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# UJIMA

Newsletter of the African American Studies Program



**Building Leaders,  
Advancing Research,  
Impacting Lives in  
African American Studies**

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## UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

2016-2017

# UJIMA

Volume 20, Number 1

## AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM

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## Letter from the Director



James L. Conyers, Jr., Ph.D., University Professor of African American Studies, University of Houston, CLASS

Located in the flux of the 45th Presidential Administration of the United States, print and broadcast journalists are voicing America is currently a divided nation. Despite ongoing distractions, such as false news, propaganda, and continued vetting, the position of African American Studies in the academy of higher learning persists in its resolve toward problem solving. Using the historical markers of Black heroes and heroines, the grind and task of the Africana studies scholar is ardent for securing, maintaining, and enhancing research and writing on the global Pan Africanist experience.

In our 48th year, the AAS Program at the University of Houston advances prioritizing the proposal of the unit toward offering an undergraduate degree in Africana Studies. This ongoing development remains balanced, however, by the fact that the domestic and international bearing of the political economy remains unclear regarding transition for the growth or regression of the African American community. Frequently in astonishment, the university becomes the groundswell of raising questions, offering debate, and encouraging students to think critically about the arts, sciences, and professions.

The University of Houston is a tier-one research institution of higher education, a learning laboratory to explore issues and systems related to race, gender, and class. Resigned to this task, forethought, and perseverance, AAS remains committed to offering a quality education for all undergraduate and graduate students. In closing, AAS will continue to support the objectives of a research university, in the way of advancing knowledge and information using qualitative and measureable tools of analysis.

Agoo-Amen,

James L. Conyers, Ph.D.  
African American Studies, Director  
Center for the Study of African American Culture, Director  
University Professor of African American Studies

# AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

By Chelsea L. Murray

The African American Studies program at the University of Houston was established in 1969 and focuses on the history, culture, life and contributions of people of African descent. Its mission is to provide students with a comprehensive, quality education and the opportunity for a creative, intellectual experience based on the critical and systematic study of the life, thought and practice of African peoples. Currently, more than 60 students minor in African American Studies. Many are assisted by scholarships, and raising funds for scholarships is a priority for the program.

The emergence of the African American Studies program stemmed from student protests during the Civil Rights era. Students at the University were advocating for an increase in African American faculty and an Afro-American Studies department. The dedication and ground-breaking efforts of the Afro-Americans for Black Liberation (AABL) spearheaded the transition of UH from its roots of an exclusively white institution to embarking on diversity with ethnic studies programs.

In February 1969, AABL along with student leader and civil rights activist, Lynn Eusan, presented University of Houston administration officials with a list of ten demands in hopes to reform academia and social environments on campus. Influentially, the demands encompassed the creation of an Afro-American Studies department, increase in black faculty and staff, recruitment and retention of more black students with financial aid assistance and adequate

housing; improved conditions for black athletes, combating racism in grading and instructions, establishment of a Black Student Union, award credit to black students for community involvement, and raise the wages of school service workers.

The establishment of the African American Studies Program became the most transformative outcomes in response to the AABL demands. In consideration of the program, members of the organization,

Assistant Dean of Students and one of the first African American administrators at UH, Chester Bratton were on the task force in creation of a degree-granting department. In April 1969, a second task force which included additional faculty and fewer student announced some of the course offerings; Afro-American History, Afro-American Literature, and Afro-American Culture.

In May 1969, President Phillip G. Hoffman

appointed white history professor Robert Haynes as acting director of the new Afro-American Studies Program. During the summer of 1969, the stated objectives of the program were to instill the concept of black awareness and identity as well as a community orientation.

Although the African American Studies program has not yet gained the standing of a degree-granting department, the program is influential in many ways in regards to student success, educational programs, and community engagement. (Continued on pg. 27)

**“Conyers can provide strong leadership in establishing an African-American studies department.”**

## ANTONIO D. TILLIS

Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and M.D. Anderson Professor in Hispanic Studies



**H**e had his sights set on becoming an international corporate lawyer, but after attending a lecture at Howard University given by world-renowned Colombian writer Manuel Zapata Olivella and having an opportunity to meet the author himself, Antonio D. Tillis was so inspired that he decided to take a detour and chart a new course.

Today, Tillis is a nationally and internationally acclaimed scholar and author who specializes in Latin American, Afro-Latin American and African Diaspora literatures.

On February 1, Tillis joined the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) from the College of Charleston where he was dean of the School of Languages, Cultures and World Affairs and professor of Hispanic Studies. Tillis received his B.A. in Spanish from Vanderbilt University, M.A. in Spanish Literature from Howard University and his Ph.D. in Latin American Literature with an Afro-Hispanic emphasis from the University of Missouri.

His array of scholarly, literary, editorial and teaching achievements includes numerous published articles in journals such as the Afro-Hispanic Review, Callaloo, the Hispanic Journal, Mosaic Journal, CLAJ and Transit Circle. He is the author of “Manuel Zapata Olivella and the ‘Darkening’ of Latin American Literature,” “Caribbean-African Upon Awakening: Poetry by Blas Jiménez,” “(Re)Considering Blackness in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian (Con) Texts: A Cultural Studies Reader,” “Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature” and “Manuel Zapata Olivella e o escurecimento da literatura latino-americana.” Tillis is the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Lorna Hill “2012 Professor of the Year” award at Dartmouth College, chosen as Fulbright Scholar to Brazil at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, president of the College Language Association (2008-10) and receiving the 2007

Purdue University Faculty Scholar award. While preparing to take the reins of the University’s largest college, Tillis discussed his priorities for CLASS:

**What are some of your initial plans as the new CLASS Dean?** My initial plans include learning as much as possible about the culture of UH and the diverse academic units that make up CLASS. In addition, engaging faculty, staff, students and other constituencies in strategic planning to fortify CLASS’ mission, vision as well as short-term and long-term goals. Also, I plan to focus on identifying ways to engage the surrounding community.

**What most excites you about your role?** The opportunity of working with a dynamic group of faculty to offer the best comprehensive education for undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, working with faculty to enhance what their academic/intellectual units do best. Finally, I look forward to working with the administration to advance UH regarding the quality of undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

**Random Facts:** I love to sing and to cook. I am a lyric baritone and have sung in classical chorales across the U.S. I look forward to singing in Houston! I enjoy cooking. My favorite dish to prepare is Brazilian moqueca.

**First Impressions:** UH is a leading research institution. I was attracted by the University’s commitment to academic excellence its diverse student population as well as its mission to be a premier academic institution. Houston offers, literally, the world to current and future residents. The city’s rich ethnic populations, its strong tradition in the performing arts, as well as its breadth of culinary delights make it an attractive place to work and to live.

**Hometown:** Growing up in Memphis shaped my spiritual core, political consciousness, love of the arts and ability to discern great blues and barbecue!

# The Mural

Demonstrating each of the principles associated with the Nguzo Saba, Da'Vonte Lyons, President of the UH-Chapter of Ankh Maat Wedjau Honor Society, contributed his impressive skills as an artist and cultural activist to Houston's Third Ward community by completing a mural in the children's library at S.H.A.P.E. Community Center. In 2015, Mr. Lyons received an internship at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, through the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellowship Program and Summer Academy. In the essay below, Mr. Lyons discusses the origins and inspiration for his artwork



The mural (It is untitled) was created for the Shape Community Center's community library during the summer 2015. Preceding the creation of the mural, I was referred to Shape by a fellow student (Dana Maule) in the African American Studies Department at the University of Houston, who haven to be an intern for Shape Community Center.

Moreover, Dana Maule asked me if I was interested in helping local artist, Michelle Barnes, create a mural that she had been commissioned to complete by Shape; I accepted. Initially, Ms. Barnes was the leading artist on the project and I was assisting her with a design for the mural, however, once the drafts were completed she gave me the responsibility of leading the project. Brother Deloyd Parker, the director of Shape, wanted me to incorporate visual illustrations that embodied the principles of shape, which are the seven principles of the Nguzo Saba (i.e. Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), etc.,) so the mural was a visual representation of those principles. In addition to the seven principles of the Nguzo Saba, I used photos that captured the daily activates of Shape community staff

and students (i.e., unity knot, playing of the drums, student arts and crafts, etc.,) and incorporated them into the mural.

I have been drawing since my youth, initially, it was just expression based on my childhood perceptions and feelings; it was not necessarily a passion but something that I had a knack for. Moreover, drawing, in many ways, helped create opportunities for me as teenager. Specifically, in high school, I was involved in many art related programs and organizations. I was a member of the Art Honor Society, I participated in the 2011 NAACP ACT-SO National Competition, and I was a member of Art House Jones Young Artist Program. These experiences allowed me to discover my capacity as a person and as an artist. When I started college in 2011, I begin to get a different angle on art. As a major in graphic communications, now painting, and a minor in African American studies I was immersed in the academic studies of a variety of traditions, philosophes, histories, etc.

As a researcher, I was most drawn to arts movements such as, the Black arts movement of the 1960's and the Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, I researched artists such as, Paul Robeson, Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka, Jacob Lawrence, etc. In addition to these studies, I was able to travel abroad to Ghana, West Africa,

and I was selected as an intern for the Museum of Fine Arts Houston and Project Row Houses. As a student and practitioner of art, these experiences helped to add context to my studies and gave me an understanding of the philosophical basis of art, in addition to its social, political, and historical significance. For me, an artist, specifically one of African descent, has a responsibility to use it as a medium of social change. Art goes beyond the artist; it represents the customs, traditions, and history of a collective group of people, a culture. Art informs, confirms, reaffirms, and inspires; it is a vision of possibility that can be used to build communities. As Paul Robeson said, art is a "radical voice," it must be used to challenge oppression and injustice, in addition to, inspiring commitment to change. So my goal as an African American artist, is to recover, reconstruct, and project the best of what it means to be African in the world, as the Harlem Renaissance artist attempted to do in the 1930's. It is to inspire self-reliance, commitment, and unity as the Black Artist Movement of 1960's struggled to achieve. It is about creating community spaces of sanctuary, education, and health, as Project Row Houses, S.H.A.P.E Community Center, and the African American Studies Program at the University of Houston has done; and that is what I intend to do as an artist.

# AAS Minor Publishes New Literary Work



By AAS News Staff

Nikala Asante, AAS Minor and creative writer, self-published her latest work *Tomorrow Will Be Better* (2015), an intimate conversation, a history primer, a discussion of current events, a Spoken Word Collection, and an invitation to engagement in social justice - all in one. While it is appropriate for any mature reader, it is especially pertinent to high school and college students seeking to better understand themselves and their roles in the world.

Nikala Asante is a creative writer, Spoken Word artist, web series producer, independent educator, and international Human Rights advocate from Houston, TX. Asante fell in love with organizing around Human Rights after traveling to the Dominican Republic to learn about garment worker rights organizing with Solidarity Ignite in 2013. Since then, she has returned to Dominican Republic and Haiti independently and with the University of Houston to help set up medical clinics, to distribute food and water, to plant food bearing trees in deforested areas, to deliver needed supplies, children's vitamins, and toys to orphanages, and to create archives of personal narratives about Haiti's 2010 earthquake.

In her community, Asante organizes homeschooling parents around educational events and field trips to advance their children's learning experiences, as well as tutoring and mentoring inner-city youth. Asante has received numerous awards from the community and university, including the prestigious Gilman International Study Scholarship. She was featured in Defender Networks' Black History special on young leaders following in the footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr in 2013, on PBS NewsHour in 2015, and has spoken on Human Rights in two documentaries ("16th Strike: the Documentary" and "Nice: A Place to Start").

Asante has published two collections of poetry, *Graffiti Nommo* and *Re-Divining Self*. Additionally, Asante recently published her first web series in 5 episodes, *Pharaoh the Web Series* -- available for viewing on YouTube. She is currently in the process of developing her own non-profit to connect students with international service learning opportunities - *Asante Global Works*.

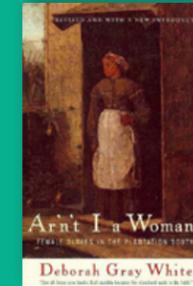
# Bookshelf Africana:

A Partial List of Books Being Read By Students in African American Studies



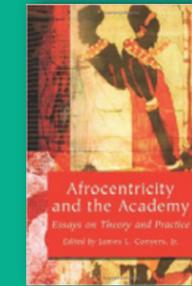
**African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology**

Edited By Gayraud Wilmore  
Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2012.



**Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South**

By Deborah Gray White  
New York City, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.



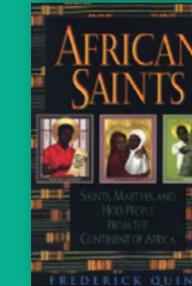
**Afrocentricity and the Academy: Essays on Theory and Practice**

Edited by James L. Conyers, Jr.  
Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003.



**Americanah**  
By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

New York City, NY: Anchor Books, 2014.



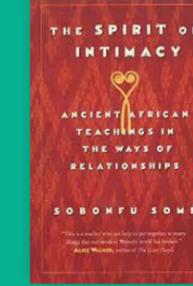
**African Saints: Saints, Martyrs, and Holy People from the Continent of Africa**

By Frederick Quinn  
New York City, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.



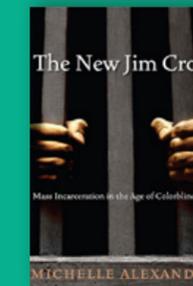
**In Township Tonight!: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre, Second Edition**

By David B. Coplan  
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008



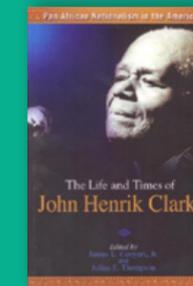
**The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient African Teachings in the Ways of Relationships**

By Sobonfu Somé  
New York City, NY: William Morrow Publishers, 1999.



**The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness**

By Michelle Alexander  
New York City, NY: The New Press, 2012.



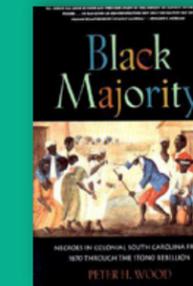
**Pan African Nationalism in the Americas: The Life and Times of John Henrik Clarke**

Edited by James L. Conyers, Jr. and Julius E. Thompson  
Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004.



**Why Race Matters in South Africa**

By Michael MacDonald  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.



**Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion**

By Peter Wood  
New York City, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.



**Dominique L. Washington**  
Houston, Texas  
Alumnus  
Political Science

## AAS Minor Pursues MA in Public Affairs

Dominique L. Washington, who completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Houston in Fall 2014, will be pursuing the MA degree in Public Affairs at Texas Southern University's Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs. A graduate of Yates High School (Houston, TX) and alumnus of the African American Studies program (AAS), Ms. Washington's pursuit of the advanced degree aligns with her longstanding commitment to serving as a catalyst for social change.

Throughout her undergraduate career, for example, Ms. Washington exhibited a profound interest in domestic and foreign policy issues that impact public resources—an imperative concern in today's increasingly interdependent world. In the spring of 2011, Ms. Washington represented the University of Houston as a delegate to the annual Model African Union Conference in Washington, D.C.

In the spring of 2014, Ms. Washington received the Dr. Kwame Nkrumah International Study Abroad Scholarship, one of AAS's most competitive awards, in support of her travel to Ghana, West Africa. Ms. Washington also successfully completed the AAS Community Internship program with the U.S. Dream Academy. Her role with the

US Dream Academy included mentoring local primary school students at Foster Elementary in Houston's historic Third Ward district.

Likewise, Ms. Washington continued to develop in her experience with and exposure to primary source and policy oriented research opportunities. Recently, Ms. Washington participated in the 2015 Mellon Summer Internship at the Library Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she explored archival sources on the early activist traditions and leadership typologies of several well-known 19th Century African American political activists.

The internship involved a national, merit-based competition that introduced award recipients to three research based components: guided primary source research in the Library Company's African Americana Collection culminating in the production of a short research paper and a capstone colloquium; a special project such as cataloging or creating an annotated bibliography of items in the collection; and, professional development through workshops on the graduate application process, mentoring by established scholars, networking, and field trips to local repositories.

## Recovering the History of Pleasantville, Texas

By AAS News Staff



The African American Studies program will work with the Pleasantville Historical Society (or Committee) in documenting the history of Pleasantville, Texas, a predominantly African American community developed in the years after World War II. Marketing itself as Houston's first master-planned African American neighborhood, Pleasantville played an extremely influential role in local and state African American politics during the second half of the twentieth century.

In addition to boasting among the highest voter turnout numbers in local and statewide elections during this period, Pleasantville was the birthplace of Houston's first African

American city councilmember, Judson Robinson Sr. The neighborhood was also home to the late Carl Hampton, founder of People's Party II, the Houston chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

The University of Houston's African American Studies Program will assist in the development of a comprehensive timeline chronicling the origins and development of Pleasantville, Texas, in four areas: politics, education, religion and business. Although documenting the history of topics such as family life will not be a focus in this initial phase of the project, space will be provided to mention significant historical events in these areas as the project moves past its first year. It is hoped that through the creation of the initial timeline, residents of Pleasantville, Houstonians and others will get a broad overview of the major events that shaped the evolution of this community.

Brooke Salmond (Fa' 2015) and Mamisi Gordon-Allen assisted in the historical recovery project through their service in the African American Studies community internship program. Nicholas Harris also assisted by developing a logo for the Pleasantville Historical Society.

## 2017 Model African Union Conference Summary

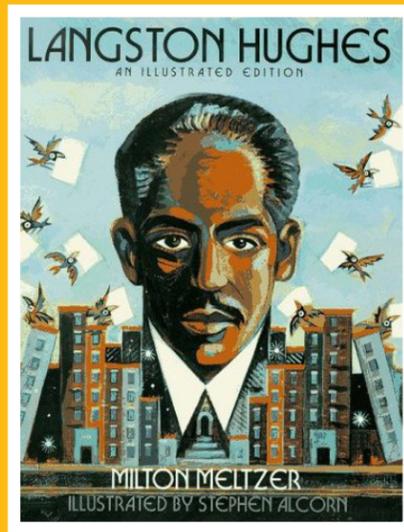
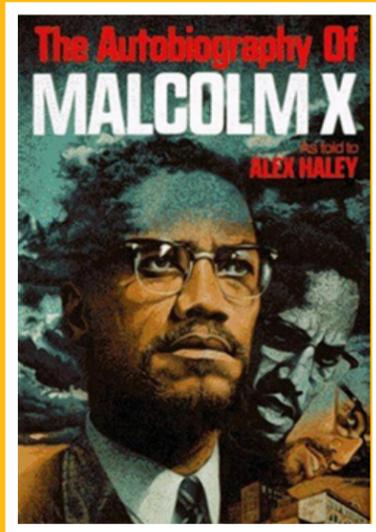
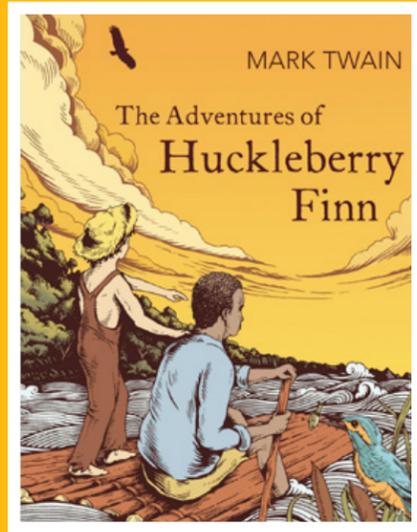
African American Studies Program minors and graduate certificate students attended the Fifteenth Annual National Model African Union Conference February 23-26, 2017 in Washington, D.C. The Model African Union Conference gives students the opportunity to engage in African issues and policy making through simulation of African Union proceedings. The conference acts as an extension of the classroom with student preparation at their home institutions prior to arrival.

Students prepared for the conference by completing the AAS 4440: Model African Union Seminar course in the fall 2016, and through independent study. Olumide Akibola (Executive Council), DáVonte Lyons (Peace and Security Committee), Kennedy Payne (Committee on Pan Africanism and Continental Unity), and Traveon Rogers (Technical Committee on Social Matters) all represented

their respective committees as delegates of the Republic of Liberia. Over a four day period students turned their training into practice as they represented Liberia in their committee meetings. The students' goal was to pass their written resolutions within their committee meetings, which are drafted in the best interest of their assigned country.

Prior to the official start of the conference, students also had the opportunity to visit the Embassy of Liberia in Washington, D.C. The meeting at the embassy was led by the Liberian Minister Counselor for Press & Public Affairs. Students had the opportunity to engage in topics about current and the future of Liberian policies with a number of embassy representatives. AAS students were very successful in their committees this year very engaged in their committee meetings. AAS minor, Kennedy Payne received the outstanding delegate award from her committee peers.

# Books for the Backyard



The first book I remember reading was a worn copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; my mother or father's from a childhood gone by placed into my hands. I remember it well, but not out of fondness. In fact, I believed it was boring. I read it because my parents had promised me ten dollars if I finished it, and ten dollars seemed a great sum to a child who could not have been older than seven or eight. The promised ten dollars served as a bookmark and reminder that I could not collect until the very last page was turned. I wished very dearly and sincerely to get to the end. Never before had I read with such determination. It is likely I put that money towards buying a new video game for my Gameboy Color; some toy or action figure now lost to me, never giving a serious thought to Huck, Tom, or Jim. I do not know the number of times my parents used this method to encourage me to read, or

for which other books, but at some point I forgot about the money and it became the books which mattered most. I have not stopped reading or been far from a book since.

Only rarely would I receive money or toys from my parents outside of my birthday and Christmas. As a child my parents laughed and sent me away when I brought up the topic of an allowance. Once I began attending the University of Houston my father told the story, often and with great enthusiasm, of how my Grandfather had given him only twenty dollars when he went to college, telling my father very seriously it was up to him to decide whether he would spend it a little at a time or all at once. And now, as a college graduate living in my parent's house, as is the fate of so many others, sometimes I have small arguments with my father about paying him back for bananas he purchased on my behalf for forty-

eight cents a pound. But never – not once throughout my entire life – have my parents ever denied to me a book that I wanted with genuine interest and which they could afford. For this I will always be grateful, and I will thank them for it every day I live on this earth. My books are my most prized possessions. Few things bring me more pride, joy, and comfort. I have books that are rare, or otherwise out of print, and some signed by people whom I greatly admire. Still, though it is now lost, if I were to find it, that copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* would be the most prized of all.

A book changed my life. I am not the only one who would say so. That is their power. To inspire, awake, teach, and transform. For every step I took forward, a book informed the direction. For me it was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I read by whim my sophomore year at the

University of Houston for reasons I do not remember but it changed me in ways I do not forget. For a friend, it was the poetry of Langston Hughes read at chance while in the 3rd or 4th grade.

It is important I detail these anecdotes because what I aim to say is that the age of the individual or the book one reads makes ultimately no difference for reading to be important. Any book may have life altering impacts at any age for different people and for different reasons. What is important is that these opportunities to explore the written word are available and encouraged. Countless figures and individuals within and outside of the black liberation struggle over the course of history became who they were because of the written word and its power. So much so that figures such as Malcolm X and George Jackson rose to respect and prominence from their prison cells, and Frederick Douglass felt liberated by the learning of letters. It is from the written word, where most of our knowledge and collective experiences are stored, that future generations will grow, lead, and prosper.

For these reasons, more than feelings of rage or surprise, I am frightened to have learned that the libraries of some HISD schools, such as Cullen Middle School, and Jack Yates High School, are almost entirely empty. Not simply of books about the black experience, but of books in general. What should not come as a surprise to anyone is that the schools facing this issue are primarily located in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. It is a shame that a 3rd or 4th grade student is unable to chance upon Langston Hughes; it is disgraceful and cruel for a student to be unable to chance upon anything at all. I know of no successful models or systems of education which may function without books, nor of

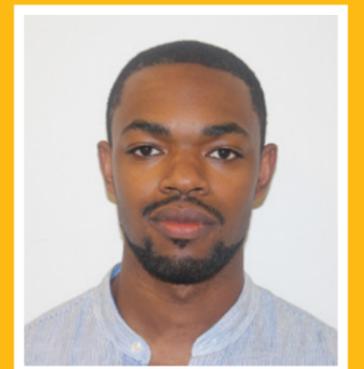
any schools without a library which may call itself one or deserves the title.

It is said that the need for books is a secondary issue in the face of other concerns such as projectors and calculators so that higher level math may be taught. Some HISD schools also do not have nurses or counselors. Blame is being laid at the feet of inadequate state education funding, and perhaps deservedly so. It is understandable, but in no way is it acceptable. Even prisons, to which many men and women of color are being sent, have medical staff, counselors, libraries, and meals. The reasons why an individual would end up in prison, justly or unjustly, is numerous, but the students in the schools have committed, in contrast, a far worse crime and suffer the fate of being born the wrong color in the wrong neighborhood. What this says about the society in which we live, where prisons are better equipped than our schools, book have been written, and no end of articles or films have discussed.

We cannot rely on the city or the faculty and administration of HISD schools to solve the problem. Not for reasons of their disinterest or incompetence, though we must question with all force if this is the case, but for reasons of our collective responsibility as a people and community. In every case we must look to the reality of the situation, the challenge it presents, and act accordingly. The reality is that it is unlikely these issues will be solved outside the community, at least without and due quickness or efficiency. Instead there are a number of initiatives which necessitate our collective attention and support to be successful. Cullen Middle School has begun soliciting donations on their webpage for the purpose of restocking their library, and HISD as a whole is reportedly working on a

system to allow book donations. This is only the start in addressing the issue. And more than the problem, we must see the possibility. There is an opportunity as a community to address this issue with collective fundraising and book drives to fill these libraries with books, and with books which relate more readily to their experiences and perspectives. Among ourselves we should plan and act in collaboration with these initiatives, from every organization to every individual.

In a University setting it is easy to forget the streets which surround us are our streets; the schools without books, nurses, counselors, calculators and projectors our schools; the future of the children who live on those streets and learn from those schools, our future. More importantly, we forget that individually and collectively, change and progress in within our power, and in this instance, more than ever, we are the deciding factor.



**Marcus Smith**

University of Houston Alumni  
African American Studies Alumni

# 8TH ANNUAL STOP THE SILENCE

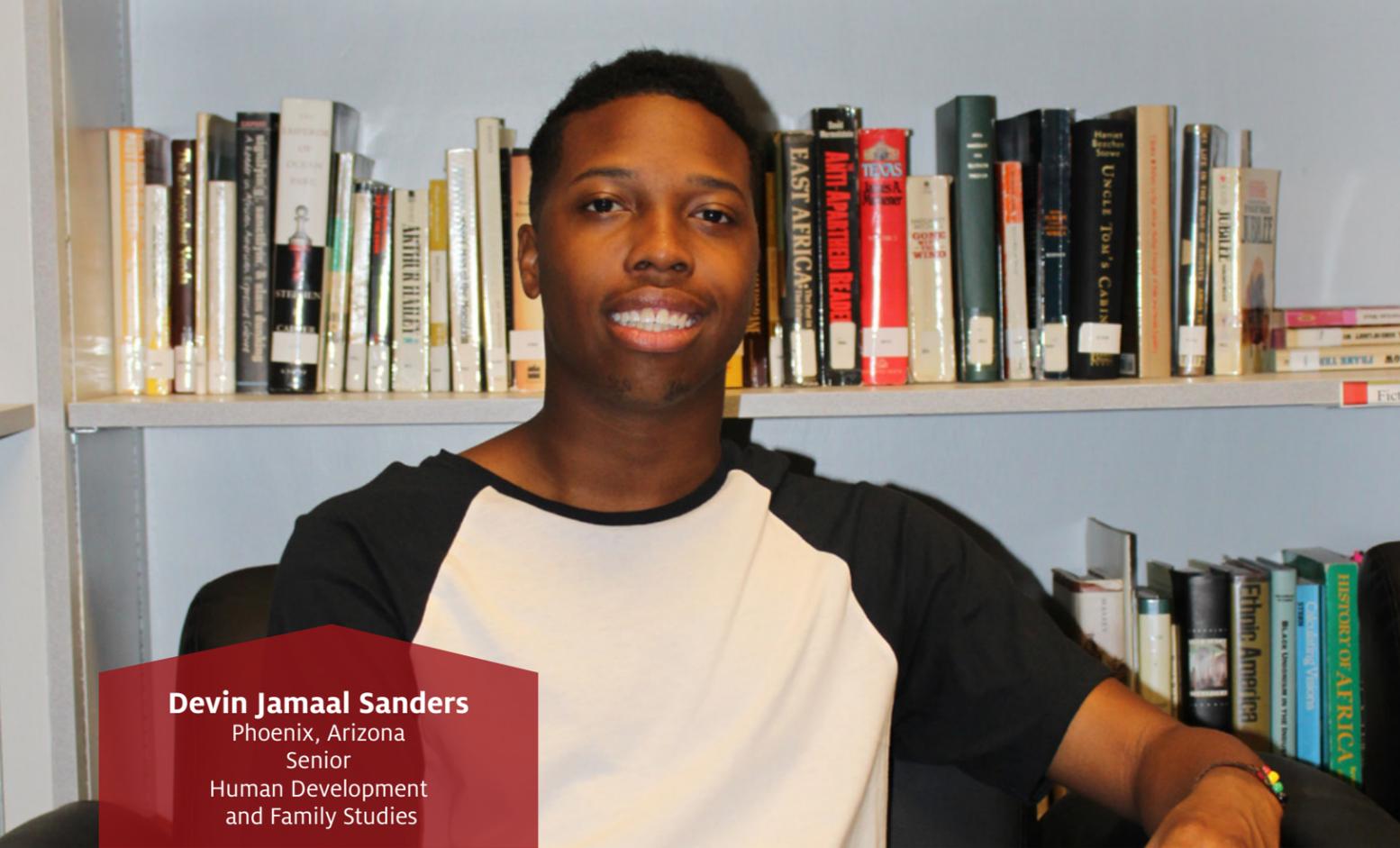
National African American  
Breast Cancer 5k Walk/Run

On Saturday, April 8, 2017 the University of Houston's African American Studies Program hosted the Sisters Network, Inc. 8th Annual Stop the Silence National African American Breast Cancer 5K Walk/Run. The Walk started and ended at Lynn Eusan Park, and took place from 7:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Ms. Serwaa Omowale, Program Manager for African American Studies, was an invaluable resource in coordinating the logistics involved with bringing the prominent event to the University of Houston-Main Campus.

Sisters Network® Inc. is committed to increasing local and national attention to the devastating impact that breast cancer has in the African-American community. In April 2010, Sisters Network Inc. made history by hosting the 1st National African American Breast Cancer 5K Walk/ Run in Houston. A portion of the funds raised from this event will benefit Sisters Network Inc. Breast Cancer Assistance Program (BCAP).

The annual Stop the Silence 5k Walk/Run brought thousands to the University of Houston campus to raise awareness about breast cancer.





**Devin Jamaal Sanders**  
Phoenix, Arizona  
Senior  
Human Development  
and Family Studies

## Devin Sanders Named 2017 SPIDUR Scholar

By AAS News Staff

As an incoming transfer student, Devin J. Sanders had a firm vision of what his future upon graduation from college entailed: the use of his education to improve health outcomes in underserved, economically disadvantaged communities. Holding a longstanding interest in becoming a dentist but finding no pre-dental program at the University of Houston, Sanders settled on pursuing a major in Human Development and Family Studies. Since his initial enrollment at UH, he has remained true to his dream, becoming the first student from the University of Houston to receive admission into the nationally competitive Summer Program to Increase Diversity in Undergraduate

Research (SPIDUR) program at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. As a 2017 SPIDUR Scholar, Sanders will study health disparities within and among African American communities.

“I feel like this research fellowship in North Carolina will help me grasp a better understanding of the public health field, allowing me to expand my knowledge and bring it back with me so that I can apply it,” Sanders says.

As an African American Studies minor, Sanders encountered and came to understand the qualitative and quantitative impact of structural racism on African American lives, which ultimately shaped his research focus.

“I want to look into why there aren’t more hospitals and urgent care providers in economically disadvantaged areas,” Sanders says.

In addition to receiving this prestigious opportunity, the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor’s School of Public Health waitlisted Sanders as a finalist for its 2017 Future Public Health Leaders Program.

The Summer Program to Increase Diversity in Undergraduate Research (SPIDUR) is a 9-week summer program for high-achieving undergraduate students, providing research experience and professional development training in their field of interest. These opportunities are not typically available

in the undergraduate classroom. This learn-by-doing model places an emphasis on graduate education and allows the Scholars to put their experiential learning into practice, preparing them to excel in their future studies and research.

The program culminates with the Summer Research Symposia, where students participating in summer research programs on campus present their research results. The Summer Research Symposia is free and open to the public.

Summer scholars receive a stipend of \$4000 for the 8 weeks of the program.

Throughout his undergraduate career at the University of Houston, Sanders has demonstrated leadership and scholarly excellence in his academic research and

student organizational activities. In the summer of 2016, Sanders assisted in organizing and leading the University of Houston’s Cub Camp Summer Experience. UH Cub Camp is a three-day extended orientation program where first-year students go just before classes begin to come together as a class, have fun, make friends, and learn more about creating a successful life at UH and in Houston.

Likewise, the African American Studies program recognized Mr. Sanders’ work ethic inside and outside of the classroom by providing him with several merit-based scholarships, including the 2016 Dr. Kwame Nkrumah International Study Abroad Scholarship. The Nkrumah Scholarship is one of the most competitive scholarships offered by AAS, awarded in recognition of

a student’s scholastic achievement, commitment to service and potential contribution to advanced research initiatives.

It bears mentioning that Mr. Sanders accomplished these achievements while serving as vice-chair of the University of Houston’s 2016 Homecoming Programming Board (HPB). His organization, leadership and service record with respect to HPB remain a hallmark of the organization’s legacy at the University of Houston today.

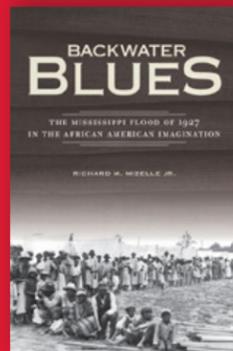
The African American Studies program at the University of Houston congratulates Mr. Sanders on this accomplishment and celebrates his commitment to educational relevance, a key virtue of scholars within the discipline of Africana Studies

## Faith Nomamiukor Receives Prestigious SURF Award

Faith Nomamiukor is a recipient of a 2017 Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship. The Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship program at the University of Houston (SURF-UH) seeks to provide funding for rising UH sophomores, juniors, and seniors to participate in a focused, full-time, 10-week research experience (June 5 - August 9) under the direction of UH faculty.

Ms. Nomamiukor is Program Manager in the Trauma and Stress Studies Center at the University of Houston (TaSSC). She is also an undergraduate psychology major in the Honors College at the University of Houston, and she is minoring in African American Studies. Faith plans to pursue a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. She is interested in conducting research on sexual trauma, human trafficking, and racial/ethnic differences in PTSD. Faith is currently writing an undergraduate honors thesis, under the guidance of Dr. Anka Vujanovic, that examines the moderating role of mindfulness in the association between sexual trauma and PTSD symptoms in psychiatric inpatients.





**Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination** (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

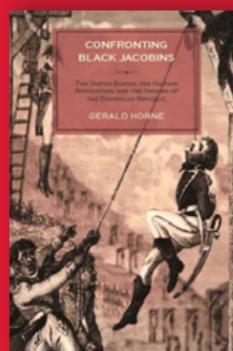
by Richard M. Mizelle Jr.

The Mississippi River flood of 1927 was the most destructive river flood in U.S. history, reshaping the social and cultural landscape as well as the physical environment. Often remembered as an event that altered flood control policy and elevated the stature of powerful politicians, Richard M. Mizelle Jr. examines the place of the flood within African American cultural memory and the profound ways it influenced migration patterns in the United States.

In *Backwater Blues*, Mizelle analyzes the disaster through the lenses of race and charity, blues music, and mobility and labor. The book's title comes from Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues," perhaps the best-known song about the flood. Mizelle notes that the devastation produced the richest groundswell of blues recordings following any environmental catastrophe in U.S. history, with more than fifty songs by countless singers evoking the disruptive force of the flood and the precariousness of the levees originally constructed to protect citizens. *Backwater Blues* reveals larger relationships between social and environmental history. According to Mizelle, musicians, Harlem Renaissance artists, fraternal organizations, and Creole migrants all shared a sense of vulnerability in the face of both the Mississippi River and a white supremacist society. As a result, the Mississippi flood of 1927 was not just an environmental crisis but a racial event.

Challenging long-standing ideas of African American environmental complacency, Mizelle offers insights into the broader dynamics of human interactions with nature as well as ways in which nature is mediated through the social and political dynamics of race.

**Richard M. Mizelle, Jr.** is associate professor of history at the University of Houston.



**Confronting Black Jacobins: The U.S., the Haitian Revolution, and the Origins of the Dominican Republic** (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2015)

by Gerald Horne .

The Haitian Revolution, the product of the first successful slave revolt, was truly world-historic in its impact. When Haiti declared independence in 1804, the leading powers—France, Great Britain, and Spain—suffered an ignominious defeat and the New World was remade. The island revolution also had a profound impact on Haiti's mainland neighbor, the United States. Inspiring the enslaved and partisans of emancipation while striking terror throughout the Southern slaveocracy, it propelled the fledgling nation one step closer to civil war. Gerald Horne's path breaking new work explores the complex and often fraught relationship between the United States and the island of Hispaniola. Giving particular attention to the responses of African Americans, Horne surveys the reaction in the United States to the revolutionary process in the nation that became Haiti, the splitting of the island in 1844, which led to the formation of the Dominican Republic, and the failed attempt by the United States to annex both in the 1870s.

Drawing upon a rich collection of archival and other primary source materials, Horne deftly weaves together a disparate array of voices—world leaders and diplomats, slaveholders, white abolitionists, and the freedom fighters he terms Black Jacobins. Horne at once illuminates the tangled conflicts of the colonial powers, the commercial interests and imperial ambitions of U.S. elites, and the brutality and tenacity of the American slaveholding class, while never losing sight of the freedom struggles of Africans both on the island and on the mainland, which sought the fulfillment of the emancipatory promise of 18th century republicanism.



**Tyler Perry's America** (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015)

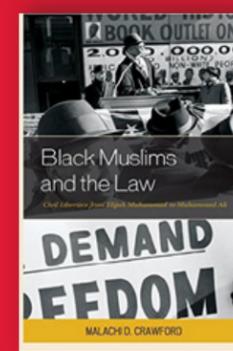
by Shayne Lee

Tyler Perry is the most successful African-American filmmaker of his generation, garnering both accolades and controversies with each new film. In Tyler Perry's *America*, Shayne Lee digs into eleven of Perry's highest-grossing films to explore key themes of race, gender, class, and religion, and, ultimately, to discuss what Perry's films reveal about contemporary African-American life.

Filled with slapstick humor, musical wizardry, and religious imagery, Tyler Perry's films have inspired legions of fans, and yet critics often dismiss them or demean their audience. Tyler Perry's *America* takes the films seriously in their own right. After providing essential background information on Perry's life and film career, the book looks at what the films reveal about post-civil rights America and why they inspire so many people. The book examines the way the films explore social class in America—featuring characters from super-rich Wesley Deeds to homeless Lindsey Wakefield—and the way Perry both celebrates upward mobility and critiques soulless wealth. The book discusses the way religion fills the films—from gospel music to biblical quotes, the power of sexuality, and more. Lee also devotes a chapter to *Madea*, one of Perry's most controversial and complicated characters.

Tyler Perry's *America* is a thought-provoking examination of this powerhouse filmmaker which highlights the way Perry's films appeal to viewers by connecting a rich African-American folk-cultural past with the promise of modern sophistication.

**Shayne Lee** is associate professor of sociology at the University of Houston.

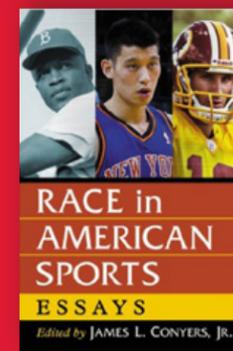


**Black Muslims and the Law: Civil Liberties from Elijah Muhammad to Muhammad Ali** (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015)

by Malachi D. Crawford

*Black Muslims and the Law* examines the Nation of Islam's quest for civil liberties as what might arguably be called the inaugural and first sustained challenge to the suppression of religious freedom in African American legal history. Borrowing insights from A. Leon Higginbotham Jr.'s classic works on American slavery jurisprudence, *Black Muslims and the Law* reveals the Nation of Islam's strategic efforts to engage governmental officials from a position of power, and suggests the federal executive, congressmen, judges, lawyers, law enforcement officials, prison administrators, state governments, and African American civic leaders held a common understanding of what it meant to be and not to be African American and religious in the period between World War II and the Vietnam War. The work raises basic questions about the rights of African descended people to define god, question white moral authority, and critique the moral legitimacy of American war efforts according to their own beliefs and standards.

**Malachi D. Crawford** is assistant director of African American Studies at the University of Houston.



**Race in American Sports** (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2014)

by James L. Conyers Jr.

*Race in American Sports* critically examines the issue of race in college and professional sports, beginning with the effects of stereotypes on black female college athletes, and the self-handicapping of black male college athletes. Also discussed is the movement of colleges between NCAA designated conferences, and the economic impact and effects on academics for blacks. An essay on baseball focuses on changes in Brooklyn during the Jackie Robinson years, and another essay on how the Leland Giants became a symbol of racial pride. Other essayists discuss the use of American Indian mascots, the Jeremy Lin spectacle surrounding Asians in pro sports, the need to hire more NFL coaches of color, and ideals of black male masculinity in boxing.

**James L. Conyers, Jr.** is the Director of the African American Studies Program, Director of the Center for the Study of African American Culture and University Professor of African American Studies at the University of Houston.

#### Other AAS Adjunct and Affiliate Faculty Publications

**Gerald Horne**, John J. and Rebecca Moores Chair of History and African American Studies, published "The Haitian Revolution and the Central Question of African-American History," *Journal of African American History*, 100 (Number 1, Winter 2015): 26-58.



## AAS MINOR MAKES AWE-INSPIRING DEBUT

At the close of the spring 2017 academic semester, the campus and local community witnessed a stunning display in Africana visual and performing arts. On 29 April 2017, Jasmin K. Weaver made her directorial debut in bringing Ntozke Shange's nationally acclaimed and award-winning play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* to the University of Houston.

Through the generous support provided by her circle of friends, Ms. Weaver directed and produced the play for the campus community and general public. The play, which Shange originally wrote in 1974, serves as a critique and corrective around issues of sexism, misogyny and the power of sisterhood.

With the overwhelming success of this event, Ms. Weaver has demonstrated how using her appreciation of cultural aesthetics can impact her critical dialogue and community engagement endeavors. In addition to casting 21 African American women college students, Ms. Weaver donated proceeds from the play to Voice Counseling & Life Skills, an organization that is preventative of mental illness in African American communities. With the cast selling 95% of available tickets, turnout for the event nearly matched capacity.

Following the production's completion and success, Ms. Weaver now turns her attention to wrapping up her undergraduate career and looking forward to graduate school. Her motivation for pursuing graduate studies is primarily driven by her quest to blend her skills and knowledge in communications with the scholarly rigor of an advanced degree in Africana Studies.

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## AAS Hosts 2017 NCBS Conference

In March 2017, African American Studies hosted the 41st Annual Conference of the National Council for Black Studies at the Hilton Houston Post Oak Hotel. The National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) is the major professional organization for scholars involved in the discipline of Africana/Pan-African Studies. Given this role and notable prominence, it is unsurprising that the conference brought hundreds of academic faculty, independent scholars, students, community participants and international observers together to engage in the critical and systematic study of African people. The City of Houston appeared prominently within the theme for this year's conference: "Resistance: In Memory of the Houston Uprising of 1917; Defining Social Responsibility in the New Millennium."

Likewise, a host of affiliate faculty from the University of Houston presented research at the conference. The list of UH scholars presenting at this year's conference included: Dr. Drew D. Brown, Dr. James L. Conyers, Jr., Dr. Gerald Horne, Dr. Antonio Tillis (Dean), Dr. Billy Hawkins, Dr. Demetrius Pearson, and Dr. Nicolas Kanellos. A number of African American Studies minors and graduate certificate students also presented at the conference, including: Elysha Adams, Da'Vonte L. Lyons, Wilma D. Powell, Ja-Nessia Prince, Devin Sanders, and Jasmin Weaver.

In addition to the program being recognized for its commitment to research, academic excellence and community outreach, Mr. Da'Vonte L. Lyons received third place in the undergraduate division of the Terry Kershaw Student Essay Awards Contest.



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Dr. Evelyn M. Simien

## SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

Hosted **Dr. Evelyn M. Simien**, Associate Professor of Political Science and the Institute for Africana Studies at the University of Connecticut. Dr. Simien discussed her third book, *Historic Firsts: How Symbolic Empowerment Changes U.S. Politics*.



Dr. Kenneth Janken

## SEPTEMBER 14 2016

Held author talk and book signing by **Dr. Kenneth Janken**, professor and director of undergraduate studies in the Department of African, African American, and Diaspora Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Dr. Janken discussed his new book, *The Wilmington Ten: Violence, Injustice, and the Rise of Black Politics in the 1970s*.



Dr. Ibram X. Kendi

## SEPTEMBER 27, 2016

Hosted lecture by **Dr. Ibram X. Kendi**, Assistant Professor of African American History at the University of Florida. Dr. Kendi discussed his latest book, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*.



Stanford Routt, and Dr. John Carlos

## JANUARY 24, 2017

Held panel discussion on "Race and Sport" featuring Olympian, track & field athlete and former professional football player **Dr. John Carlos**, and UH alumni and former professional football player **Stanford Routt**. **Melanie Lawson**, anchor with Houston's ABC affiliate KTRK-13, served as moderator for the panel.



## FEBRUARY 7, 2017

resented documentary screening of "GET IN THE WAY: The Journey of John Lewis," featuring filmmaker **Kathleen Dowdey** as guest speaker.



Dr. Valethia Watkins

## FEBRUARY 14, 2017

Hosted lecture by **Dr. Valethia Watkins**, assistant professor of Afro-American Studies at Howard University. Dr. Watkins spoke on "Africana Studies and Gender: Non-Aligned Women and the Politics of Feminism."

## FEBRUARY 17, 2017

Hosted the Center for the Study of African American Culture's **2017 Research Symposium** on "African Americans in Higher Education"



Dr. Marcia Walker-McWilliams

## MARCH 28, 2017

Held author talk and book signing by **Dr. Marcia Walker-McWilliams**, associate director of programs for the Center for Civic Leadership at Rice University. Dr. Walker-McWilliams addressed the themes and major concerns in her new book, "Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality."



## APRIL 8, 2017

Hosted the 8th Annual Stop the Silence National African American Breast Cancer Walk/Run at Lynn Eusan Park sponsored by Sisters Network, Inc.



Dr. Kameelah L. Martin

## APRIL 20, 2017

Held author talk and book signing by **Dr. Kameelah L. Martin**, Director of the Honors Program and associate professor of African American Literature in the Department of English, Language, & Cultures at Savannah State University. Dr. Martin spoke on her latest work, "Envisioning Black Feminist Voodoo Aesthetics: African Spirituality in American Cinema."

## APRIL 26, 2017

Hosted celebration for spring 2017 graduating AAS Minors in Agnes Arnold Hall 210

# The Graduate Certificate in African American Studies

The graduate certificate in African American Studies continues to illustrate its intellectual vitality and social relevancy through sustained increases in course enrollment across the last several years. This summer alone, a total of nine students are enrolled to take AAS 6300: Africana Studies Theory and Method, one of four approved courses for the nine-hour certificate.

Such profound enrollment numbers could be considered fairly impressive given that this is only a summer graduate-level course; however, the apparent demand for the certificate remains higher now than at any point since its inception in 2006. In the fall 2006, three students were enrolled into and pursuing coursework in the new certificate. A decade later, fourteen students were enrolled in the same courses. That is a 367% increase, and interest in the certificate is only expected to grow in the coming years.

According to data from the Texas Education Agency, African Americans and Hispanics currently make up more than 60 percent of the state's k-12 student population. Similarly, by the year 2020, Houston is on track to become the third largest city in the country. With the University of Texas-Austin serving as the only institution of higher education in the state of Texas that offers advanced degrees in African American Studies, the University of Houston's Graduate Certificate Program in African American Studies is uniquely positioned to expand and support any growth in disciplinary interests that these demographic shifts might portend.

## TIMELINE OF UH LEADING UP TO PROGRAM ESTABLISHMENT

- The University of Houston was founded in 1927.
- The University of Houston admitted its first black graduate student in 1961, and its first black undergraduates in 1963.
- By March 1963, the University had twenty African American students and was fully desegregated.

### MOMENTS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

- Before the University of Houston became an integration public institution, there were attempts made by African Americans world-wide in applying and writing letters in request of admission.
- These potential students were denied the opportunity to enroll in the University and often advised to apply to Texas Southern University.
- Every year, the AAS sends a group of students to study abroad in Ghana.
- In 1958, Mr. E.K. Aboagye of Accra, sought admission and financial aid to the University of Houston. In a letter Mr. Aboagye had believed himself to be the first Negro to attend the institution. The President at the time, Clanton W. Williams responded in letter that the school had not reached a decision in admitting Negro students and advised Mr. Aboagye to seek other institution which are not having integration issues; thus stay in contact with American diplomatic authorities in Accra.
- In reference to the correspondence between the University and Mr. Aboagye, the AAS program has strong ties with Ghana and makes efforts in sending as many students abroad each year. Ironically, the first city that students visit is Accra.
- In 2015, University of Houston Alumni, Sylvester Turner became mayor of the City of Houston.

### AAS THROWBACKS

- AAS held private screening of Higher Learning in 1995 which showcased racial tensions on a college campus.
- In 2003, the African American Studies Program began the Summer Study Abroad Tour to Ghana. The program allows students to experience the beauty, history and culture of Africa and its people.
- In 2002, current AAS director, James L. Conyers, Jr., Ph.D was appointed.

"One of the reasons Conyers came out ahead was student's belief that he can provide strong leadership in establishing an African-American studies department."

"While faculty and community critics hope that Conyers will be a stabilizing force for a program that cannot offer tenure to professors as an incentive to make long term commitments, it may actually be the students who make the difference in maintaining the energy required to eventually achieve the goal of establishing an African-American studies department." - Renee Feltz, KPFT News Houston, August 30, 2002

### LOOKING FORWARD

- The African American Studies program will host the 41st Annual National Council of Black Studies conference in March 2017.



2017 Kwame Nkrumah International Study Abroad Scholars