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### CAS Upcoming Events:

- Rap Sessions: November 8, 2006, Baltimore Museum of Art, Hess Boardroom; 6:00pm

All events are free and open to the public. Please join us for an opportunity to engage and share your thoughts with our students, faculty and staff. The Nov. 8 Rap Sessions will feature a meet and greet session with Maryland Immigrants Community Organization (MICO) from 6:00-6:45pm.

Volume 3, Issue 1

October 2006

# Africana News Fall 2006

JHU CENTER FOR AFRICANA STUDIES

## Editor's Note: Center Welcomes Permanent Director

This is a very exciting time for the Center for Africana Studies. We are proud to Welcome Dr. Ben Vinson, III as the first Director of the Center, and we look forward to the program's development under his leadership. I would also like to preview a number of changes to this and future editions of the Africana News.

First, we have formalized a space in the newsletter called *The Director's Corner* where Dr. Vinson will make regular contributions. In this edition, the director outlines the development of Africana

Studies from a more narrow focus on the Black experience in the United States to a Diasporic framework that contextualizes this experience in relation to Black populations across the globe. He also sees great possibilities in forming alliances with members of the Johns Hopkins community, and plans to capitalize on the untapped cultural and scholastic resources of the greater Baltimore and Washington DC areas. Stay tuned for the next newsletter where he provides more details about his plans in these areas.

In future editions of the newsletter, we aim to spotlight either a faculty member whose work centers on the Black experience, the work of an outstanding student, and/or an Africana related activity on campus or in the community. In this edition, Sociology student Natasha Desai spotlights Professor Neil Roberts, a political scientist with a fascinating medley of Africana related scholarly interests. Her description of professor Robert's work provides a complementary view

(see Welcome, page 4)

## Director's Corner

By Ben Vinson, III, PhD, Director, Center for Africana Studies

In 1909, W.E.B. Dubois used the term "Africana" in his effort to create an encyclopedia that would discuss the history and culture of peoples of African descent in the Americas, Africa, Europe and throughout the world. In the early 1910s and 20s, work on the international experience of Blacks within an Africana framework became familiar to Black U.S. activists and academics, as can be testified by articles appearing in publications like the *Journal of Negro History*, as well as the activities of individuals like Marcus Garvey.

The recent growth and development of Africana Studies throughout the United States (particularly since the early 1990s), replete with its broad reaching inquiries into the condition of blackness in the

social sciences and the humanities, represents the modern embodiment of pioneering, early 20<sup>th</sup> century visionaries. In the view of some, the orientation of Africana studies along the "African Diaspora" paradigm, as opposed to a more narrowly constructed African American research agenda, represents a positive phase shift in U.S. academe. The Diaspora paradigm seeks to better contextualize the experience of African Americans in an international framework, while at the same time revealing past and present influences that global black populations have had upon each other and their respective societies. While African Diaspora related work is nothing new, its recent

emergence in the context of debates surrounding globalization and transnationalism has provided it with new relevance and urgency. Theoretical models, such as Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic paradigm (1993), have done

(see Director, page 4)

### Inside this issue:

Director's Corner	1
SAC Mission Continues	2
CAS Spring Course Offerings	2
Reading Africana	3
Faculty Spotlight: Neil Roberts	3
Escalating Downward	5

## Center's Student Advisory Council Continues Mission of Cross Cultural Education and Relationship Building

By Alexandra Cork  
Co-president, CAS Student Advisory Council

The Center for Africana Studies Student Advisory Council (CAS SAC) was created last year under the leadership of alumna Claudette Onyelobi and Dr. Katrina Bell McDonald and Dr. Floyd Hayes serving as advisors. The Council was formed to ensure the overall success of the Center for Africana Studies and to address issues most germane to students.

This year the Council would like to continue this mission. The Council seek to challenge the idea that courses offered by the Center for Africana Studies are relevant only to students of African descent or those planning to major/minor in the field. These courses are pertinent to anyone who endeavors to become a culturally aware citizen. Likewise, the Council would like to increase the variety of courses available through the Center for Africana Studies.

Among the Center for Africana Studies Student Advisory Council's goals is to help foster an environment of unity amongst the various multicultural organizations. The first steps toward achieving this goal were taken last year with the Council's *One Voice* program. Through this program we sought to bring together leaders and members of various groups to formulate a master calendar of events. This effort was important to us because we understand that it is through supporting one another that bonds are strengthened. With that in mind, the Council seeks to carry the mantle further this year and make significant progress in developing more cohesive relationships.

The Council has also been proud to sponsor Rap Sessions in Africana Studies. These programs provide a forum for graduate students to facilitate informal intellectual exchanges on the black experience. They were phenomenal last year and this year's Rap Session facilitated by Biology student Alissa Richmond on September 27, was well attended. Alissa's session "From Black to White: The Climb Up the Professional Ladder" focused on the near nonexistence of people of color the higher up the corporate or academic ladder one climbs. Rap Sessions are free and open to the public, and the Council's members are thrilled to host them on a monthly basis this year.

The Council's members are also ecstatic about the appointment of Dr. Ben Vinson as the first director of The Johns Hopkins University Center for Africana Studies. Dr. Vinson is a Latin American Historian. He also has a strong interest in race relations especially as they pertain to the African Diaspora. Under Dr. Vinson's leadership, the Center looks forward to exponential growth and development. If you would like more information about the Center for Africana Studies or Dr. Ben Vinson please visit [web.jhu.edu/Africana](http://web.jhu.edu/Africana). The Council is always looking for committed members. For more information on joining the CAS Student Advisory Council, contact either of the co-presidents Farai Chidavaenzi at [fcidav1@jhu.edu](mailto:fcidav1@jhu.edu) or Alexandra Cork at [acork1@jhu.edu](mailto:acork1@jhu.edu).

## CAS Course Offerings Spring 2007

### 362.101 (Staff)

#### Introduction to Africana Studies (3)

Introduction to the content and contours of Africana Studies as a field of study--its genealogy, development, and future challenges. The course focuses on historic and contemporary experiences of African-descended peoples in the Americas.

### 362.240 (Bynum)

#### Where is the Love?: Imagining Love in 20th Century American Literature (3)

This course explores the various ways in which African American Authors use love — eros (erotic), agape (religious/God) and philia (brotherly/sisterly/familial) — to construct and nurture a self and/or communities that surround them.

### 362.260 (Roberts)

#### Heretical Political Theory: Hannah Arendt and CLR James (3)

This course situates political theorist Hannah Arendt and Trinidadian thinker C.L.R. James as heretics—those persons existing at the margins of society whose thought seeks to transform the prevailing normative structures of a society's order of things. Exegesis of select primary texts followed by secondary interpretations of those works will be emphasized within the context of the recurring trope of the heretic and the perspective of heretical political theory.

### 362.320 (Mulla)

#### African Americans and American Medicine (3)

This course looks at the tensions between anthropology's insistence that race constitutes a meaningless biological category and the social realities of African Americans within American medical institutions both historically and in the contemporary context.

### 362.330 (Coleman)

#### African and Native Intersections in the Americas (3)

During the term we will examine several key themes including the struggle of Native Americans and African Americans to maintain traditions as independent, self-defining communities and the broader phenomenon of Red/Black intermarriage, conflict, and common historical experiences.

### 362.457 (Hayes)

#### Richard Wright & Modernism: Philosophy, Literature & Politics (3)

This seminar provides an examination of the modern black writer Richard Wright. We will interrogate Wright's critique of modern Western civilization, his interpretation of the black experience, and his involvement in radical politics. The broad purpose of this course is to develop an analysis that accounts for Wright's philosophical, literary and political commitments.

### 362.500 (Vinson)

#### African Diaspora Research Practicum: Diaspora in Baltimore (3)

This research intensive course is designed to introduce and familiarize students with basic research techniques for conducting historical and ethnographic work (oral histories) on the African Diaspora, using Baltimore as a research site.

## CAS Faculty Spotlight: Neil Roberts

By Natasha Desai, JHU 2008

Neil Roberts, a visiting faculty member in The Center for Africana Studies, brings an interesting and valuable twist to the field. His diverse academic background ranges from Public Policy and Constitutional Law to Political Theory and Africana Studies. This combination of interests has led Professor Roberts to question and teach freedom as it arises out of notions of slavery. He strongly feels that Africana thought is an interdisciplinary field. It is the emergence of a different way of thinking about the world, looking at the different creolized populations that came out of Africa and where they settled, whether it be in the Americas, the Caribbean or even Asia. He sees a fundamental shift in the Africana Studies paradigm post-9/11. Whereas in the 1960's the catch phrase for Black Studies was "rights", post -9/11 notions of "freedom" are questioned most frequently.

This is Professor Roberts's second semester at Hopkins, prior to which he did his graduate work and taught at The University of Chicago. Professor Roberts's background is very interesting, particularly as it relates to his chosen field of study. He is originally from Jamaica, though he split his time between Jamaica and Washington D.C when he was growing up. He attended Brown University as an undergraduate where he originally wanted to be a chemist. Instead, he majored in Public Policy with a concentration in Constitutional Law. As

he was finishing the requirements for his major, Roberts took a class with the eminent scholar Anani Dzidzienyo on Blacks in Brazil. He found it fascinating that Dzidzienyo—originally of Ghanaian heritage and a friend as well as classmate of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan—had taken such a passionate interest in the role of Blacks in Brazilian society. Inspired by his teacher, Roberts did a second major in the Afro-American Studies Program at Brown, writing an honors thesis on the thought of Jamaican novelist and social theorist Sylvia Wynter.

Last spring at Hopkins, he taught a seminar class titled "Political Freedom in Africana Thought". Along with teaching, he organized two symposiums last spring, one "Black Feminism Today" and the other on "Race and Contemporary Political Theory." The idea was to encourage audience discussion about these topics, and with a considerable turnout, the lecture series was a success. For the second lecture on race and contemporary political theory, the 2005 winner of the award for Best Academic Book from the *New York Magazine*, Tommie Shelby of Harvard University discussed the symposium's theme with Lewis R. Gordon, a renowned philosopher from Temple University.

In the future, Professor Roberts hopes to organize a forum on Race in Science, looking at how science was used to justify racial inferiority in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through Social Darwinism, and how this view is changing drastically with advancements in genetics. Along these

lines, Black Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins writes that the, "placement of Black academics in historically White institutions meant that such thinkers routinely encountered the residual effects of scientific racism that viewed Blacks as objects of knowledge in sociology, psychology, history and other disciplines". Professor Roberts would like to focus on this notion and how it is changing with the increase in the number of Africana Studies Centers and Departments nationwide. He also hopes to teach a comparative course on the writings of German philosopher Hannah Arendt, a critic of Marx, and Trinidadian intellectual C.L.R. James, a proponent of Marxian theory. The course will probe how these two figures with differing rationales view political freedom and totalitarianism.

Professor Roberts suggests these seminal texts for anyone wishing to gain a better understanding of the field of Africana Studies.

[A Companion to African-American Studies](#), by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon

[The Black Jacobins](#), by C.L.R. James

[A Voice from the South](#), by Anna Julia Cooper

[The Souls of Black Folk](#), by W.E.B. Du Bois

[Women, Race & Class](#), by Angela Y. Davis

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## Reading Africana ~ suggested readings for students

Joseph, Peniel, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, Henry Holt & Company, LLC: \$27.50, ISBN: 0-8050-7539-7.

"In writing this wise and dazzling display of literary elegance and expert excavation, Peniel Joseph has vaulted into the front ranks of interpreters of this nation's most explosive era." — Gerald Horne, Professor of History, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Jackson, John L., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*, Chicago University Press: \$50.00, ISBN: 0-2263-9001-2.

Billed as "part conspiracy theory, part rant, part novelistic storytelling, part autoethnography," Jackson's book provides discerning readers with a provocative analysis of contemporary black subcultures: middle class blacks in a gentrifying Harlem who are split between a social justice-minded old guard and a neo-capitalistic new guard, conspiracy theorists, Black Hebrew Israelites of Worldwide Truthful Understanding and hip hop artists as exemplified by Mos Def. — Publishers Weekly

Thomas, Debra A., *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, Duke University Press: \$84.95, ISBN 0-8223-3419-4.

Thomas brilliantly illustrates how culture, nation, and the ideology of progress are implicated in an understanding of what blackness and Jamaican identity actually mean in various contexts. — Lee D. Baker, Professor of Anthropology, Duke University

(Director, from page 1)

much to popularize Diasporic approaches, to suggest refinements of methodology, and to chart avenues for building carefully upon the waves of Diaspora scholarship that have appeared since the politically inspired Pan-Africanist and Civil Rights discourses of the 1950s and '60s.

The Center for Africana Studies at The Johns Hopkins University is uniquely poised among the over 450 U.S. university programs, departments and centers dedicated to the black experience, to become a leader in engaging and shaping the terms of the emerging currents in African Diaspora research. We enjoy the advantage of being situated in Baltimore, which contains one of the largest percentages (65%) and number of African Americans (over 400,000) in cities across the nation. At the same time, given recent municipal political developments and economic programs, Baltimore has embarked upon initiatives to attract immigration from Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean.

As a result, the Center for Africana Studies is located within a vibrant zone of African Diasporic activity that cannot help but to imprint itself upon the identity of the community and the university. Moreover, being located in the greater Washington metropolitan area provides the Center with a potential wealth of networks and institutions that are dedicated towards crafting policy aimed at studying and improving the condition of black life. Lastly, Johns Hopkins enjoys an esteemed tradition of

being a leader in the fields of science, health, and international relations, in addition to its strong legacy in the social sciences and the humanities. With creative efforts, these traditions can be utilized by our Center to generate particular programmatic and curricular strengths.

In the years to come, I look forward to working with the broader JHU community to develop Africana Studies into a robust and recognized program. Necessarily, our efforts will involve strengthening our academic prowess along the three key Africana tracks—African-American centered research, scholarship on Africa, and broader Diasporic inquiry. As an integrative, intellectual center, it is imperative that we explore ways in which to bring these tracks into rich conversation with each other so that unique insights, both theoretical and empirical, will be created into the study of blackness. Hopefully, in the upcoming years, we will build a strong synergy and momentum on campus that will bring both students and scholars to actively participate in pushing the questions and paradigms of Africana scholarship. Through our collective research, course offerings, programs, speakers, and interactive colloquia, we will begin the conversations that will create distinction and innovation in the field.

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 1993). Although Gilroy is largely credited with popularizing the “Black Atlantic” as a concept, its roots extend to the work and teachings of Robert Farris Thompson and Peter Linebaugh. See Isidore Okpewho, introduction to *African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xxii; and Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (2001): 62. Some interesting articles on the relationship between black history and the African Diaspora include Patrick Manning, “Africa and the African Diaspora: New Directions of Study,” *Journal of African History* 44, no. 3 (2003): 487-506; Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 11-45; and Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). See also George Shepperson, “Pan-Africanism and ‘pan-Africanism’: Some Historical Notes,” *Phylon* 23, no. 4 (1962): 346-58. Also informative on the origins of African Diasporic Discourse is Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

(Welcome, from page 1)

of Africana Studies from the perspectives of public policy, constitutional law and political theory.

Students are the backbone of the Center for Africana Studies. During the Black liberation struggles of the 1960s and 70s, student protests were central to the implementation of “Black Studies” within institutions of higher learning. Here at The Johns Hopkins University, the Center for Africana Studies has also emerged out of a decades old struggle by students who saw its value, not just for Black students, but for the Johns Hopkins community as a whole. At a University such as Johns Hopkins, this fight was won through forming alliances with students and faculty from across racial and disciplinary divides within the University. The Center for Africana Studies seeks to keep and build upon these Alliances. Along these lines, Alexandra Cork, co-president of the Center for Africana Studies Student Advisory Council (CAS-SAC) provides more details about the council’s plans to assist in furthering this mission.

I am particularly proud to present a special section in this edition

of the newsletter titled “Student Voices in Africana Studies.” Here, students from an introduction to African American Studies course critically engage with ideas and concepts they have encountered in their course readings, and relate this information to their own life experiences. Students reflect upon issues such as 1) why it is important to study the contributions of people of African descent in the Americas 2) why labeling African Americans as “forced immigrants” is a misnomer 3) the meaning of race among Black immigrants and 4) the Black feminist critique of Afrocentrism. With the “fresh eyes,” of individuals who are encountering new ideas and perspectives, these students present analyses of complex ideas with clarity and enthusiasm. I know that you will enjoy reading their work.

Finally, for those of you who would like to learn more about Africana Studies, see our new “Africana Reading list” section. We will have new recommendations for you in each issue.

By Bedelia Nicola Richards  
Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology

# Escalating Downward: The Collapse of Urban Public Schooling

By: Floyd W. Hayes, PhD, Coord. of Programs & Undergraduate Studies, Center for Africana Studies

In April 1983, more than a decade ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education of the U. S. Department of Education issued a report that state unambiguously that “The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”

The report, entitled *A Nation at Risk*, likened the devastation of public education to “an act of war.” “We have in effect,” the report warned, “been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.” Many Americans seemed shocked for a time by the report’s findings. The, however, were not a new discovery.

The source of the present collapse of urban public education can be traced back to the late 1950s and 1960s, following the U. S. Supreme Court’s momentous, but flawed, *Brown* school desegregation ruling. Terminating state-sanctioned racial apartheid in America’s public schools was correct; reasoning that all black schools were inherently inferior was incorrect. In a deliberate attempt to distort and evade the Court’s decision, many urban school systems outside of the South installed the pupil assignment policy of tracking that effectively re-segregated many schools by channeling the majority of black students into the lowest track early in their educational careers.

Reasoning that poor education ultimately would hurt black and white working class children in the Nation’s capitol, community leaders called for neither racial integration nor segregation; rather, they demanded **quality education**. Washington, DC community activists defined this educational goal unambiguously: (1) the distribution and mastery of the fundamental tools of learning: reading, writing, computational skills, and thinking; (2) academic motivation; and (3) positive character-development. Each of these elements was supposed to advance as students matriculated from elementary through high school.

Like residents of so many other urban areas, Washington, DC’s black community lost the political struggle for quality education. In 1967, the celebrated *Hobson v. Hansen* case terminated the school system’s tracking policy, but the court claimed that racial integration automatically improved the educational performance of black students. Liberal civil rights leaders and educational managerial elites won the day and began to implement various racial integration policies—racial-balance using, magnet school programs, and other education experiments. Because integration is not an end in itself but only a means to achieve an end, the contradictions and dilemmas quickly became apparent.

Thus, educational managers and civil rights elites put forward racial integration as the singular goal of education and imposed it on public schools at all costs. They overlooked the issue of quality education. As a result, good classroom teaching declined, the fundamental tools of knowledge were abandoned, and positive character building was perverted.

Moreover, as white and later middle-class black flight

from cities to suburbs accelerated in the late 1960s and 1970s, America allowed its urban areas and their schools to decay and deteriorate. In the process, school regimes bused African American and Latino children to an expanding system of largely white and affluent suburban schools in order to achieve “racial balance.” This tactic helped to destroy the sense of community in urban areas, as remaining inner-city life became increasingly characterized by economic impoverishment, political disenfranchisement, and cultural despair.

The consequences of this course of events are now evident with the collapse of public education in urban areas across this nation. Ironically, school budgets have continued to rise along with a growing ossification and inefficiency of urban school bureaucracies.

Adding insult to injury, liberal members of the educational managerial elite have rationalized the denial of quality education to black students by applying various theories of cultural deprivation. Categorizing African-descended Americans as “culturally deprived” or “culturally disadvantaged” merely compounds and continues, into the contemporary era, the legacy of cultural domination and the denial of black human dignity originally articulated by whites during the Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in colonial America.

To refer to black Americans as “educationally handicapped” when there has been an historic and systematic conspiracy to deny them quality education is comparable to breaking a person’s leg and then criticizing that person when she or he limps! This is a strategy for keeping the oppressed in a condition of oppression.

These unfortunate educational trends and developments characterized urban and less affluent public school systems in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, many suburban and more affluent public school systems also have been experiencing an educational crisis. They confront a growing rate of complex problems: functional illiteracy, violence, drop/push outs, discipline, drug use, teenage pregnancy, gang activity, and teacher burn out.

In the current stage of American postindustrial-managerial development, the collapse of public schooling is frightening. In the emerging society, knowledge and the management of people are supplanting money and manufacturing as the only sources of politico-economic power. Resisting the professional-managerial class’s cultural domination and intellectual imperialism requires that the people themselves come to view knowledge and its utilization as sources of power.

Learning, therefore, needs to be increasingly understood as a life-long project and an indispensable investment for social development. Educational credential more and more will be the key to a person’s role in society. However, more than mere possession of certificates will be the requirement to practice one’s knowledge. Knowledge-based performance and decision-making will be the necessary attributes of the educated person. Survival, development, and even struggle will depend on knowledge-based action.

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**Register Now!**

The Center for Africana Studies offers a broad inquiry into the ideas and experiences of African peoples on the continent of Africa, in the Americas, and elsewhere around the globe.

It is an interdisciplinary program organized around African American Studies, African Studies, and African Diaspora Studies; its three major sub-fields. Spanning diverse academic disciplines – in humanities, social sciences and public health – Africana Studies brings together several fields of interdisciplinary scholarship.

While these fields possess distinctive intellectual traditions, they offer exciting possibilities for comparative as well as integrative inquiry.

Visit us on the web at [web.jhu.edu/africana](http://web.jhu.edu/africana).



## Contact Us

The Center for Africana Studies is located on the JHU Campus in Greenhouse 118. Our editorial staff seeks appropriate news articles, editorial submissions and calendar items for publication. Please forward submissions to Bedelia Richards, News Editor, Greenhouse 118, Johns Hopkins University, 3400 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218 or by email at [bnr12@jhu.edu](mailto:bnr12@jhu.edu).

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Donations to support the printing and publishing of the Center for Africana Studies Newsletter may be sent to Alecia R. Lewis, Interdepartmental Academic Programs, Greenhouse 118, 3400 N. Charles St., Baltimore Maryland 21218.