EDITOR’S NOTE: Black Excellence in the 21st Century
Mindelyn Buford, II, JHU Ph.D. Candidate (Sociology)

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am pleased to step in as the editor of Horizons, following in the footsteps of my good friend and colleague Tara Bynum, who recently completed her PhD in English. Although I come to this post with limited editorial experience, a stint as former copy editor for NOMMO Magazine (a UCLA publication), self-immersion in the world of Microsoft Publisher software, a bevy of eager contributors, and guidance from Managing Editor Claude Poux have enabled me to pull together this issue in pretty fine style.

I arrived at Johns Hopkins University in Fall 2004, starting my journey toward the doctorate in the same year that the Center for Africana Studies was birthed. Over these past four years I have watched the Center grow as it fosters a scholarly community of undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral students, faculty, staff, and community members. The Center, its faculty and students have provided invaluable support to me at key moments in my doctoral studies, and I am honored to return the service through this editorship.

It is an exciting time in Africana Studies and we have much to share with you. On the home front, the Center continues to grow with new funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a centennial conference on the NAACP, and a summer institute on Black resistance. Moreover, our accomplished scholarly family continues to grow with the addition of Postdoctoral Fellow Shani Mott, Professor Nathan Connolly, and Visiting Professor Kelly Baker Joseph. The Center also continues its support of rising scholars through its summer research grants for graduate and undergraduate students, and public scholarship through the Diaspora Pathways Archival Access Project.

We also join the world in its enthusiasm over the election of Barack Hussein Obama, the future 44th President of the United States of America. His presidency culminates the hopes about which our ancestors dreamed, the achievement for which the elders fought, and the excellence that we will all realize in the 21st Century.

As we revel in this moment, let us wisely recall the lessons of the past—both written and spoken—and excitedly anticipate our continued progress. Many of the issues we debate today were hot topics in the days of Booker T. Washington (the subject of this month’s book review), Fred Scott ’50 (the first Black undergraduate Johns Hopkins alumnus; B.S., chemical engineering) and Research Professor James E. West. Join us in these conversations.

I think you’ll enjoy this edition of Horizons!

On behalf of the CAS, best wishes for a Happy New Year!
Director’s Corner

Dr. Ben Vinson III
Director, Center for Africana Studies
Professor of History

This issue of Horizons comes at a particularly transformative moment in history. Recent changes in the national political scene that have culminated with the election of incoming president Barack Obama, coupled with momentous international economic developments, have generated a nearly unprecedented degree of social analysis from all quarters. Under the microscope are the trends and patterns underlying the historical episodes that have brought us to our contemporary times. Also under intense scrutiny are the seemingly disparate and multidimensional events that are transpiring globally. In no small measure, and perhaps as never before, connections are being drawn between our past and our present that trace and outline the rhythm of our march into the future. And with near sage-like bearing, internet blogs, newspaper editorials, television pundits and airwave commentators ruminate our world’s tomorrow.

As these processes rapidly unfurl, it seems not an exaggeration to assert that the interpretive power of the discipline of Africana Studies may be poised to enjoy relevance as never before. Steeped in trying to understand the complex intersections of racial analysis (including hybridity), transnationalism, pluri-ethnic politics, cultural symbolism, the meaning of citizenship, and the social-psychological power of “diaspora,” Africana Studies offers a valuable, interdisciplinary lens by which to translate the affairs of our world. With its commitment to community and social engagement, the Africana Studies enterprise also offers to this generation’s cohort of students the practical means by which to articulate and enact their growing social consciousness. It is with this spirit in mind that we offer you this version of our newsletter. Poised as we are, literally upon a new horizon of change, this installment of Horizons helps chart the course as taken and envisioned here at Hopkins—through our seminars, events, public “conversations,” and interpretative articles. We hope that you will find our newsletter and events useful as we take important steps forward towards generating a new, global society.

Faculty News

Sara Berry (History) presented “Globalization and the State in West Africa: the Neoliberal Phase” at the Maxwell School, Syracuse University; “A forest for my kingdom? ‘forest rent’ and the politics of history in Asante (Ghana)” at the University of Chicago; and “Cultivating to claim the land? Farming, ‘tenure security’ and local governance in contemporary African societies” at the International Institute of Advanced Studies in Accra, Ghana. She also has forthcoming papers in the journals World Development, Development and Change, and Ghana Studies, and in the edited volume Contesting land and custom in Ghana: state, chief and the citizen.

Nathan Connolly (History) has been awarded the 2008 Arthur Fondiler Dissertation Prize for the best doctoral dissertation completed in the History Department of the University of Michigan.

Floyd Hayes, III (Political Science) presented a paper, entitled “Richard Wright and the Dilemma of the Ethical Criminal: Can One Live Beyond Good and Evil,” at the International Centennial Conference, Celebrating 100 Years of Richard Wright. The conference was sponsored by The American University of Paris, Paris, France, June, 19-21, 2008.

Franklin W. Knight (History) has been appointed a lifetime National Associate of the National Research Council of the National Academies headquartered in Washington, DC. He presently serves as chair of the Associate and Fellowship Programs Advisory Committee of the National Research Council. On October 6 Franklin Knight will deliver the Arthur Schomburg lecture in the department of history at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Here since 1973, Professor Knight was the first Black faculty to be tenured at Johns Hopkins.

Center News

The Civil Rights Century: The NAACP at 100 will take place at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland on February 6-7, 2009. It has been one hundred years since an interracial group of activists met in New York City to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in February 1909. For a nation that is less than 250 years old, the centennial of the NAACP is a major milestone. Using the NAACP as a lens, how much has changed in American race relations over the past 100 years? How far do we have to go? “The Civil Rights Century: The NAACP at 100” is a public history conference that commemorates the NAACP’s long history and encourages dialogue about the nation’s racial past, present, and future. For more information about the conference please visit: http://www.jhu.edu/africana/calendar/naacp-conference-09.html

The NEH Summer Institute, “Slaves, Soldiers, Rebels: Currents Of Black Resistance In The Tropical Atlantic, 1760 – 1888,” will take place at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, between July 6 and August 7, 2009. The Center for Africana Studies will host the program. We enthusiastically invite applications from persons wishing to participate in the Institute. Participation is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The purpose of the institute is to expose people teaching history at the college and university levels—who may or may not be specialists in the history of the Black Atlantic—to new scholarship in the field. The Institute will feature presentations from leading historians specializing in the Black Atlantic, speaking about their research. Participants will meet with scholars in seminar-style settings, visit nearby research facilities and sites related to the Black experience in the mid-Atlantic region, and have access to the library and facilities of Johns Hopkins University. For more information about the institute please visit: http://www.jhu.edu/africana/events/neh-summer-institute/index.html
Affiliate Spotlight
Nora Ali, CAS Undergraduate Staff Assistant, JHU Sophomore

The 2008-2009 school year proves to be an exciting one for the Center of Africana Studies with the addition of Dr. Shani Mott (English), Dr. Nathan Connolly (History), and Dr. Kelly Baker Josephs (CAS). They’ve traveled the world, teaching all about the African Diaspora while having children, maintaining relationships, writing novels, and meeting with me. Now they’re what I call modern day superheroes.

ALIAS: Shani Mott
ORIGIN: Wesleyan University, where she earned her Bachelor’s degree. She holds an MA and PhD in American Culture from the University of Michigan (which is where she also received a marriage proposal from none other than Dr. Nathan Connolly, (to the right)).

BASE OF OPERATIONS: Dell House
SUPER POWERS: Her postdoc is in African American literature from 1850 to 2003. In her upcoming novel (which is the basis for her Spring 2009 course), Shani discusses the literary crossing of the color line — or what she calls “racial transvestism.” This occurs when black authors write novels with predominantly white characters, or white authors attempt to write about blackness, etc.

ROLE MODEL: Professor Ashraf Rashfi at Wesleyan, who helped her when she became a Mellon Fellow. There have been many scholars who have analyzed bits and pieces of what Shani has studied, but through Professor Rashfi, Shani was able to “focus on finding my own voice – facing change in the academy with changed faces.”

WEAKNESSES: Favorite class in undergrad: The Black Sixties Last album: Keith Sweat Tupac or Biggie: “If I have to pick; Biggie’s beats are hot but I hate the lyrics. It’s all Tupac or Biggie: “If I have to pick; Biggie’s beats are hot but I hate the lyrics. It’s all

ALIAS: Nathan Connolly
ORIGIN: Nathan received his MA and PhD in History from the University of Michigan, an MA in the Social Sciences from the University of Chicago and a bachelor’s degree from St. Thomas University. He taught philosophy at St. Thomas and worked as an educational consultant in Fenway High School in Boston, MA prior to coming to Hopkins. After marrying fellow superhero Shani Mott, the couple and their daughter moved to Baltimore.

BASE OF OPERATIONS: Dell House, with an occasional hideout in the Former Governor of Mombassa’s home, off the coast of Kenya.

SUPER POWERS: His research explores the historical role of land in the making of racial categories. He’s currently collaborating with a junior scholars writing group, composed of junior faculty and postdocs. Nathan also helps out with the Critical Thought Collective, led by Kelly Baker Josephs while teaching an upper-level course entitled “Jim Crow in America.” Next semester he’ll teach “America after the Civil Rights Movement.”


ALIAS: Kelly Baker Josephs
ORIGIN: As visiting assistant professor in the Center of Africana Studies, Kelly comes from York College, The City University of New York, where she teaches courses in Anglophone Caribbean Literature, Postcolonial Literature and Theory, Literatures of the African Diaspora, and Gender Studies. (PhD, Rutgers U)

BASE OF OPERATIONS: Greenhouse, although she would take her homeland of Jamaica any day.

SUPER POWERS: She is currently working on a book manuscript, “Defining Madnesses: Representations of Insanity in Anglophone Caribbean Literature,” which considers the ubiquity of madmen and madwomen. What does that mean? It means that they pop up all over the place. “Caribbean literature tends — whether it’s the focus of the text, the protagonist or side bit character — to have a mad person floating through. So I’m trying to figure it out why it increased so much with the independence.” Her research focuses on literature produced from 1959 to 1980.

WEAKNESSES: Favorite music artists: Country music in general — “Darius Rucker’s country album — download it, please do. Kenny Rogers is a legend. Waiting on J. Legend’s new one.”

Faculty News cont.

Katrina Bell McDonald (Sociology) has been appointed Associate Dean for Multicultural Affairs at JHU.

Hollis Robins (English) delivered a paper on October 3, 2008, at the Western Literature Association 2008 Conference in Boulder, Colorado, entitled “There are no gentlemen here”: Black Newspapers and the Structural Origins of Gold Rush Literature, 1848-1858.

Melanie Shell-Weiss (History) has published two books with the University of Florida Press; Florida’s Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration (with Robert Cassanello) and Coming to Miami: A Social History (forthcoming January 2009). She will also present “Prime Movers: Labor Education, Race, and Anti-Communism in Miami and the Caribbean Trade Union Movements, 1965-1970” at the Social Science History conference and “Ideal Workers and Citizens: Race, Gender, and Immigration Recruitment in the Early 20th Century South” at the American Historical Association annual meeting.

Ben Vinson, Ill (History) presented a paper entitled “Moriscos y Lobos en Mexico Colonial” at the conference: Diaspora, Nacion y Diferencia in Veracruz, Mexico, July 10-13, 2008. He also presented a paper entitled: “Re-examining the Mexican Caste System from its Margins” at the Association of African American Life and History Conference, Oct. 1-5, 2008. Professor Vinson has two forthcoming co-edited books entitled Black Mexico (Univ. of New Mexico Press, co-edited with Matthew Restall, 2009), and Expanding the Diaspora (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2009, co-edited with Rachel O’Toole and Sherwin Bryant).
Summer Field Report

Jeff Pugh, 2008 CAS Summer Research Grant Recipient and JHU Ph.D. Candidate (Political Science)

The plastic walls of the trash bag shelters rippled in the crisp South African winter air. As I noticed the line of make-shift houses lining the sidewalk across the street, groups of refugees congregated in and around the shelters. On the translucent walls, cardboard signs called for the South African government not to persecute or ignore these vulnerable newcomers, who had been subjected to a wave of xenophobic violence earlier in the year, after fleeing from a wave of election violence in their native Zimbabwe.

Despite the grim surroundings, many of the refugees seemed to have a quiet determination to demand their basic rights and to seek a peaceful solution to their situation. During my conversations with nonprofit workers, government officials, and refugees over the course of several weeks, I consistently heard frustration with prevalent xenophobic attitudes coupled with a desire to strengthen institutions for mitigating hostility and violence toward refugees and immigrants. I was in South Africa during June and July of 2008 to do field work on institutional responses to migrant-citizen conflict, so these conversations were very helpful for understanding the reality of current relations between foreigners and South African citizens.

Although I was based in Johannesburg for most of my trip, I was invited to a seminar at Parliament in Cape Town, so I loaded up my rented VW Golf with a supply of ostrich jerky and set off on a 16-hour road trip to attend the seminar. Once there, I had the good fortune to hear from the Minister of Home Affairs, parliamentarians, refugees, and nonprofit activists. Many of these shared their perspectives on the fear and resentment underlying the xenophobic attacks, as well as South Africans’ shame and condemnation of this violent manifestation of prejudice, competition, and communal rejection.

Afterwards, activists affiliated with the organization Africa Unite told me that their model for forging more constructive relations between citizens and migrants involves joint human rights training retreats for young people and ongoing community organizing. By empowering young people with organizing skills, as well as facilitating direct and positive cross-group interaction, the organization has helped people break down negative stereotypes of each other. They also encouraged joint community development in the form of job training that makes use of refugees’ skills (many Zimbabwean refugees are college-educated professionals), local savings cooperatives, and awareness-raising about human rights. Just as much of the hostility of the citizen population toward migrants is mirrored in other countries around the world (including the United States), programs like those developed by Africa Unite may also serve as potential models for mitigating anti-foreigner violence elsewhere and for facilitating peaceful and constructive integration of migrants. Since this is one of the empirical applications for which my research will be relevant, this field exploration has been a useful point of departure for my dissertation, and I am grateful to the JHU Center for Africana Studies for helping to make this summer research possible.

CAS Summer Research Grants

2008 RECIPIENTS

Mindelyn Buford, II, PhD candidate (Sociology)
Thomas Cousins, PhD candidate (Anthropology)
Caitlin Cross-Barnet, PhD candidate (Sociology)
Sarah Doyle, BA candidate (International Studies)
Kristin Day Lehner, PhD candidate (History)
Jeffrey Pugh, PhD candidate (Political Science)
Marieke Wilson, PhD candidate (Anthropology)
Andre Young, PhD candidate (History)

APPLICATION PROCESS FOR 2009

Scope: Applications for summer grants to support research in African Studies, African American Studies, or African Diaspora Studies.

Application should include:

1) A 2-3 page proposal, that includes the topic to be investigated, a brief explanation of its importance to Africana Studies, and specific plans for summer research.
2) A budget statement of your research funding needs.
3) Two recommendation letters.

Awards: The maximum award for undergraduates is $1000.00. Graduate students may receive up to $1500.00.

Applications should be submitted to:
Professor Ben Vinson III
Johns Hopkins University
Greenhouse 108
3400 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

Deadline: April 4, 2009

Questions may be addressed to
Dr Ben Vinson III at bvinson2@jhu.edu or Dr. Floyd W. Hayes III at fwhayes3@jhu.edu
Richmond Barthé’s “Green Pastures”
Asantewa Boakyewa, JHU Diaspora Pathways Archival Access Project Intern

The Afro-American newspaper’s archives are home to an extensive collection of African-American, American and world history. The contents of the archives span everything from cotillion balls in early twentieth century Baltimore to world-famous artists and politicians. Out of over 1,000 folders uncovered in the archives’ “B” range, there is one figure that is especially captivating and illuminating to the American historical and cultural narrative—Harlem Renaissance sculptor Richmond Barthé. The Harlem Renaissance signified a time of rebirth in African-American culture, where the accommodation chains of the past were broken and the breadth and depth of African-American and African Diasporic life and culture were, alas, interpreted by those who lived it. Through his work, in particular “Green Pasture: Walls of Jericho,” Richmond Barthé brought a three-dimensional voice to a pivotal era in African-American history and culture.

Born in 1901, Richmond Barthé’s interest in the arts was nurtured by his mother Marie Clementine Robateau. His artistic inclinations first manifested in drawings and paintings; he first showed an exhibition at age twelve at the Mississippi County Fair. Exhibiting at local fairs continued when Barthé moved to New Orleans. There, his talents would be further encouraged by parochial figures and Lyle Saxon of the Times-Picayune. Saxon attempted to enroll Barthé in a New Orleans art school but the throes of “Jim Crow” would prove insurmountable. With the help of a Catholic priest who was impressed by his works, Barthé pursued painting at the Chicago Art Institute in 1924. While enrolled in an anatomy class at the institute, he gained an affinity for sculpture. His success in the class prompted him to exhibit sculpture at Negro Week in Chicago, 1927. This showing forayed Barthé into his lifelong career as a sculptor.

Over his lifetime, Barthé produced a range of works that communicated the cultural richness of the African-American and African Diasporic experience. He also created works that transcended racial and ethnic lines, like his bust of English actor John Gielgud as Hamlet. “Green Pastures: Walls of Jericho,” is a frieze inspired by Marc Connelly’s Pulitzer Prize winning play “Green Pastures.” Barthé’s “Green Pastures” (or “The Wall,” as it is referred to by New Yorkers), was designed to span some 40 feet and stand eight feet high. It depicts the exodus of Israelites from Egypt. “The Wall” was originally created for the Harlem River Housing Projects, under a Works Progress Administrative initiative. However, the structure was erected outside the Kingsborough Housing Projects in Brooklyn, NY, where it still stands.

In Hidden New York, authors Jennifer Scott and Steve Zietlin illustrate how Barthé’s 70-year old work still resonates today. “I know the people in the projects know this is somebody speaking directly to their condition...their tradition, and speaking directly to that thing that is going to motivate them,” said artist and former Kingsborough resident Will Halsey. “The frieze forms its own stage...See that's us with the bags, that's us the dispossessed; These are the dispossessed; these are the people that have to leave bondage. That's us.”

Funded by a grant from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Diaspora Pathways Archival Access Project (DPAAP) is a three-year collaboration between JHU’s Center for Africana Studies, the Sheridan Libraries’ Center for Educational Resources, and the Afro. DPAAP seeks to explore and describe the contents of the Afro archives to make their contents publicly accessible and searchable via the Web.
ELECTION NITE 2008

CHANGE HAS INDEED COME TO AMERICA
Nora Ali, JHU Sophomore

I have criticized many things about Hopkins in my short time here. Not to say I don’t like this school — I honestly could not imagine myself somewhere else. But there was always this kind of...sense of complacency. Hopkins students aren’t happy, but we’re not mad. We are just content. And I hate that. There’s no fun in “content.” No passion, no drive, no motivation — content is nothing.

Content is a state of nothingness. It’s a waste of time in the short lease we have on life.

Tonight, I realized how wrong I was. Because it was not a matter of complacency — quite the opposite. I realize now there was something simmering. There were voices hoping for the change this nation needs.

We were all too busy working hard for this man who we know will bring this change to overtly disrupt the stale air at this school.

And tonight, at 11:00pm, Hopkins has forever changed in my mind.

At a school where social segregation is beyond evident, hundreds of students were found in the intersection of St. Paul and 33rd Street celebrating Barack Obama’s victory.

HUNDREDS. All chanting for change, chanting for something we can believe in, for the hope that we have been feeling for months and years finally coming to a culmination.

And while we chanted “Yes we can” as cars drove past honking their horns in celebration, I realized that we have more reason to celebrate than anybody else.

American youth made this election.

Many thought our surprising interest in this campaign was something of a fad — it was cool to walk out with your “Barack You Rock” shirts. But they underestimated our dedication. And while we’re not carving backwards B’s into our cheeks like some supporters we know, we were the peoplepower behind this election. And this knowledge — that we have changed the course of history forevermore — comes with a price. A price that I am all too willing to accept.

Because this passion we now have now cannot be allowed to burn out, we need to sustain it to save this nation. I have no doubt that we will.

LAST NIGHT, I SAW WITH FRESH EYES THE AMERICAN FLAG
Nathan Connolly, JHU Assistant Professor (History)

Flying over Grant Park, the Stars and Stripes no longer represented the banner of reactionary nationalism, broken promises, slavery or imperialism. Rather, the flag became — in the blink of an eye — an uncommitted symbol of justice and peace.

Black Americans like myself have long had to separate the flag from that which remains best about America. In many respects we’ve had to find symbols of American greatness elsewhere — mostly through civil rights icons and memories of collective and individual gains hard-fought against the powers of injustice.

In the context of these struggles, the flag, for most of us, has stood as a banner of race and class oppression, its colors symbolized profane notions of patriotism steeped in Manifest Destiny and Americans’ freedom to discriminate.

In the wake of Obama’s win, however, the American Flag signifies more than the country’s founders scratching the anti-slavery passages out of the Declaration of Independence. It signifies more than the white South and North using mass black disenfranchisement to reconcile after the Civil War. It signifies more than the armies of the United States marching on the lands of Native Americans, more still than the unwillingness of Franklin Roosevelt to make lynching a federal offense. Indeed, the flag today is more than the quiet race-baiting woven into the populist fabric of Nixon’s “Silent Majority.” It is more than Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign opening a “Morning in America” in Philadelphia, Mississippi (atop the slain bodies of black and white civil rights activists and in the midst of what Reagan called that very day a “sea of beautiful white faces.”)

For me and millions of other African Americans, the flag, today, represents the acknowledgement of this history and much more. It represents a willful admission of past mistakes and the true hope that both past and present success portends. The flag flies as a sign of hope rooted in remembrance, a future in open view of our troubled past. Where 9/11 punctuated the end of the 20th century, the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States is the 1st major American event of the 21st. In economic, political, social, ecological and, indeed, existential terms, his ascension to our nation’s highest office is, in some sense, America staring down its ugly history in the face.

Of course, this is the most remarkable day in America’s racial history, and yet its greatest effect on our day-to-day lives still remains unknown. For we scholars of Africa and the African Diaspora, Obama’s election serves as a mandate to be even smarter and more diligent in our pursuit of an honest agenda of reasoned and historically informed justice.

Mere hours after having opposed the prospect Obama’s presidency, many of the Right’s intellectual soldiers claimed this election represents the end of America’s race problem. Obama’s win is their win. To them, Obama’s victory represents their triumph over being held accountable for this country’s racial strife. And literally overnight, they have found fresh allies in America’s political Center — even Center-Left observers who likewise wish to characterize November 4th, 2008 as the day America’s race problem died. We, of course, know better.

And it is our duty to help our students and those who read our work to understand this election as one, albeit profound, step on the road to a better country and world.

THERE’S A BLACK FAMILY IN THE WHITE HOUSE
Sika Koudou, JHU PhD candidate (Sociology)

The date is November 5, 2008 and for the first time after the announcement of Barack Hussein Obama as our 44th U.S. President-elect I finally cried. I couldn’t believe it. I was awe-struck for hours, barely able to sleep.

A man of multi-racial descent but who yet identifies as African American is in the position to lead, dare I say, “our country,” for at least four years. For so long, African Americans have been looked upon as burdens to this country for numerous reasons ranging from the accounts of social ills (e.g. crime and violence, teenage pregnancies, single-parent homes, high unemployment, etc.) that commonly circulate among our urban poor to the use of affirmative action to help those who have, in many instances, the human capital (i.e. skills and education), but lack social networks to advance. I must admit that what truly touches my heart is that not only will it be a black man — but even more intriguing — a black family will be stepping foot into the White House. It is such a beautiful thing and I thank God for allowing me to witness it. This is not another situation in which the echoes of women proclaiming “there are no good black men out there” or black men openly stating “black women only want you for your family” is expressed. But rather we see that love can and does exist within the black family.

A beautiful, intelligent, strong-minded, well-rounded African American woman stands by Barack Obama’s side. Michele Obama, who is every bit as prominent as her husband, presents an image that many black females can relate to physically and aspire to intellectually. African American females of mahogany, cocoa, and ebony skin whose hair may not cascade down their backs no longer have to feel as if their image is invisible to the public eye.

For some, stressing the importance of race may seem misguided. But it does matter, for this is a country that once held picnics (pick-a-nigger) as an excuse for white communities to gather, commune, and rejoice as they watched a Negro body swing from a tree. Therefore, I say let’s be proud that an African American family will occupy the White House in January 2009, but let us not lower our expectations of this administration — one that promised us change.
Critical Issues Forum

Interdisciplinary conversations on issues facing our community

Slavery in Question:
Musings of An Africana Studies Student
By Joshua Hilliard, JHU Undergraduate

Speaking from the perspective of a reformed African American, I know what it is like to at once be apathetic, ignorant and fed-up with hearing about struggle and disparity. Struggle and disparity were not issues in my life; since they were not issues, they were not relevant. Perhaps my coming to Baltimore, with its high population of African-Americans in combination with taking Africana Studies classes at Johns Hopkins University, made African America more real to me. Of course, I had seen and read Alex Haley’s Roots and Malcolm X; I had studied Martin Luther King’s speeches in elementary and secondary school; I had participated in many Black History Months. Yet, I feel that hearing one thing and then not seeing anything to verify that knowledge nullifies it.

In my Africana Studies classes, I read about new concepts concerning African-Americans, then go out to urban East Baltimore for my job and witness the disparity among African-Americans, the disparity in opportunities and quality-of-life between East Baltimore blacks and West Baltimore whites and, more or less, just plain old oppression. Naturally, like a toddler who delights in learning the link between his words and his environment—and then wants to learn more words—I grew hungry for more information our community. I wanted to learn about DuBois and the Talented Tenth, Booker T. and “casting down one’s bucket,” Huey Newton and the Black Panther Party, and Kwame Ture and the Black Power Movement.

Even more so, I wanted to understand the root of all of this madness—this racially institutionalized America, this black activism, this endless struggle—which I thought to be slavery. Before this hunger arose in me, I thought that slavery was just an inevitable result of the struggle—which I thought to be slavery. Before this hunger even more so, I wanted to understand the root of all of this madness—which I thought to be slavery. Before this hunger even more so, I wanted to understand the root of all of this madness—which I thought to be slavery.

In the fall I enrolled in an Africana Studies course, African American Literature and Its Traditions, and I searched for any leads to this question in every assigned novel that the class read. I found the best answer to the question about slavery’s persistence in a combination of two novels, Iola Leroy by Frances E.W. Harper and Native Son by Richard Wright. Both are thought-provoking novels set in the post-Emancipation era—with Native Son being a bit more contemporary—and both deal with the plight of the Negro.

In reading both of these novels, I could see a greater force working behind the actions and decisions of the novel’s characters, fueling those actions and decisions with inevitability. One could say that their behaviors are the products of public opinion which is, in itself, the product of societal custom. U.S. societal custom is engendered by the ultimate custom, slavery. What slavery personifies and perpetuates, in the words of Native Son’s Max, is oppression and “injustice; it is an accomplished fact of life.”

Indeed, Slavery has so twisted the morals of American society and kept them contorted in such a way for so long, deafening any citizen’s revulsion to the inhumane nature of slavery, that they assume an ossified form. To borrow a phrase from Harper’s novel, America was stuck in the “old ruts of slavery.” Then, public opinion’s center-of-mass adjusted accordingly, rendering any move toward change—and nearer to a more humane way of life—as anathema. This steadfastness required a nationwide catastrophe—the Civil War—before ultimately yielding to the anti-slavery tide.

The persistence of a slave mentality perhaps can best be juxtaposed to the habit we have of using gasoline as a primary fuel source—despite its detrimental atmospheric effects. Alas, the wealthiest parties are those with the most oil to sell. Wars have been fought over its acquisition, and world economies have vacillated under its influence. Yet, even though scientists have admonished us with crystal clear, alarming prognostications, we persist nevertheless (just like smokers). The slave mentality has held the same grip on our psyches, even finding biblical justification in the eyes of some radical evangelicals; America is addicted to slavery’s economic benefits, no matter the human toll. Or did we stick to it because it was the only thing we knew? In the words of the great Harriet Tubman, “If I could have convinced more slaves that they were slaves, I could have freed thousands more.” I shudder to think that such was (or is) actually true.

What Can You Do for the BSU?

Editorial Comment by Nora Ali, JHU Undergraduate

Note—statements in this essay are not representative of the Black Student Union. This solely represents the author’s reference frame.

When Rosa Parks refused to get off that bus, there were some Black people out there who were mad. Some Black people who were so used to the way things were that they were not ready for change. Surprised? Harriet Tubman said it best when she said, “If I could have convinced more slaves that they were slaves, I could have freed thousands more.” You think all Black people supported Martin Luther King, Jr. and what he stood for? Heck no. But years later, those same people got to sit in the front of the bus, despite their lack of contribution or encouragement. I think it’s safe to say those individuals were ungrateful. And I feel that there are Black students on this campus here today that are reminiscent of those ungrateful souls from 40 years ago.

I think the members of the Black population who are NOT members of the Black Student Union should be ashamed of themselves. This organization, formed in their best interests, does nothing but cater to them. And the appreciation they show—especially upperclassmen—is to not bother showing up. Now, don’t get me wrong—each meeting has a solid turn out. But I feel the BSU meetings should be overflowing with Black students. Overflowing. And the thing that makes me most angry is when people say, “BSU doesn’t do anything.” Is that really your excuse?

First and foremost—if an organization that represents you does not live up to the standards you want it to, fix it. I am not going to sit here, writing this and pretend I love every minute I’m doing something BSU-related. I don’t. But I feel it unethical for me not to participate and help out. As a Black student, I should want to know how I am being represented. Now am I saying that being Black is all that I am? Of course not. But when racially-triggered incidents occur here, where does the administration go? They’re not going to try to find you, studying in your little cubicle on B-Level or in your dorm down the street. No, they will go to the most obvious group to communicate with us—the Black Student Union. In (cont on pg 9)
THE FRED SCOTT BRIGADE: A History and Report of the 2008 Reunion Dinner
Michael David Smith, JHU Class of 1970

In June 1992, I visited Baltimore for the first time in fifteen years at the behest of a gravely ill friend. He asked me to visit him since we had not seen each other in years. When Leslie Farrington heard I was scheduled to visit Baltimore, she decided to come down from New York.

We then contacted other Baltimore friends - Leslie King-Hammond, Carroll Phillips, Erich March and Karen Freeman-Burdnell - for a reunion of dining out and visiting the Homewood campus of Johns Hopkins University.

We sauntered around campus, noting new buildings, old stalwarts and departmental changes. We toured old Levering Hall, as well as additions; relived war tales; and laughed at old hi-jinks. After I hugged some of the trees in Gilman Quad, I even persuaded Erich March to hug some trees, too, though he was very reluctant to be seen in public hugging trees.

We had such a good time that I thought other members of our friendship ring at JHU should be invited for a reunion dinner. Thirty-six of us convened the first Saturday of the following October at the Johns Hopkins Club. Composed of graduate students and undergraduates, as well as staffers and friends, we came from as far away as California and as near as down the street from campus. We had a great time reminiscing and updating our lives and careers. The 1970 photograph of African-American students at JHU was the centerpiece of our reunion.

We had such a good time that some members suggested we reunite every two or even five years. However, numerous others suggested that we meet every year. This last suggestion became our habit and tradition. We have now reunited for sixteen years. Our reunion is now so ingrained that some members set their vacation-time to the last Saturday in September, which seems to agree with most schedules as well as with the weather.

As we invited other early African-American JHU students, Fred Scott came to dine and offhandedly mentioned that he was the first such undergraduate student to graduate from the Homewood campus. In his honor, we then named our group The Fred Scott Brigade, surprised as we were to learn that the racial barrier had only recently been broken.

The Fred Scott Brigade has dined at the Johns Hopkins Club every year since 1993, except three times. At our third reunion dinner (1995), we convened at a jazz dinner-club on North Charles and 25th Street. At our eighth reunion (2000), we had cocktails at the glass-walled penthouse bar and had dinner in the ballroom of the beaux-art Hotel Belvedere-turned-condominiums at N. Charles and Chase Streets. In 2007, we met downtown at the Reginald Lewis Museum of African-American History and Culture, at the suggestion of our member and Museum chairwoman Leslie King-Hammond.

The numbers dining at our reunions have fluctuated widely -- from eleven in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, to fifty-four in 1998. Our friendships endure even in the face of catastrophe -- so must our celebration of friendship. This enduring quality also helps make our reunions precious.

On September 27, 2008, the Fred Scott Brigade convened again in the Eisenhower Room of the Johns Hopkins Club, with thirteen current students among the thirty-six dining. Our guru, Fred Scott, talked about the need of African-Americans to set our own destiny and establish our own systems of learning. Ralph Moore, class of 73, eulogized our late beloved chaplain Chester Wickwire, who had twice attended our reunion dinners. Fred Scott and Chaplain Wickwire have helped show us the life-long joy of intellect and creativity.

Undergraduate Lindsey Leslie spoke to the group about her wish to write the history of the JHU Black Students Union. She introduced her topic and asked for help from the guests. Marguerite Bryan, a doctoral graduate of the JHU Sociology Department and New Orleanian, updated us on the present state of New Orleans in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Gustav.

Current JHU students introduced themselves to the whole room, as each student sat with alumni. The festivities were then given over to talk at each table. For example, Dr. Bryan reported having a great conversation with current sociology doctoral student Mindleyn Buford, II. Judging by the laughter and chatter, every table seemed to have equally lively discussions of various sorts.

The food was excellent. I reintroduced soup as a course, after dropping it in an economizing move a few years ago. The salad of greens, Granny Smith apples and walnuts was excellent. The enlarged number dining required the kitchen to substitute other entrees to replace the duck that was planned for all. While I loved my crab cake and filet mignon, others reported that the duck was delicious, also.

The Fred Scott Brigade exists as an homage to friendship. Among lessons of discipline, accomplishment and the vicissitudes of life that may have been taught, brigade members ultimately hope that JHU students who have dined with us over the years have learned to value friends.
A DAY IN THE PARK WITH THE WORDS AND WISDOM OF DR. CORNELL WEST
Jennifer Claiborne, JHU Center for Liberal Arts and Shelley Pitter, JHU Advanced Academic Programs

Even rain couldn’t keep Baltimore and surrounding area residents from venturing out on a half gloomy Sunday to the Baltimore Book Festival on September 28th, 2008 to hear Dr. Cornel West (center), a public intellectual hailng from the ivies of Princeton University. Dressed in his signature black scarf, suit, and black-rim glasses, he challenged his audience “to combat the politics of fear.” The crowd roared with a welcoming excitement that was charged with the undertones of a fiery political atmosphere. It was standing room only in the tent located in the eastern portion of the park in Mt. Vernon, as students, teachers, political leaders, grassroots organizers, writers, and those who just wanted to learn a bit of history for themselves.

Everyone’s ears waited intently to hear about Dr. West’s upcoming book, “Hope on a Tightrope.” Although there to promote it, his inspirational words were far from cheeky promotional bylines. Dr. West was energetic, and spoke vigorously about the plight of America today; the economic crisis; the historical possibility of the first African American president; the struggle of the working class poor, and the triumphs and tragedies of African Americans. He moved across the stage in rhyming syncopations, in what felt like a heart-to-heart conversation between generations.

Dr. West beckoned the audience “to return to your humanity and defeat fear and exclusion.” With a captivating voice, he called out to the hip hop generation, speaking on Tupac Shakur, saying, “Yes, he was a man of contradictions, much like America. The brother was a thug and an activist. He knew better, and was trying to work it out, much like you.” An agreeing laughter poured through the tent. He smiled, enjoying his own gentle humor, turned to the other side of the tent and said, “Even, Lil’ Wayne fans and non-fans can agree that that boy is a lyrical genius, yes a genius for overcoming adverse circumstances. He’s from New Orleans, that’s an adverse circumstance.”

As Dr. West spoke, the crowd grew larger, expanding from inside of the tent to a standing mass peering inside. His charisma permeated every inch of the space, and his message of love and humanity resonated. Dr. West made a clear distinction that even though America has come to a history-making era in wealth and politics, Americans must not count material status as a measure of success.

He emphasized that no longer can America, especially black America, remain silent to what has left young black America hungering for role models of leadership; action and true success. He paused and opened the floor to questions. When asked what was “Hope on a Tightrope,” he answered, “Love. Hope. Faith. Not just of ourselves, but for everyone of every color everywhere. We must find it. Preserve it. We must take it off the rope, off its balancing act, set it on a solid foundation. You know, we come from a tradition of turning to love first, instead of hatred. We come from a tradition of moving through perilous times fueled only by our love for each other.”

After a few more questions, laughs, and applause, Dr. West was ushered through the crowd, while shaking hands and speaking to his fellow man as if each were an old friend. His lecture was finished. The crowd was disbanded and mobile, but the feeling created by the man and message remained.

Cont’ from page 7 (Nora Ali)

the aftermath of the Sigma Chi fraternity incident two years ago, when some white students used racist depictions to “celebrate” Halloween, the demands of the BSU included the building of a multicultural center. On January 2nd 2009, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) will be moving into a temporary Multicultural Center until the final one is completed in 2011. Talking to an official in the OMSA office, she stated it took the BSU to demand the existence of a center before any administrative action occurred. Talks about a multicultural center have been happening for years – but it was the voice of the BSU that made it happen in less than two years.

The Black Student Union remains the only student organization that the school did not initially accept or recognize. BSU founders had to fight to get a room. When administrators told them, “There’s no need for black students to form a group,” they held meetings on their own time to demand equal rights to organize. When administrators told them that there’s no room for a BSU, they found a storage room in the basement of AMRII and took it upon themselves to clean it up. When administrators told them there’s no furniture for the BSU room, they went into The Hut and started to drag those chairs to AMRII before being stopped by security [only to make security carry those chairs back!]. I think it’s a disgrace to those founders, and to ourselves, when students decide not to participate because of some sad excuse. If you feel the BSU should do something, come and tell them! We are more than willing to listen. A few weeks ago, one of the BSU meetings was solely dedicated to hearing what every single member wants and expects from the BSU this year. And yet, I still hear some students saying, “Oh, well, BSU needs to do more.” Unless you are going to tell me what exactly the BSU needs to do, I don’t want to hear it. Not a single word. If you have the audacity to criticize an organization that is trying to cater to your interests and well-beings, and in response you turn your back and talk against it, then you are not worthy of being a part of it. Please, don’t be a part of the problem, be a part of the solution!
READING AFRICANA


Lorna Goodison, *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her Island* (New York: Amistad, 2008)


ANOTHER LOOK AT BOOKER T.

By Claude Joseph Phillip Poux, CAS Administrator

At the book’s onset, Lee H. Walker, the lecture collection editor of the 2006 symposium, *Booker T. Washington: A Re-examination*, strains his credibility when declaring that Washington “was one of the most famous, influential and respected men...perhaps of all time...either black or white.”

(Hopefully, Walker, having now observed the 2008 Summer Olympics, regrets having overlooked billions of Yellow and Brown people, whose contributions to the world likely exceed that of the West.)

Fortunately, leveler heads prevailed at the summertime gathering of scholars at Northwestern University just outside of Chicago, who offered assorted commentaries about Washington — undoubtedly a significant figure in American history.

One is left with a clearer picture of the man, which is the book’s primary redeeming quality.

That Washington loved his people is indisputable.

His self-help philosophy and his founding of Tuskegee Institute (now University) enabled life-enhancing opportunities for Blacks who became productive carpenters & farmers, excellent physicians, veterinarians and nurses — and even a handful of Harvard Law School graduates — in Jim Crow’s heyday no less.

But Washington’s emphasis on economic development is often viewed in diametric opposition to W.E.B. DuBois’ penchant for political agitation. As the brilliant Brown University economist Glenn Loury posited at the conference, however, economic self-sufficiency and political agitation need not be mutually exclusive.

That’s why a distinguished activist such as Ida B. Wells, a fervent believer in economic self-sufficiency, co-founded the NAACP free of political misgivings.

Indeed, during its century-long tenure, the NAACP has not discouraged Black economic self-sufficiency as some Washington zealots claim. Its emphases were and are on mobilizing the masses and initiating robust legal strategy — which has encountered as much resistance from Whites as has Black economic self-sufficiency.

Gregory Brown of the Black Holocaust Society suggests that Black economic self-sufficiency is as feared by Whites as is Black political agitation when he writes, “In the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, [White] police flew airplanes and dropped nitroglycerin and dynamite on 600 Black businesses, burned 1500 homes and destroyed a 35-square-block area of the Black community of Tulsa also known as the Greenwood District. It was so prosperous it was nationally known as Black Wall Street. The riot was intended to put Blacks back in their place.”

(As Harvard Law professor Charles Ogletree has sued Oklahoma for reparations on behalf of the Black Holocaust victims and their descendants.)

Alas, responses to aggression against Blacks must be fashioned by Blacks — and comprised of both political and economic considerations.

The resulting platform will clarify which issues should be de-racialized without overlooking their disproportional impact on Blacks, thus allowing for rigorous analysis of Black victimization vis-à-vis the self-help motif.

Blacks will own the emerging narrative that links our tragic history and present dilemma to an aggressive “take charge” agenda for mitigating American pathologies (such as White neo-nationalism, which espouses that we are “hewers of wood and drawers of water.”), which will frame a Black strategy for blunting racism’s edge.

But first, let us recognize that both DuBois and Washington posited powerful — however flawed — paradigms for Black liberation. Let us take the good from each scholar to formulate cutting-edge solutions that push the envelope for all human progress.

Surely Booker Taliaferro Washington would have liked that.

“Without dignity there is no liberty, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men.”

Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961)
COURSE OFFERINGS—SPRING 2008

362.101 INTRODUCTION TO AFRICANA STUDIES (3) Young Limit 20  This course is an 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.

362.122 HISTORY OF AFRICA (3) Wiemers Limit 40  This course is an introduction to the African Past since 1880.

362.217 THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: STRUGGLES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA (3) Limit 20  Vivian  This course examines struggles to achieve racial equality in the mid-twentieth-century United States, with emphasis on the sit-ins, mass protests, and organizing campaigns of the ‘50s and ‘60s.

362.218 MADNESS AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE (3) Josephs Limit 20  This course examines the anxieties that surrounded decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean. Readings will be drawn primarily from literature, but will also include texts from history, anthropology, sociology and psychology.

362.308 FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO MULTI-CULTURALISM: STUDENT MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE (3) Staff Limit 12  This colloquium examines the historical and contemporary connections between student activism and the struggle for civil rights in America, combining classroom study with practical community collaboration. Scholarly readings and class discussions will provide historical context, familiarizing students with the history of student activism and the struggle for African American civil rights in the United States since World War II. A key focus of the class will be the black experience on campus, in communities, and in American society more generally. Students will also participate in collaborative fieldwork, partnering with local high school students and community activists to create a documentary film focusing on civil rights and community relations in Baltimore. A historical understanding of the student and civil rights movements will both inform, and be enriched by, students’ participation in the documentary project.

362.361 MAJOR TOPICS IN 20TH CENTURY BLACK HISTORY (3) Hinderer Limit 12  This research course will examine major issues in twentieth century African American history with a special emphasis on Black Baltimore.

362.457 RICHARD WRIGHT & MODERNISM (3) Hayes Limit 25  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 his 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. In order to understand his development as a writer and intellectual activist, we will examine his life experiences in South and later in the Communist Party, as well as the complex philosophical ideas that shaped his thinking and writing. Through a critical reading of works by and about Wright, seminar members will examine his contribution to Africana existential thought, which is premised upon concerns of freedom, anguish, resentment, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation.

362.495 AFROMEXICAN HISTORY (3) Vinson Limit 12  This course provides a broad historical overview of the African presence in Mexico, beginning in the colonial period and stretching into the 20th century. The primary focus is on Afrormexican development during the 17th and 18th centuries, and how blackness became an important part of the Mexican heritage. Through examining a black population that is somewhat on the margins of the larger Black world, new questions are raised about the African Diaspora, its functionings, and its transformational meaning—especially amongst societies that have strong degrees of racial mixture.

Cross-Listed Courses

010.345 THE AFRICAN CITY: ART AND THE POLITICS OF PLACE (3) Meier

100.387 BLACK INTELLECTUALS AND THE IDEA OF AFRICA: SYMBOLISM, INVENTION, AND REALITY IN MODERN BLACK CULTURAL PRODUCTION (3) Duke-Bryant

130.128 NUBIA: AN AFRICAN KINGDOM IN AMERICAN THOUGHT, 1767-2009 (3) Pope

212.305 INTRODUCTION TO FRANCOPHONE CARIBBEAN LITERATURE (3) Saliot

230.313 SPACE, PLACE, POVERTY, & RACE: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NEIGHBORHOODS & PUBLIC HOUSING (3) Deluca

230.340 SOCIOLOGY OF PRIVILEGE (3) Buford
If you would like to contribute to *Horizons* please email cpoux1@jhu.edu

Visit our website www.jhu.edu/africana

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