a new position in political science, an essential component of research and teaching in the Africana world. This request emanated from the Department's Curriculum retreat on October 24, 2008. It is also important that the Department offer a 200 level course in Swahili. Our students complain and our faculty is unanimous in our

belief that the "Department cannot offer a 100 level language course without offering a 200 level course." Students are discouraged from taking the first course if the second is not available. It enhances the Department's integrity and makes sense in terms of our curriculum to offer these two courses. All of these plans (meeting with related faculty, requesting a political science instructor, and consolidating our offerings in Swahili) are

part of a broader initiative to strengthen the Department and to make Africana Studies a more coherent program for all of our students.

This year we also plan to unveil the portraits of all of the previous chairpersons who served the Department faithfully and well. It is part of our initiative to thank them for their contribution in building the Department and a reminder to us (the college, the faculty and students) that we have an obligation to strengthen the Department and leave it better than we found it.

It goes without saying that we need the assistance of the dean and all our constituents to make these initiatives possible and thereby create a better environment for our faculty, staff and students.

~Selwyn Cudjoe



This fall Professor Cudjoe is teaching classes on "Caribbean Intellectual Thought" and "Black Women Writers."

A Trip to the Federal Reserve Bank

Boston, MA – On Friday, September 25, 2009 members of Africana 212: “Black Women Writers,” along with Professor Selwyn Cudjoe, attended a lecture and exhibit tour at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. The exhibit, entitled “Black Entrepreneurs of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” and curated by Melita Podesta '75 in conjunction with the Museum of African American History, “focuses on the enterprising black entrepreneurs of the 18th and 19th centuries in New England”. It highlights the important intellectual as well as economic contributions African Americans have made to further the development of the United States. One of these stellar individuals is Harriet E. Wilson, celebrated as the first African American woman novelist and author of *Our Nig*, published in 1859.



Professor Cudjoe and students from his “Black Women Writers” class

In a stimulating lecture titled “ The Inconceivable Harriet Wilson: Writer, Speaker, Entrepreneur” distinguished literary historian and professor of Africana Studies at Bowdoin College, P. Gabrielle Foreman, focused on Wilson’s fierce entrepreneurial spirit. In the years preceding the publication of *Our Nig*, Wilson peddled her own hair care products throughout New England. As that business began to slow down, Wilson in an effort to keep her son from destitution went to work writing *Our Nig*. Regarded as one of the most influential works by a black women, it is interesting that for Wilson, her work was merely an economic venture, a means to an end, a way to procure some financial stability for her and her son, who tragically died at the age of seven only weeks after Wilson published *Our Nig*. Only eight weeks after her son passed away, Wilson abandoned her literary career and went back to selling hair care products. Over the next several years, “Mrs. Wilson’s Hair Regenerator” became a highly successful business selling over 3,000 bottles door to door in the greater New England area and producing over 1,500 advertisements in newspapers and journals in states from New Jersey to Maine. Foreman suggests that Wilson’s ingenuity and success, 50 years before Madam C.J Walker, is a testament to her entrepreneurial spirit.

In detailing the importance of Harriet Wilson’s life and work, Foreman touched on many of the biographical elements in *Our Nig*, which is formally classified as a sentimental novel, not an autobiography. For instance. Wilson’s actual mother was Margaret Green, in the book referred to as Mag Smith. Similarly, just as Mag abandons her daughter, Frado, leaving her with the Belmont family, Wilson was forced to leave her son as a result of her own poverty. The most fascinating aspect is perhaps how Wilson translates her own ambitions for self-improvement into character traits for Frado. *Our Nig* is infused with various elements of Wilson’s personal life experience, particularly her entrepreneurial savvy.

The exhibit will be open daily at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston until February 2010. Check out www.bos.frb.org for more information.

-Joy Clarke '11

Ebon Venus

*Let others boast of maidens fair
Of eyes of blue and golden hair
My heart like needles ever true
Turns to the maid of ebon hue*

*I love her form of matchless grace
The dark brown beauty of her face
Her lips that speak of love’s delight,
Her eyes that gleam as stars at night*

*O’er marble Venus let them rage,
Who set the fashions of the age,
Each to his taste, but as for me,
My Venus shall be ebony*

--Lewis Latimer, *The New York Age*, 1890

Professor Emerita Judith Rollins' Update on Her Recent Activities

Recent years have been busy and fulfilling for me. The outstanding experience has been my presidency of the Association of Black Sociologists (ABS), the largest national organization of sociologists with an interest in the Africana world and/or of African descent. In 2007-08, I was Program Chair for the August 2008 conference and chose the theme, "Challenging Hierarchies: Nation, Class, Race, Gender, and Sexuality." Wellesley alumna Amy Pechukas ('02) and current sociology major Carla Legros were extremely helpful in organizing and implementing a program that included over 40 panels, a medical sociology mini-conference, and a full day of film screenings. As President in 2008-09, I presided over the subsequent '09 conference, which we held in New Orleans in a deliberate effort to support that city and, especially, the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

ABS invited local individuals and organizations to make presentations at our conference and gave a financial contribution to the Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic, which has struggled to survive since the hurricane.

My sociological research and writing have been continuing and fruitful. A theoretical piece, "And the Last Shall Be First: The Master-Slave Dialectic in Hegel, Nietzsche and Fanon," was published in the Summer 2007 issue of *Human Architecture: The Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. Growing out of my interest in the social psychology of domination, this article examined these three writers' explorations of how and why subordinate people bring about their own liberation.

My empirical research, too, has continued. Field

research and interviewing remain my favorite part of being a sociologist. In the fall of 2007, I spent three weeks in Nevis (West Indies), concluding the field research for an article on Nevisian women. (I'd previously spent the fall of 1998 and January of 2000 in



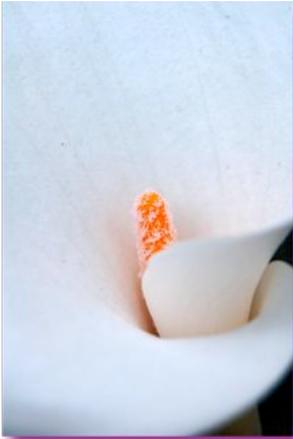
Nevis. As this research was underway, I'd given papers on aspects of it at the International Sociological Association meeting [Durban, South Africa, 2005], the Caribbean Studies Association meeting [San Andres, Colombia, 2008], and Ohio Wesleyan University [2008].) Using data from 40 in-depth interviews and government documents, I wrote the article, "Nevisian Women's Gender Consciousness: Content and Sources," for publication in the journal, *Caribbean Studies* (January-June 2009). Calaloux Press will publish an expanded and updated version of this article in 2010. Meanwhile, my larger research project in St. Lucia (West Indies) is progressing. Based on participant observation and (now over 80) interviews, this is a community study of a small, somewhat isolated village, with a focus on women.

I've also been pleased to be able to return to research on my own ancestors, most of whom were living in the Boston area since the 18th century. I'm now focusing on Robert Teamoh, my great-grandmother's brother, who became a reporter for the *Boston Globe* in the 1880s and was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in the 1890s. Evidence of his tenure in the House can still be seen on the Boston Common: He wrote the legislation which led to the erection of a monument honoring Crispus Attucks, the black man who was the first American to be killed in the American Revolution.

Despite my official retirement in June '08, my involvement with Wellesley continues. Last spring, I taught "W.E.B. DuBois: Public Intellectual." This extraordinarily rich course – because of the

remarkable productivity, talent and commitment of DuBois, the first African-American sociologist – was one of the most fulfilling I've taught at Wellesley.

Finally, as many of you know, I have become the Ombudsperson for Wellesley College. I'm honored to have been asked to fill this important position and look forward to being able to support Wellesley students, faculty and staff in a new way.



More Faculty Updates

Pashington Obeng

This year, I am co-chairing the Black Task Force. I recently published an article titled "Environmental Injustice: African Indian Response in Karnataka, South India" featured in Filomina Steady's book *Environmental Justice in the New Millennium*. Also on August 2, 2009 I spoke on "Black Theology: A Message from the Margins" at Bangalore St. Joseph College.

Donna Patterson

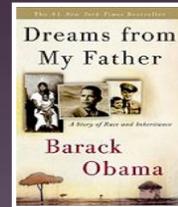
For the 2009-2010, school year, I am offering new classes, performing more college service, and working on a number of projects. Two courses, "Health, Medical Professionals, and the Body" and "Francophone Africa," are being offered the first time this year. Likewise, I am advising two majors, three first-year students, one senior thesis, and am a member of the Budget Advisory Committee.

I currently have one essay in press, one article under review, and I am drafting a book proposal for my manuscript-in-progress: *Expanding Professional Horizons: Pharmacy, Gender, and Entrepreneurship in 20th Century Senegal*.

In September, I presented a paper at the Society of Medical Anthropology at Yale University, entitled "Gender, Power, and Professionalization: Pharmacists in Senegal."

Faculty Updates Continued on Page 7

Department Events



Africana Studies Fall Colloquium

This fall all majors and minors are required to read Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*. Discussions are being held twice this fall. The first discussion was October 27th and it featured guest speakers Professor Wilber Rich (Political Science) and Professor Rhonda Frederick, Director of the African and African Diaspora Studies, Boston College



Department Lunch

On October 21st, students and professors gathered for a lunch to discuss the state of Africana studies at Wellesley College. The discussion covered topics ranging from the new Swahili program to enrollment.

Who studies Africana Studies?

While this is my first semester taking courses in the Africana Studies Department, I have developed my interest in the African continent through independent study and reading.



In middle school I became active in volunteering/activism and in high school I founded a chapter of STAND, A Student Anti-Genocide Coalition, with a focus on Darfur, at my high school. I was also a State Outreach Coordinator for STAND national during that time. Very few people in my hometown of rural, southern Vermont knew anything about the conflict in Darfur so I read up a lot on the issue to prepare presentations for peers in the surrounding area.

At Wellesley I continue to be active in volunteering and volunteer periodically with Boston Cares and Habitat for Humanity (the latter of which I'm an e-board member). I'm also on the e-board of Wellesley Children's Literacy Initiative, a fledgling group at Wellesley that collects unwanted books to send to underserved children in the United States and around the world. Recently I joined Amnesty International and am excited about getting back into activism at an organized level. While I'm involved in several other groups, these are the most important and the others generally involve human rights and are centered on volunteering and activism.

My interest in Africa probably began with stories my Dad told me about his experience serving in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone. I have decided that I would like to join the Peace Corps after graduating and I hope to work in Africa as well. I feel that a major in Africana Studies will support my aspirations for living/working in Africa and will supplement my prior educational experience on the continent - which has generally been lacking

~Katherine Nolan '12

If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, you must be the one to write it.

-Toni Morrison

What Can I Do With A Black Studies Major? *222 Answers* By Robert Fikes Jr,

Reprinted from the Summer 2009 issue of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.

The interdisciplinary field of Blacks Studies—alternatively called African American Studies, Afro-American Studies, Africana Studies, Pan African Studies, or Afro-Ethnic Studies, depending on the school where it is offered—is a relative newcomer on the academic scene and its proponents have had to defend its theoretical underpinnings and practicality, something which the traditional liberal arts fields are also challenged to do but not to the same extent. Since the establishment of the nation's first Black Studies Department in 1968 at San Francisco State University, and despite the wide acceptance and institutionalization of Black Studies in academia, there still remains the nagging question about its ability to produce outstanding citizens equal in quality to individuals who as undergraduates majored in, say, history or English or art. Black Studies has now been around long enough to notice its handiwork: men and women constructively contributing to society, employed in a wide spectrum of professions.

It is a difficult task to compile a list of noteworthy people who majored in Black Studies because there are so many who could easily qualify. This list merely scratches the surface. Black Studies attracts a broad span of interested scholars. Not only

persons of African descent, but also persons of European, Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Native American descent are represented in the list. Some of those mentioned are virtually household names or have received considerable local or regional attention. Their professions range from A (Astronaut) to Z (Zoo administrator). In short, the answer to those asking what can a person do with a Black Studies major is simple: Anything!

Most of the entries contain a brief sketch of the person's career, the type of degree obtained in Black Studies, and additional (usually graduate) degrees in other disciplines, which the person was granted.
~ Robert Fikes, Jr.,
Librarian, San Diego State University

*Wellesley College
Africana Studies
alumnae who have
made us proud.*

Megan L. Comfort.....Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, University of California at San Francisco.

B.A., Wellesley College.
Ph.D., London School of Economics and Political Science.

Neo Tapela.....Doctor of Internal Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.

B.A., Wellesley College. M.D., Harvard University.

Loriani Santos.....Attorney specializing in commercial litigation in the firm of DLA Piper (San

Francisco office). Former Treasurer of La Raza Law Student Association.

B.A., Wellesley College. University of California at Berkeley.

Karen Grigsby Bates.....Journalist-novelist. She has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *People* magazine, and the *Los Angeles Times*; made appearances on National Public Radio (NPR), ABC's "Nightline" and the "CBS Evening News."

B.A., Wellesley College.



Faculty Updates continued from page 5

Filomina Steady

While on sabbatical this fall, I have been very busy. I am currently an executive board member for the Association for the Worldwide Study of the African Diaspora (ASWAD), and I serve on the executive committee for the International Union for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES): Task Force on the Anthropology of Women and Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). As far as publications and research go, I just published a new edition of my book, *Environmental Justice in the New Millennium: Global Perspectives on Race, Ethnicity and Human Rights*. And thanks to the grant I received from the Ford Foundation, I am now researching "Women and Leadership in the Mano River Union of West Africa." In addition to my research, I have also presented at a few conferences this fall: "Looking for Female Leadership in All the Right Places in

Africa and the African Diaspora" Panel on Women and Leadership in the African Diaspora, Association of the Worldwide Study of the African Diaspora (ASWAD) biennial conference, Accra, Ghana, August, 2-8, 2009 and "Women and Leadership: Implications for Democracy, Peace and Social Transformation in the Mano River Union: An Investigative Framework Talk" presented at the Universities of Conakry, Sierra Leone and Liberia, September to October, 2009.

Fall Events

- Wednesday, October 7** **MLK Lecture- Callie Crossley**
6:30-8:30 Tishman Commons
- Wednesday, October 21** **Africana Student and Faculty Lunch**
12:30-1:30 Stone Davis Dinning Hall
- Tuesday, October 27** **Africana Studies Colloquium (1st Meeting)**
4:15-5:45 Harambee House
- Thursday, December 3** **Africana Studies Colloquium (2nd Meeting)**
4:15-5:45 Harambee House
- Friday, December 4** **An Evening of Music With Faye Alibocus**
6:30-9:30 Harambee House

Wellesley College's
Africana Studies Department
Presents
A Sacred Evening of Music
With
Faye Alibocus, Soprano



Friday, December 4th
Harambee House
6:30-9:00pm

Questions: slange2 || disabilities: jwice || expires: 12/5



What's Next

If you would like to be featured in our Spring Newsletter, please send us an update on what you have been up to. We would love to hear what our alums are doing.

We are also looking for more student writers. If you are an Africana Studies major, minor, or just would like to get involved with the Department, please send an email to abarnes@wellesley.edu.

"Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning."

-Maya Angelou

In the spring edition, look forward to more updates on students. We will feature a few students who are currently studying abroad all over the world. We will also feature study abroad and internship opportunities, that many can take advantage of this coming summer and next fall.