

Professional Bio Sketch
Kameelah Martin Samuel, PhD.

The Visiting Scholars Program in AAS is designed to encourage new scholars to contribute fresh and innovative teaching and research in the discipline. African American Studies selected Dr. Kameelah Martin Samuel as one of two AAS Visiting Scholars for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Samuel earned her undergraduate English degree from Georgia Southern University and her MA in African American Studies from the University of California Los Angeles. She received her PhD. in English from Florida State University in 2006. Her area of focus is twentieth century African American literature with an emphasis on folklore and the African American conjuring tradition.

Samuel recently completed a manuscript, currently under review for publication, on the conjure woman as a folk hero in literature. Her research engages the ways African American authors have shifted, recycled, and reinvented healing women in twentieth century fiction. Arguing that the conjure woman is one of the most adept agents of mobility, resistance, and self-determination in the realm of African American womanhood, the objective of Samuel's study is to construct a historiography of the conjure woman as a literary archetype, which investigates various the authority of her power, the negotiation of gender and body politics, as well as questions of African-based spirit work and Christian spiritual ethics.

She is busy researching and writing a second monograph, tentatively titled "Envisioning Voodoo: African Diasporic Religion in the Popular Imagination" which questions the representation of women and spirit work in film, graphic novels, and the art work of Romare Bearden and Kara Walker.

Other areas of interest include the novels of Tina McElroy Ansa, Toni Morrison, Sea Island culture, black women and the blues tradition, genealogical research, and the writing of family histories. She is a member of the American Studies Association, National Council for Black Studies, College Language Association, and the African American Historical and Genealogical Society.

In the spring 2012 semester, Samuel will be teaching a new course in African American Studies, **AAS 3394: Women and Voodoo**. The class is designed to both introduce students to African-based religion practiced in the Americas and to exam the role of women in such religions. It will engage current research, fiction, and other critical resources to assess how gender and spirituality function together. It will also consider such topics as representation and body politics; gender performance and the negotiation of power; spiritual authority and religious syncretization; as well as sexuality, blues music, and ancestral presence.