

The University of Houston Friends of Women's Studies present
The Barbara Karkabi Living Archives Series
#BlackWomensLivesMatter
September 9, 2015

Panel Biographies



Shekira Dennis, is a graduate of Texas Southern University. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a minor in journalism from the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs. Shekira received her first internship opportunity with Houston's City Hall in the office of then City Council Member Wanda Adams. She then went on to complete her term as the 64th President of Texas Southern University's Student Government Association.

Shortly thereafter her talents earned her a summer organizing fellowship with President Obama's campaign in the key battleground state of North Carolina where she worked alongside the Charlotte team. During her last semester at Texas Southern University she worked for a non-profit organization, the Texans Together Education Fund a non-partisan group that empowers low propensity voters in economically disadvantaged areas to vote. She also completed the White House Internship Program where she worked with the Office of Presidential Personnel. Upon her return to Houston she joined the ranks of Strong Strategies a political fundraising and compliance firm. She then went on to co-found the

Houston Justice Coalition. Shekira is also a member of the Houston Black Leadership Institute a professional development program developed by the Greater Houston Black Chamber.



Amanda K. Edwards is an attorney and native Houstonian with a passion for building communities through public service. Amanda is running for City Council to be part of long-term solutions that will move all of Houston forward. Amanda attended Eisenhower High School in Aldine ISD and Emory University in Atlanta, where she earned a degree in political science and served as student body president for the college. Amanda has worked for Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee in Washington before earning her degree from Harvard Law School. While at Harvard, Amanda served as a Criminal Justice Institute student attorney, chaired the Harvard Black Law Students Association Spring Conference and was awarded the Elaine Osborne Jacobson Award for her commitment to serving underserved populations in the healthcare law arena.

Compelled by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Amanda relocated to New Orleans. While there, Amanda served as a judicial law clerk for Federal District Court Judge Ivan L. R. Lemelle and founded Project NOW: The New Orleans Writing Project, which inspired New Orleans youth to empower themselves and their community through the power of writing. Amanda returned to home to Houston with a broadened perspective and interest in impacting her community.

Currently, Amanda practices law at Bracewell & Giuliani, LLP in Houston, where she solves complex issues relating to tax-exempt bond financings, public-private partnerships, community development projects, and non-profit organizations. Amanda also maintains a strong commitment to community service. She has served as President of the Board of Directors for Project Row Houses in the Historical Third Ward community and on numerous other civic boards and committees, including Texas Lyceum, Crisis Intervention of Houston, Texas One Voice: A Health and Human Services Collaborative, and the Houston Area Urban League Young Professionals. Amanda is also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Amanda is a graduate of the Center for Houston's Future Business/Civic Leadership Forum, Leadership Houston, and the United Way's Project Blueprint.



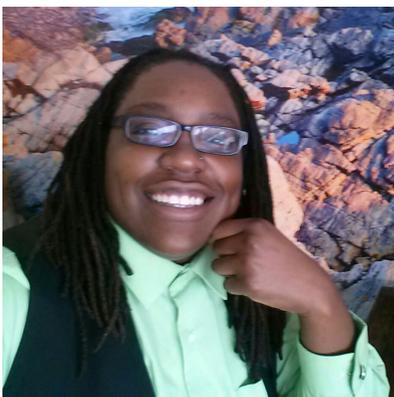
Jalyn Gordon is a senior at the University of Houston studying Political-Science and African-American Studies. Currently serving as the President of Black Student Union at UH, Jalyn is deeply rooted in the academic and social success of African-American students at the university and increasing the awareness and efficacy of 'small community' black institutions. Jalyn has been involved in a myriad of community organizations, as a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, as an intern for Neighborhood Centers, working for Houston City Council as the Community Outreach Liaison for At-Large 1 Council Member Stephen Costello, and currently serving as a member of the Next Generation Advisory Council for District D of Houston.

As a Mellon Scholar for the Library Company of Philadelphia, Jalyn recently completed her first original body of research titled "*Praise Waits for Thee: A Look at the Sustainability and Progression of Black Churches in Philadelphia (1800-1850)*" and is looking to further this love of research by attending graduate school in fall 2016 to

pursue either a Masters or PhD in African-American Studies.



Rachel Afi Quinn received her Ph.D. from the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan in 2012. Her scholarship focuses on race, mixed race identities, gender, and sexuality in the African Diaspora and she employs tools of transnational feminist theory, including ethnography and visual culture in her research. Her first book project, "*Ya Somos Americanizadas, Dominican Women's Transnational Identities in Santo Domingo*" is an interdisciplinary cultural studies project that explores the impact of neoliberal development and US popular media on Dominican women's identities. Dr. Quinn has also worked in documentary film production and distribution. More information about her recent film *Cimarrón Spirit* (2015) can be found at www.loscimarrones.com.



Tiffany Ross joined Mental Health America of Greater Houston as the Education and Training Program Manager in June of 2014. Prior to this role, Tiffany worked at AIDS Foundation Houston as the Priority Population Program Coordinator working with ex-offenders who were HIV positive and she traveled throughout the State of Texas to the various state jails and prisons teaching HIV education to incarcerated men and women. At MHA, Tiffany is currently responsible for the management of education and training programs, including the WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) program. She oversees professional training for medical, mental health, and social service professionals as well as community education and outreach. Tiffany currently sits on the board of the Lesbian Health Initiative in Houston and the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio. Tiffany is a certified facilitator for Mental Health First Aid and Wellness Recovery Action Plan and she is a member of the National Association of Social Workers. Tiffany's interests' are community and political activism around HIV, LGBT people of color,

immigration, race and mental health. Tiffany has a Bachelor's of Science in Sociology from The University of Houston-Downtown and a Master's of Science in Social Work from The University of Texas at Austin.



Cristal C. Truscott, PhD, is Interim Department Head of Music & Theatre and Assistant Professor and Theatre Program Director at Prairie View A&M. Dr. Truscott is a Houston native and graduate of the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA). She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre with a minor in Africana Studies from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and went on to complete her Master of Arts and Doctoral degrees from NYU's Department of Performance Studies. Before joining the faculty at Prairie View A&M, Dr. Truscott taught classes in the drama and religious studies departments at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA and lectured at universities and arts programs nationwide including San Francisco State University, University of Georgia at Athens, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and Columbia University. She is also former Assistant Editor of the scholarly performance journal, *TDR: The Drama Review*; former Associate Editor for *Azizah Magazine*; and has served on the editorial boards of the publications *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* and *Black Masks Magazine: A Spotlight on Black Art*; and is Associate Editor of the current issue of the *Journal for History and Culture*, a publication of the Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture (TIPHC) at PVAMU.

Dr. Truscott is founding artistic director and playwright of Progress Theatre, an internationally touring ensemble company. Her work as a playwright and performer has been commissioned and supported by the likes of the New England Foundation for the Arts–National Theatre Project, National Performance Network, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts and Ford Foundation and featured at numerous venues nationally and abroad including Washington DC's The Kennedy Center, New York's Apollo Theatre, San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Europe's World Music Theatre Festival, the Hip Hop Theatre Consortium, and the National Black Theatre Festival.

With Progress Theatre, Truscott facilitates an arts education program, Generation Progress, which has reached thousands of students through featured university and grade-through-high school performances and workshops using art to encourage social consciousness, cross-community dialogue and cultural awareness. She also currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors for the National Network of Ensemble Theatres (NET) and has been an invited artist participant in groundbreaking national and international conferences such as "Future Aesthetics: Hip Hop and Contemporary Performance" funded by the Ford Foundation and "Diversity Dialogues," lead by the US Embassy to the Netherlands and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund. As an artist and educator, Dr. Truscott is passionate about contributing to the development of new artists, new aesthetics and diverse audiences for the next generation of American theatre.

Moderator:



Syan Rhodes joined the KPRC 2 News team in July 2014. She is a native Houstonian who grew up in the city's Sunnyside neighborhood and also Third Ward. She is a product of Houston Independent School District magnet programs at Dodson Elementary School, T.H. Rogers Middle School, and Episcopal High School in Bellaire. She is a graduate of the prestigious Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. She made her first appearance as a TV reporter during a three-month internship at KSNT-TV, the NBC affiliate in Topeka, Kansas. During her time at Northwestern, Syan was a part of a team of journalism students that freed an innocent man from Illinois death row. That case eventually led former Illinois Governor George Ryan to issue a moratorium on executions in the state. Years later the state would ban the death penalty.

Prior to joining KPRC, Syan served as anchor of WESH 2 News in Orlando. Before that, she spent two years as weekend anchor at WMC-TV, the NBC affiliate in

Memphis, Tennessee, and three years as a reporter and weekend morning anchor at WBIR-TV, the NBC affiliate in Knoxville, Tennessee. She also worked as an investigative reporter and weekend anchor at KETK-TV, the NBC affiliate in Tyler, Texas. Syan is an active community volunteer and frequently requested public speaker. She is a past president of the Central Florida Association of Black Journalists, and a member of the National Association of Black Journalists.

Syan says the opportunity to "right wrongs" is what she loves most about her job. In her free time, Syan enjoys dancing, reading and socializing with family and friends.

Contacts:

Elizabeth Gregory <egregory@uh.edu>; Jalyn Gordon <jalyn.gordon@gmail.com>; Shekira Dennis <shekira.dennis@gmail.com>; Edwards, Amanda <Amanda.Edwards@bgllp.com>; cctruscott@pvamu.edu; TRoss@mhahouston.org <TRoss@mhahouston.org>