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Our Editors

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Message From The Director
“DURING FERGUSON”

by Rita Kiki Edozie (Ph.D.)
Professor and Director,
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I’m writing from an on campus event titled “After Ferguson”! The title presents an opportunity to reflect on the momentous events that have occurred this year surrounding the topic of police brutality, our parallel events at MSU’s African American and African Studies, and the theme of this edition of our newsletter, “Hands Up: Don’t Shoot”!

Michael Brown and Eric Gardner had both met their fateful deaths at the hands of the Ferguson and New York City (Staten Island) police departments by the beginning of the fall semester. As such, we dedicate our 9th edition to their memory but as well use the numerous supportive curricular events that we held this semester as an occasion to reflect on the deeper and broader implications of Ferguson and Staten Island’s symbolism.

What exactly is going on? Where do these events place us in the unfolding trajectory of civil rights in America? Is this about race? How do the events affect us at MSU’s African American and African Studies? What happens after Ferguson? Despite that we hosted a range of different supportive curricular for our students and faculty in fall 2014, including keynote talks, roundtables, talk-back’s, teach-in’s, power rallies, film screening panels, cultural gala’s, and town-hall meetings, these questions forged the main talking points that were asked, deliberated, debated, and responded to at every turn.

We began the semester with the second half of our speaker series, “Project 60-50: Marking and Assessing the Long Freedom Struggle” where we continued our intellectual interrogation of civil rights through our alternative Black Studies’ lens. We ran a monthly series that hosted civil rights and LGBT activist, Mandy Carter, award winning art history and design scholar, Deborah Willis, a scholar of Black internationalism, Dr. Francis Nesbitt, and scholar of comparative race and politics, Dr. Gladys Mitchell-Walthour. Each approached the aforementioned...
momentous queries of the year in diverse and dynamic ways.

In examining the intersectionality between race and LGBT rights activism, Mandy Carter opened up the Project 60-50 conversation by leading us with a conversation of the challenges that the Black LGBT activist community undergoes within both the Black and the LGBT communities of struggle respectively. New York University distinguished professor, Dr. Deborah Willis followed with a presentation of artistic representations of the black freedom struggle that showcased artworks illustrating and illuminating for our audience the ways that “rights” are expressed by and on the black body through art and performance. Africana Studies professor at San Diego State, Dr. Francis Nesbitt traced both the parallel and subsequently fused Black civil rights struggle in the US and South Africa through the Black anti-apartheid movement. In post racial US, affirmative action is on the decline; in the post racial democracy of Brazil, affirmative action is on the rise. At the concluding session of the series, this was Gladys Mitchell-Walthour’s thesis as she sought to explain variance in perceptions toward race and affirmative action comparatively among African Americans and Afro-Brazilians.

Undergraduate students at MSU’s African American and African Studies explored the incidents of police brutality in Black communities across the nation through talk-back’s, rallies, and town-meetings. At our undergraduate minor event titled “#New Black?”, over a hundred undergraduate students queried ten panelists of AAAS faculty and grad students around issues of racial expression in 2014, White privilege, and racial profiling and the increasing criminalization of black peoples.

Our Black Student Alliance (BSA) hosted its annual Black Power rally choosing as its theme this year the title, “Un-Armed and Dangerous: Arsenal of Intellect”. In their long tradition of activism and raising consciousness and awareness about Black freedom and civil rights, both the BSA students and their keynote rally speaker, Dr. Marc Lamont-Hill rally-roused the crowd to advocate for justice for the victims of police violence. At a campus town meeting organized and moderated by new college of education professor and critical race theorist, Chezarre Warren, entitled, “After Ferguson”, I began to write the current opening article. The auditorium was packed full with an audience who were not shy about expressing their feelings about the events of the day. Faculty, students, and community members connected Ferguson issues to the numerous micro-aggressions and incidents of structural
racism that they experience on a daily basis at MSU. I couldn’t help wondering however – isn’t it too soon to talk about the “after” in Ferguson? I would rename the session as, “during” Ferguson! As well, is “Ferguson” separate from our community at MSU or isn’t it part of the same series of concentric circles? In my mind, Ferguson R US! As such, we should use Ferguson as a framework to both query and participate in various and multiple sites of a continued freedom struggle.

As an educational institution --- and one whose primary majors are graduate degrees – discourse through critical studies research and scholarship are an important part of our supportive curricular activities. However, as a humanistic discipline, this fall semester, we also showcased several cultural performances that articulated the concerns of Black communities worldwide regarding the value of Black lives and bodies. DC-based African Diaspora filmmaker and director of “Sankofa”, Haile Gerima was in town screening and discussing his new film ‘Teza”. The film presents the trauma of an African Diaspora subject who experiences varying forms of displacement as he straddles between homeland and host-land. This semester, we co-hosted a session of the Charles Wright Museum of African American History’s Liberation Film Series on campus. The documentary film, “Cuba: An African Odyssey” hosted panelists Maurice Carey and Dr. Glenn Chambers who discussed the shared Cold War histories in Africa and Latin America. The African Student Union hosted Africa Week ending with their annual gala event, which highlighted Africans’ attempts to avoid cultural genocide. Through fashion shows, musical performances, and theater skits, African students gala theme, “Afri-extravaganza” promoted the vibrancy and dynamism of the continents diverse cultures and juxtaposed this message against African cultural resurgence against an increasingly dominant western cultural imprint in the continent.

We concluded our semester with our annual Kwanzaa celebration, honoring this African-inspired African American holiday with R&B, hip-hop, and Afro-Beat music, food and drinks from Altus, and we forged exciting end-of-semester interaction among faculty, students, and community members.

Read about the details of our fall 2014 semester in the following pages of our ninth edition...hands up!
Message From The Editor
Hands Up, Don’t Shoot: Policing the Black Body

by Aron Patton
Second Year Masters - Ph.D. Bridge Student

On August 9th 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, 18-year old Michael Brown was fatally shot by police officer Darren Wilson. Callously, Brown’s body was left for hours at the murder scene.

Brown’s death is utterly disturbing and points not only to the use of excessive force by law enforcement, but the disproportionate use of this force against Black people, specifically Black men. Yet, even more troubling is the fact that Brown’s death is in no way unique. Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Renisha Mcbride can easily be added to the list of young Black men and women who have lost their lives in what can only be described as a system of tyranny masquerading as justice and protection. Indeed, masquerading seems an apt word if the deaths of these men and women are placed within a larger sociohistorical context in which the Black body is stamped from birth with the label of criminality and suspicion. The existence of Black Codes, Jim Crow, and segregation can be characterized by their ability to monitor and control Black bodies and minds. Thus, for many Black Americans, the belief that there are two legal systems is much more accurate given the disparate treatment Black Americans face within the legal system. If we look closely at policies and laws such as stop-and-frisk or the harsher penalties given to crack cocaine users than powder cocaine it is not difficult to understand this point of view. Michael Brown, those named above and the many other Black men and women murdered at the hands of unchecked, violent law enforcement are the unfortunate recipients of this historical and present-day brutal, dual legal system.

While it is important to acknowledge those who still live, we musn’t forget, however, that they live with the knowledge that a loved one could be taken from them because of this structural, racist violence. Though burdened with unbelievable grief, these parents have sought to demonstrate to the world that what happened to their child has also happened to others. Both Tracy Martin and Sybrina Martin visited Ferguson to mourn the death of Michael Brown. In a beautiful act of solidarity, support, and love, Sybrina Martin penned a letter to the Brown family. Their
actions do away with the uncritical notion that the death of Michael Brown, or the death of Renisha Mcbride, was an isolated and unrelated event. Both families realize the deaths of their children as evidence of a larger social structure at play.

The theme for the Fall 2014 semester’s edition of The Emerging Black Studies Scholar, *Hands Up, Don’t Shoot: Policing The Black Body*, acknowledges the continued violence against Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement. Nonetheless, we must remember that while the violence enacted upon Black Americans by law enforcement is indeed vile, it receives such attention due to its visibility and immediate impact on the physical body. This violence is a part of and occurs within other violently racist social structures in the United States. If compared to a gun, the violence of our legal system and law enforcement represents the bullet. We must not forget that there exists a trigger, and a hand that wields it.
Civil Rights and Black Queers

by Aron Patton
Second Year Masters - Ph.D. Bridge Student

Michigan State University, through its unique project, *Project 60/50: A Year Long Conversation on Civil and Human Rights*, acknowledges the national importance of the 1954 Supreme Court decision to overturn segregation in public schools as well as the passage of the Civil Rights Act by then president Lyndon Johnson in 1964. The African American and African Studies (AAAS) program has partnered with the university and engaged in these integral conversations through our annual speaker series. This fall semester, we kicked off our Speaker Series with Mandy Carter. Creator/Co-creator of SONG (Southerners on New Ground) and NBJC (National Black Justice Coalition), Through her dedication to social justice, Mandy Carter has continued to be a major influence around issues of Civil Rights and Black Queer issues. Her engaging discussion encouraged audience members to complicate the usual heterosexual and male-centered narrative of Civil Rights. Carter examined the roles of notable gay activists such as Baynard Rustin and James Baldwin who she states were denied the right to fully participate in the larger Civil Rights movement. Even though such a heterosexist and patriarchal line of thinking penetrated many aspects of Civil Rights, important coalition building between LGBTQIA activism and the activism of African Americans did occur. Carter emphasized the passage of The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009 by President Barack Obama as a turning point in connecting LGBTQIA justice with racial justice. For Carter this signaled not only a departure from thinking of racial justice as separate from LGBTQIA issues but, most importantly, from the idea that these two identities as they manifest in people’s lives are separate. Though not explicitly stated, Carter nonetheless challenged attendees to acknowledge that people live their lives at the intersections of these various identities and experience systemic oppression and discrimination in complex ways. Indeed, Carter’s addition, she was award the Spirit of Justice Award from Boston’s Gay and Lesbian Advocates & Defenders.

Carter’s thought provoking talk entitled *Whose Beloved Community?* centered on contemporary Civil Rights and Black Queer issues. Her engaging discussion encouraged audience members to complicate the usual heterosexual and male-centered narrative of Civil Rights. Carter examined the roles of notable gay activists such as Baynard Rustin and James Baldwin who she states were denied the right to fully participate in the larger Civil Rights movement. Even though such a heterosexist and patriarchal line of thinking penetrated many aspects of Civil Rights, important coalition building between LGBTQIA activism and the activism of African Americans did occur. Carter emphasized the passage of The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009 by President Barack Obama as a turning point in connecting LGBTQIA justice with racial justice. For Carter this signaled not only a departure from thinking of racial justice as separate from LGBTQIA issues but, most importantly, from the idea that these two identities as they manifest in people’s lives are separate. Though not explicitly stated, Carter nonetheless challenged attendees to acknowledge that people live their lives at the intersections of these various identities and experience systemic oppression and discrimination in complex ways. Indeed, Carter’s
examination of contemporary Civil Rights and LGBTQIA justice interacts and contributes to the discussion of Black queer scholars such as Roderick Ferguson, Mae G. Henderson, and E. Patrick Johnson. These scholars examine the ways identity politics (i.e. Black power, women’s movements, LGBTQIA justice) often conceptualize identity as being one dimensional and not reflective of the lives of those who may be women, of color, and part of the LGBTQIA community simultaneously. Better said, the multidimensional and constantly fluctuating nature of identity is not easily captured by identity politics. However, while in some regards limiting, doing away with identity politics nonetheless erases aspects of identity that are paramount to defining culture, community and self.

Mandy Carter’s presence at Michigan State University was an intellectual treat and certainly a necessary scholarly contribution to the AAAS continuing conversation on Civil Rights.
Preserving and reshaping history through the photograph was the foundation of Deborah Willis’ lecture titled “Visualizing and Reimagining the Black Body Politic and Identity Rights in the Academy.” According to Willis, African American culture can be taught through the visual experience.

By questioning the history of how images have been represented, we will be able to understand how important photography served as a powerful tool in both subjugating and Liberating the Black body in history. As a result, educators can use the practice of Black visual studies in the classroom as a critical examination of the historical record.

Willis began her lecture by discussing how contemporary artists return to past to reclaim and liberate 19th century photographs that have framed Black bodies as “Others”. She includes artists like Carrie Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson, for example, who subvert historical photographs of Sarah Baartman that have framed her as a scientific and anthropological specimen, by envisioning Baartman’s ghost returning to the museum, kicking over the display jar containing her remains and telling her own story.

In addition to artists, Willis points out how the Black Press used photography as a platform for liberation through self-representation. The Crisis and Liberator, for example, were central in allowing Blacks to show their own image and tell own their story. Also, Black men who fought for the Union Army would go to photography studios to take self-portraits in their uniforms. Posing in photography, according to Willis, was more than self styling, but a means of self-
emancipation from the stereotypical and repressive images of blacks in the 19th and 20th Century.

Outside of photography, Willis points out how visual culture and media also served as tools of visual resistance. The creation of Ms. Black America in 1968, for example, transformed the historical definition of beauty by celebrating natural hairstyles and African inspired dress. Additionally, objects such as lunch boxes became politicized through its depiction of TV figures like the Harlem Globetrotters. Willis argues there was agency in children having objects adorned with people who reflected their community. Willis further states it is important to unpack these images in the classroom, and analyze the ways they have both transformed ideas of celebration and aspects of oppression. Whether a controversial image of Pam Grier in the movie Coffy, or artist Mary Sibande who depicts domestic workers as super women to counter the degrading narratives of Black women created in movies like Gone with the Wind, Willis states we need to have the historical references to see how they surface today, in addition to showing the multiplicity of images of women and men that show us as full human beings.

The lecture was aesthetically rich with artist images and Civil Rights photography. Many of the images referenced in Deborah Willis’ lecture can be found in her
book “Posing Beauty: African American Images from 1890s to the Present”. Dr. Willis is currently the chair of the Department of Photography and Imaging in addition to University Professor of Africana Studies at New York University.
Comparative Civil Rights and South Africa

by Kathryn Mara
Second Year Masters Student

Speaking on the topic of “Black Internationalism: From Antislavery to Anti-apartheid,” Dr. Francis Nesbitt, an Associate Professor of Africana Studies at San Diego State University, visited Michigan State University’s campus on Friday, November 14. As part of MSU’s African American and African Studies’ “Renegotiating Black Studies Today” 2014 Speaker Series, “Fifty, Sixty, and One-Fifty Plus: Marking and Assessing the Long African American Freedom Struggle,” Dr. Nesbitt was well-situated amongst the series’ diverse assortment of speakers. Indeed, the series itself derives its name from a campus-wide initiative, “Project 60/50,” which combines a commemoration of two major events in African American history, namely Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964), with a nuanced dialogue on contemporary race relations through the lens of diversity and human rights. Refusing to address these issues in isolation to each other or history at large, AAAS’ speaker series has been further interested in the intersection(s) of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Dr. Nesbitt adds to this ongoing discussion in his evocation of globality, in what he refers to as “global movements,” situated in both the United States and Africa that are in communication with each other, in complex and often contradictory ways.

In order to broach this rather far-reaching topic, Dr. Nesbitt uses South Africa as his case study and, in particular, the anti-apartheid movement. As such, he frames it as a “transnational anti-racism movement,” which, internally, resembled a campaign to end white supremacy; externally, however, it was less idea-driven and concerned itself with more practical matters. On the continent, this resembled support for military bases, as well as...
material and diplomatic assistance, while, off the continent, it took shape in international sanctions and material support. The U.S, in particular, was tactical in the manner in which they addressed apartheid, due to the political climate imposed by the Cold War. Most prominently, South Africa is host to an assortment of strategic minerals, such as uranium, which left in the “wrong” hands could produce explosive results.

To combat the possibility that Africa be swayed by the Soviet Union, the U.S. government, and, in particular, the Central Intelligence Agency, initiated a number of programs largely oriented “to sway African students to [the pleasures of] capitalism.” Needless to say, the U.S. did not initially impose sanctions on South Africa, though the United Nations voted to do so, due to fear of offending white rule. Finally, and perhaps the only indicator of U.S. mortality, the U.S. vetoed the option of imposing sanctions, as the country’s representative saw the hypocrisy of criticizing South Africa for its oppressive system of governance when the U.S. was still, for all intensive purposes, one itself.

The U.S’ official response, however, did not necessarily model the African American activist voice. Indeed, the Black Left, which Dr. Nesbitt describes as “the forgotten years of the Civil Rights Movement,” founded the Council on African Affairs, which supported African liberation movements. This, in and of itself, became controversial, as the U.S. did not make a habit of speaking out against their European allies, who, in the time the organization existed from 1937 to 1955, still had colonial stakes in Africa. This had disastrous effects for its membership, who accused of having communist leanings, were subject to harassment, indictments, and, in the instance of its educational director, imprisonment. Eventually, the organization was disbanded.

On a more collective scale, however, such organizations as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, National Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Congress of Racial Equality, were liberal in their endorsement of the South African anti-apartheid movement; however, they would not support internal groups who used armed resistance, namely the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania, and the South African Communist Party. Even that was not
universal though, as calls for Black Power were met with Pan-Africanist sympathies, most concretely in Malcom X and the Organization for Afro-American Unity who were in support of armed resistance. More surprisingly, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who grew comparatively radical toward the end of his career, acknowledged the workability of armed struggle in an African revolution, while still maintaining its lack of feasibility in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

This sense of connectivity grew throughout the Diaspora, most prominently in the development of such organizations as the Congress of African Peoples, the construction of academic institutions such as Black Studies departments, the African Studies Association, and the African Heritage Studies Association, and, finally, the recognition of such momentous occasions as Africa Liberation Day and Pan-African Conferences. Even so, a division grew between African and African American membership, regarding, in particular, the interpretation of the latter group as a “savior” to the continent.

Significantly, however, the anti-apartheid movement had legs in both South Africa, as well as the African Diaspora, as represented in the formation of the Rainbow Coalition and student movements, as well as the activism of other similarly oriented organizations. In 1990, this collective effort was recognized in South Africa with the repeal of apartheid laws and the legalization of African liberation organizations, and, later, in 1991, Nelson Mandela, who would go on to be the country’s first Black president, was released from prison. Of course, Dr. Nesbitt’s discussion of these complex dynamics is a significant addition to AAAS’ speaker series, not only because it contributes new ideas to an ongoing discussion on African(-American) freedom struggles, but also due to its complication of the pre-existing ones in both a compelling and nuanced manner. To keep this dialogue going, as well as access a more detailed description of Dr. Nesbitt’s research, his book “Race for Sanctions: African Americans against Apartheid, 1946-1994” should be found as an excellent point in which to begin.
Comparing Affirmative Actions and Civil Rights in the US and Brazil: Dr. Gladys Mitchell-Walthour

by Olaocha Nwabara
Third Year Ph.D. Student

Is there support for Affirmative Action in Brazil and in the United States? Surprisingly, according to the research that the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Professor Gladys Mitchell-Walthour\(^1\) is conducting, support for affirmative action in the US is dwindling, while support for affirmative action in Brazil is on the rise. This is one important research insight that Gladys Mitchell-Walthour, AAAS’ final speaker of the year, presented at her talk, “Discrimination and Support for Affirmative Action in Brazil and the USA”.

Mitchell-Walthour’s presentation examined perceptions of racial discrimination and support for affirmative action policy in the United States and Brazil. An important finding of Mitchell-Walthour’s research is that in spite of the fact that both Brazil and the US are viewed as very different, in terms of racial politics, African descendants in both countries are less likely to admit that they have faced racial discrimination compared to their willingness to admit the existence of discrimination against blacks. Dr. Mitchell-Walthour’s research problem interrogates African descendants’ support for affirmative action policy in relation to their willingness to admit that they have faced racial discrimination.

Dr. Mitchell-Walthour’s research is important, both on a comparative basis as well as its prospects for civil rights activism. In terms of the comparisons between Brazil and the US, we see that while affirmative action has been an important institution for expanding civil rights in both countries; there is a

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\(^1\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x94NGZDbbiw
distinct difference between how affirmative action has been established, received, and challenged comparatively in both countries. In spite of Ferguson, for example, Mitchell-Walthour’s research troubles the reality that discrimination is on the rise in the US whereby her research shows that African Americans do not perceive the need for the continuance of Affirmative Action policy. Yet in Brazil, with the deconstruction of the myth of the racial democracy and with the more recent establishment of Affirmative Action in a country that comprises over 50% African descendants, racial incidents equivalent to Ferguson such as the React or Be Killed movement (Reaja ou Sera Morto) in Bahia, which is seeking justice for Davi Alves, are fostering an increase in support for Affirmative Action.

Dr. Gladys Mitchell-Walthour is a political scientist specializing in Afro-Brazilian racial identification, racism, and political behavior and opinion. She is currently a visiting professor of Africology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her talk is especially important for us as Black scholar-activists who are concerned about teaching racial consciousness and advocating for racial policies in the US and throughout the African Diaspora.

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2 http://www.aswadiaspora.org/
From the AAAS Undergraduate Minor Program

by Kris Rowe
Master’s – Ph.D. Bridge Student

A new course, new initiatives, new professors, new events, and new students including first year M.A. student Juan Maefield all helped shape the all-new African American and African Studies (AAAS) Undergraduate Minor this semester, Fall 2014.

This semester was the first semester for AAAS 100: Race and Community in Local to Global Perspective, a course taught by new core faculty member Dr. Yomaira Figueroa. According to its course description, this new course covers “multifaceted topics and dialogue on race,” and the “ways that racial categories remain an organizing principle” with a “core focus on African American, African diaspora, and continental African sites of analysis.” Alongside the longstanding AAAS 300: Survey of Africana Studies, AAAS 100 and 300 provided undergraduate students two dynamic courses that explore questions of race, identity, and Blackness.

The AAAS Minor also held two new events this semester, organized by the AAAS Undergraduate Minor Team—a new team of AAAS undergraduate students, graduate students, and core faculty interested in the progression of the AAAS undergraduate program. The first event was a mixer for undergraduate students called “Chat and Chew With AAAS.” Here, undergraduate students who were enrolled in, or interested in, the AAAS minor gathered to eat food, play games, and find out more information about the program. This event took place in late September, throughout AAAS’s office space on the sixth floor of Wells Hall. The undergraduate students partook in games such as Name That Tune (Diaspora Edition) and the raffling off of books by AAAS’s own Dr. Rita Kiki Edozie and Dr. Geneva Smitherman, respectively.

The second major event held by AAAS’s Undergraduate Minor Program this semester was called “#NEWBLACK: A Talkback on Race in 2014.” This talkback consisted of a panel of AAAS-affiliated undergraduate students, graduate
students, and faculty members speaking to the overarching question “Is it about race?” The panelists who participated were: 1) AAAS core faculty members Dr. Rita Kiki Edozie, Dr. Yomaira Figueroa, Dr. Tamara Butler, Dr. Glenn Chambers 2) AAAS graduate students Ashley Newby, Sherrae Hayes, AJ Rice, Janelle Edwards, and Ola Nwabara and 3) AAAS undergraduate students Rashad Timmons and Elvie Banda. AAAS-affiliated undergraduate senior Kenya Abbot moderated the event, which was co-sponsored by African Student Union, African Student Leadership Association, and the James Madison College Office of Diversity Programming. Some of the larger, guiding questions for the event were: “Are we post-race?” “Is ‘it’ about race?” “Does white privilege exist?” “Can race help us understand what is happening in Ferguson, MO?”

The event also allowed room for undergraduate students to “talkback,” and share their own knowledge, opinions, and experiences regarding the given topics at hand: race and racialization, privilege, and racial profiling/police brutality. Relevant Youtube clips were shown to help springboard the conversation, and tweets from the audience were displayed by us following the Twitter hashtag #NEWBLACKatMSU throughout the event. This use of technology allowed the event to be particularly interactive, and allowed for the students to share links, videos, and thoughts with one another. Search the hashtag on Twitter now to see a collection of the fascinating and enlightening commentary from the audience members that night. The AAAS Undergraduate Minor Team plans to host smaller, more specialized Talkbacks like this one in the spring, as a part of an all-new AAAS Undergraduate Minor Talkback Series.

The AAAS Undergraduate Minor also made appearances at Sparticipation and Spartan Remix at the very beginning of the semester. Both of these resource fair-style events are designed as spaces for undergraduate students to find out about all the different organizations, offices, programs, and departments MSU has to offer. We met a lot of undergraduate students at these events, and even got to hang out with Sparty! The influx of undergraduate minor enrollees that has occurred this semester is likely in part due to our presence at these events.
The AAAS Undergraduate Minor was on a roll this semester! The rest of the Undergraduate Minor Team and I cannot wait to see what happens next.
Aaron Ibn Pori Pitts Raz Baaba: Portraits of a Revolutionary Artist

by Tiffany Caesar
Second Year Ph.D. Student

“1950s and the Black Power Movement/Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s acted as a catalyst that have form the principle layer to my work . . . giving it boldness in color and the retentive African Spirit as a personal narrative, exchanging ideas and reassessing the creative interactions between the artist and society.” - Ibn Pori Pitts

From Abandon Poemz . . . or Memory Songz

The Gods are talking, and if you view the work of Aaron Ibn Pori Pitts, you may hear some of these conversations. He uses optimal consciousness, a term created by Linda James Myers, to move the art participant beyond their comfort zone, as they engage in a fluid critique of society. Optimal consciousness, within the framework of Black aesthetics, suggests that the role of the artist is to provide art that raises the consciousness of the people. The Black artist has to create work that is functional to the society to evoke change. Particularly in the case of Ibn, his work is some where between heaven and earth, as he tries to help the black community heal itself.

I received the chance to participate in Ibn’s healing process on Saturday, September 13, at the Charles Wright Museum Liberation of African American History film series. They were showing a documentary on his life called- Raz Baaba Aaron Ibn Pori Pitts: Portraits of a Revolutionary Artist. The film allowed us to see an intimate viewing of his life, as his family, friends, and admirers discussed how his medicinal work touched their lives. He was truly a renaissance man, described as a Pan-Afrikanist Activist, Spiritual Artist, Poet, and Videographer from Detroit. Ibn was a key player in the Black Cultural Arts Movement and the Black Labor Movement of the 1960s, where his artwork and activism reigned supreme. Some of his accomplishments included an Artist-in-residence at the Charles H. Wright Museum and Metro Times, publisher of Black Graphics International, and founding member of PitchBlackPoetry.
However, his relationship with the spiritual world provides you with an esoteric moment. Myers further explains how consciousness is a manifestation of your spirit, the fusion of the sacred and secular within Ibn's work that raises the consciousness, affects the mind, body, and soul. Inspired by the Yoruba God Ogun, the deity of iron, war, hunting, and politics, he created a remarkable installation out of an old Chevy called, *Urban Monumentz*. This piece was further described as an altar to the West African Orishas, a transformational experience, musical ritual, and spiritually charged. Many of Ibn's creative manifestos pay homage to Ogun, through its incorporation of iron. This is most prominent in his automobile artworks described as Afro-futurist shrines dedicated to the ancestors; this piece in particular has been featured in Forbes for its brilliance. In one of his creations called *Sweet African Magic* he mixes poetry and drums, while ritualizing some of the Yoruba's spiritual elements with cowry shells, distinctive symbols, and face paintings, as you participate in an invocation ceremony—a truly humbling experience as he reverence the Gods.

Bringing optimal consciousness to his work, he knows his mission in life. Even when paralyzed in a wheel chair, you can see Ibn flying in the sky, his transcendental artwork will take you anywhere within multiple revolution.
A Report: Grassroots Planning for Black Liberation Education in Detroit

by Tiffany Caesar
2nd Year PhD Student

Saturday, November 1st at the Paul/Robeson Malcolm X Academy in Detroit there was a Midwestern Strategic Planning Forum: For A Black Education For Liberation Agenda. During this energetic event, people were split into praxis teams to discuss critical issues surrounding African children’s educational needs. The praxis teams included professors, educators, parents, students, and community activists brainstorming on educational solutions that work for students of color. A Black Educational Congress (ABEC) is a network of Black educators and activists from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean with intergenerational collaborations that collectively work towards the elevation and celebration of African children. The keynote speakers included Dr. Geneva Smitherman, University Distinguished Professor Emerita in English and African American and African Studies at Michigan State University, Dr. Jeffery D. Robinson, Principal at Paul Robeson/Malcolm X Academy, and Assistant Adjunct professor in African American and African studies at MSU and Mr. A.J. Rice, an African American and African Studies doctoral student at MSU.

Dr. Jeffery Robinson, opened with a robust discussion surrounding multi-million dollar budget cuts that affected his school’s daily obligations. He mentioned how state and federal money guaranteed for his school, mysteriously disappeared as other schools in white districts were expanding. Dr. Robinson spoke of one of his elementary teachers having more than 40 students in her classroom because of the budget cuts.
Within his speech there was passion to continue the long fight to provide his children with adequate education despite the lack of federal funds.

I attended the praxis on African Centered Education lead by Kenfentse K Chike, professor in Africana Studies department at Wayne State University. We talked about the importance of having a curriculum that empowered African children through their heritage and provided a rigorous academic component. There were also discussions on the development of African Centered Educational institutions, and how we can sustain them.

Overall it was a great experience, truly inspiring as people gathered harmoniously with a mission to critique, challenge, and change educational programs that are destructive to the black child's mind.
Researching and Interning in South Africa: My Experiences

by Kenya Abbott
Senior Undergraduate Student

Upon my arrival, some 15 plus hours later, I couldn’t imagine but to feel a sense of home. Although it was clear I was an outsider, I had arrived to the motherland, Africa. I had arrived at Africa, not to study land or animals or live in a village, but to study and conduct research on something that was important to me and important to others. This trip created so many opportunities to engage in different spaces, gaining different perspectives and understandings of what things were like in South Africa. Both how they differed and related to United States often triggered my mind. Our first night out to grab a bite to eat, I immediately recognized the McDonalds and KFC stores. Not what exactly I expected to see so quick, or so much. But it was there. Things weren’t as different as I expected. It is eye opening because when you are staying in Pretoria and visiting Johannesburg constantly, you are seeing these mixed communities, as well as participating in them. The perception becomes integration. It is this idea of freedom that comes to mind. However, when you actually engage these communities, shopping, dining, hanging out, you start to see another reality.

While in South Africa, I had the opportunity to intern with the African Union International School, teaching 2 classes of students ranging from middle school to first year high school. The basis of the class I co-taught/assisted was to teach young students the importance of research. My participation in this internship shaped much of my experience and my ability to step outside of my comfort zone in South Africa. Often I like to stay in the background instead of being in front of an audience or interacting with others, however, I was able to engage in the complete opposite. I actually had to stand in front of young students and engage them in lessons and help orchestrate a class. This is an experience that not only can you put on a resume, but also one that you can learn from. It taught me some critical things about engaging young people and how to teach at some capacity.

A few places stood out for me on this trip; the Sangoma ritual, Mapungubwe and Erasmus. The Sangoma Ritual was very humbling. This was a religious practice, often looked at as taboo in South Africa. They allowed us an opportunity to participate and observe. It was exciting for me to see something like this in person. I was able to connect some traditions from black churches here at home.
and compare to some the dances through the ways they moved. Our trip to Mapungubwe was also a highlighted moment. The amount of peace that I experienced at Mapungubwe was amazing. From seeing sunsets each day we were there to climbing to the mountain top of Mapungubwe to seeing the sky full of bright stars each night to the great food. And lastly the visit to Erasmus was one of the most touching. We were able to visit a self sustaining village. Here, they make their own bricks, offer their own schools, make their own clothes, grow their own food, and much more. Visiting them and having the opportunity to share experiences became a space of unity. Many of us shed tears and expressed a sense of home, and the feelings were reciprocated as they were as welcoming as we were open.

This study abroad opportunity impacted me in ways that are still remnant. I had an opportunity to challenge my ignorance. It is one thing to hear about somewhere or even read about it, but to actually visit and learn about it through observation is an awesome experience. As a black girl from America, visiting South Africa 20 years after their apartheid and to see how these impacts have affected them and develop on my understanding of how Slavery and Jim Crow laws have impacted African Americans has been one of the most educational experiences I have engaged. Although in South Africa I may be considered colored, it is important to note the ways in which both identity and experiences shape us across the globe. Visiting South Africa through the study abroad program “Research and Action in the New South Africa” placed many things into perspective not only abroad but back in America. As an undergraduate student, it is not often that we are able to go out and test our own research, or as I look at it, study personal experiences that we continually are trying to make sense of. I found the opportunity worthwhile. I definitely think that more undergraduate students should take advantage of this opportunity, not only to become more active but to also become more aware. I definitely learned a lot about South Africa, the U.S. and myself. With opportunities as such, we are able to develop our understandings, build upon them and teach others.
Project E-Sankofa and Digital Story-telling at MSU AAAS

by Ramon Jenkins
Third Year Ph.D. Student

With MSU Global and MSU IT-Services Teaching and Learning, MSU-African American and African Studies will enter the fray of offering its very own Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in Spring/Summer 15. The MOOC will be known as Project e-Sankofa: The Global Black Family, and while the actual MOOC course will be offered beginning summer 2015; during the spring semester AAAS will convene several workshops and a speaker series on behalf of Project E-Sankofa, called “Digital Storytelling in Black/Africana Studies”.

Project E-Sankofa leverages for AAAS a new digital disciplinary study (in our case inter-disciplinary digital humanities and digital social sciences) that uses computational methods to answer existing research questions, or to challenge existing theoretical paradigms. The objective of the MOOC is to cultivate community activism through academic scholarship and research in Black Studies among MSU students, faculty, and the community. The idea for a Black/Africana Studies MOOC was proposed by Keesa Johnson Muhammad, who is an instructional Designer for IMSU’s T-Services Teaching and Learning. [https://www.youtube.com/user/keesav](https://www.youtube.com/user/keesav).

As instructional designer, Ms. Muhammad will be responsible for identifying best practices online blended learning. With the intellectual guidance of the AAAS director and faculty, Ms. Muhammad will be incorporating technology, videos, and video conferencing materials into the Africana Studies curriculum which will be useful for research and scholarship as it pertains to the black experience.

The name for Project E-Sankofa “Sankofa” is drawn from Akan (Ghanaian) oral tradition, a proverb that means, it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.
The African value embedded in the Sankofa Adinkra image (Akan visual symbol that represent concepts), and its associated proverb, informs a core-curricular mandate for teaching and research in Black/Africana Studies discipline. The MOOC will focus on topics and literature pertaining to: Race and Blackness, the Black Holocaust, Black Aesthetics and Arts; Black Feminism & Sexuality, and the Global Black Family.

*Project E-Sankofa* will be utilized as a tool for engaging the public about issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class in a historical context. Scholars whose lectures will be featured are: Eric McDuffie (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign), Adam Banks (University of Kentucky), and Bryan Carter (University of Arizona). Scholars involved in *Project E-Sankofa*, will present research that exhibits complex and nuanced ways of understanding the Africana experience.

Keesa Muhammad says, “Think of it as having access to your own a virtual library/archive solely for Black Studies students, faculty, and community members”. African American and African Studies is delighted to have the opportunity to host *Project E-Sankofa* next year, and we are grateful to MSU’s Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives for lending its financial support to the project through the **Creative Excellence in Inclusion Grant (CEIG)**.

http://www.inclusion.msu.edu/FundingOpportunities/CIEG.html
Graduate Student Voices on South Africa: 20 Years Post-Apartheid

by Kathryn Mara
Second Year Masters Student

April 27, 1994, marks the end of South African Apartheid, a heroic feat not only within the country itself, but also in global Pan-African consciousness. To discuss the twenty-year interim since the abolishment of this government-sanctioned system of oppression, Michigan State University’s African American and African Studies program hosted a panel discussion on October 24, appropriately titled “Graduate Student Voices on South Africa: 20 Years Post-Apartheid.” The purpose of the panel additionally served to frame their annual study abroad program, “Research and Action in the New South Africa,” in light of such topics as the status of race relations, the progress of party politics, the African philosophy of Ubuntuism, and the development of an African Renaissance.

Accompanied by relevant media sources, as well as topical introductions by Dr. Rita Kiki Edozie (Professor of International Relations and African Affairs, Director of AAAS) and Kathryn Mara (Masters Student, AAAS), commentator, Ola Nwabara (PhD Student, AAAS), professionally guided discussion of the featured panelists, Akil Cornelius (PhD Student, History), Yeukai Mlambo (PhD Student, Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education), A.J. Rice (PhD Student, AAAS), and David Walton (PhD Student, AAAS and History). Each of the panelists, save Ms. Mlambo who came to MSU by way of her family home in South Africa, have participated in Research and Action in the New South Africa, and Ms. Nwabara will be attending for her third time this summer, her second as program leader.
Appropriately, the participants boasted a wide range of research interests. Indeed, Mr. Cornelius aims to examine Venda culture and civilization with the assistance of archeological sources, while Ms. Mlambo hopes to investigate issues of diversity and race in higher education and women in STEM-related topics in South Africa. Mr. Rice’s research, on the other hand, is interested in conducting a comparative study on race and politics in urban landscapes in both the United States and South Africa, while Mr. Walton’s study is concerned with, what he terms as, “parallel institutions” in the U.S. and South Africa and comparable freedom struggles. Even Ms. Nwabara’s area of inquiry contributes to this broad spectrum in her analysis of Nigerian immigrants’ cultural output in such spaces as the U.S. and South Africa.

The diversity of the speakers’ interests is fitting, insofar as it represents the interdisciplinary of AAAS’ study abroad initiative as a whole. “Research and Action in the New South Africa” not only accepts, but encourages, both undergraduate and graduate students from a host of disciplines, providing them the opportunity to implement critical ethnographic techniques and conduct field-research in an international context. Of course, students are allowed flexibility in selecting their research topic, so that it is accessible to their own theoretical framework(s), but as alluded to by the panelists’ own comments on and aspirations for the study of South Africa, the possibilities for study are growing at an increasingly expansive rate. In addition, students will be assigned a topically relevant internship, which may assist in further grounding their research inquiry. The program maintains close partnerships with the University of South Africa’s Archie Mafeje Institute for Applied Social Policy Research, UNISA’s Centre for Pan African Languages and Cultural Development, UNISA’s Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, and the African Union International School. In years past, internships have been assigned at the above-listed institutions.

As a further similarity to the panel discussion, AAAS’ study abroad initiative also provides participants with an appropriate context in which to conduct research and perform service activities in post-apartheid South Africa. Namely, it will host a complex assortment of seminars on topics such as apartheid history, race and identity, politics and
society, language and culture, and community development, as well as encourage participation at conferences regarding such subjects as race and Pan-Africanism. Additionally, it will provide students with training in the Zulu language, one of South Africa's eleven official languages and one of its nine African languages. Finally, the program will also allow for pertinent excursions, most promisingly trips to Mapungubwe National Park, museums such as the Apartheid Museum and the Hector Pieterson Museum, and relevant arts and culture events as they arise.

In closing, “Graduate Student Voices on South Africa: 20 Years Post-Apartheid” served as an excellent precursor to AAAS' study abroad program, “Research and Action in the New South Africa,” in that they both underscore the necessity of field-research in international case studies, as well as showcase the wide variety of disciplinary frameworks that can be used in the study of Africa, at large. Although the panel discussion is presently over, the reader is further encouraged to pursue more information on the study abroad program, which will be hosted again during the summer session (May, 19- June 17, 2015) and is available for both undergraduate/graduate credit. A more detailed narrative can be found here: https://www.msu.edu/~aaas/study_abroad.html, and if the reader has any more questions, he/she should feel free to contact the program coordinator, Kathryn Mara (marakath@msu.edu), or the program leader, Ola Nwabara (nwbaral@msu.edu).
Student Profile: Brittany O’Neal, Ph.D. Candidate – Visiting Assistant Professor of Africology and African American Studies at Eastern Michigan University

by Joyce Farley
First Year PhD Student


This is the checklist of academic achievement for PhD candidate Brittany O’Neal, a native of Lima, Ohio. She is a member of the 2005 African and African American Studies (AAAS) program cohort here at Michigan State University. Prior to coming to MSU, she earned both her bachelors and masters in African American Studies at the Ohio State University—the other Big Ten school.

Currently, O’Neal is an adjunct professor at Eastern Michigan University in Africology and African American Studies. Like most doctoral students and candidates, O’Neal, finds herself masterfully juggling the rigor, demands and never ending task list of teaching, reading, writing, conducting research, and most of all, finding time for life outside of the academy. In addition to teaching, she is working tirelessly on completing her magnum opus (dissertation)—Apologia for Black Liberation: The Concept of God in James H. Cone’s Black Liberation Theology & William R. Jones Humanocentric Theism.

She is quick to make the distinction that her work is more philosophical, and at one point at time was at the crux of her scholastic anxiety.

“I’m doing religion, but I’m not a religious person. I felt very fearful of presenting my work to a larger audience, because I was afraid of the feedback I would get, and would be reprimanded for my views. So, realizing in academia, that it is a safe place. That we are all suppose to be able to express our views openly without retribution,” says O’Neal.

O’Neal embraces the term scholar-activist with gusto. In her second year, she served as treasurer for the Sankofa
Graduate Organization (now the Sankofa Graduate Union) and participated in community service and activism. The Sankofa Graduate Union is a supportive academic and community oriented organization for AAAS students. While finishing coursework, she fulfilled her international internship at the Hackney Museum in London, England. She is proud to admit that her time there coincided with the 200th anniversary of the abolishment of the slave trade, which she says was a positive experience. O’Neal’s domestic internship allowed her to help women who survived abusive relationships with the organization Women in Need in New York City, a non-profit.

As her time at MSU comes to a close and she prepares for the next phase of life, O’Neal is quick to share her wisdom gained during this experience. One of those lessons includes growing intra and interpersonally. “Learning how to navigate this type of [university] terrain, as we are navigating personal, political and academic interests. So, learning how to work with different people and work within adversities. So, working through different directors—now and in the future. Knowing how to proceed and not being afraid, I guess in a sense,” says O’Neal.

O’Neal credits Dr. Edozie with supporting her professional growth, and keeping both herself and fellow colleagues abreast to job openings and current trends in the discipline. Also, O’Neal praises AGEP (Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate) for professional development and the needed camaraderie for students of color.

Like an elder in the AAAS community, O’Neal shares sagacious advice for emerging scholars, she wishes someone would have told her, “Look at the larger African experience/African American experience—be open and be willing to have a dualistic approach and be aware of what’s going on in the program and Black studies,” says O’Neal.
Dr. Yomaira Figueroa and The Afro-Latin/Spanish African Diaspora

by Bernie Moore
1st Year PhD Student

Dr. Yomaira Figueroa was hired this year as a new Assistant Professor in African and African American Diaspora Studies, jointly appointed by the Department of English and the Global Studies and African American & African Studies programs. She recently completed her doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation was entitled: “Languages of Exile and Diaspora: A Decolonial Approach to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea and the U.S. Latin@ Caribbean.”

Dr. Figueroa hails from Hoboken, New Jersey, and she is a first generation Afro-Puerto Rican. She was a McNair Scholar during her undergrad at Rutgers, where she studied English, Women/Gender Studies, and Puerto Rican/Hispanic Studies.

Although originally inspired to be a High School English teacher, Dr. Figueroa’s trajectory changed as she witnessed large numbers of her African American and Latino/a colleagues struggling at Rutgers, sometimes having to drop out. She owes her success to many of the supportive undergraduate professors who kept her on track and helped her develop her craft. She decided to pursue graduate school, so that she could fulfill this supportive role in the future.

She entered her PhD program at UC Berkeley and immediately noticed a distinct identity crisis. Being Afro-Latina in California is very different than in New York and New Jersey, where most Latinos/as hail from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. In California, where most Latinos/as are Central American or Chicano/a, she was read differently, often not as Latina. This experience, according to Dr. Figueroa, made race much more salient to her, influencing her research accordingly.

I asked her about her research on Equatorial Guinea, inquiring how she became interested in this. She told me that there’s a very interesting comparison to be made
between EG literature and Hispanic literature in the United States. Most EG literature is Spanish-language and produced from Spain in a not dissimilar way that Latino/a Caribbean literature is often produced in the U.S. This makes, she argues, an “interesting South-South dialogue from the North.”

She is currently teaching courses on diasporic experiences of colonization and race. Her ideal course would teach decolonial theory and Afro-Diasporic literature. Dr. Figueroa can be contacted at yomairaf@msu.edu.

Click here for more information on Dr. Figueroa.
New Core Faculty Spotlight
Dr. Tamara Butler and Community Pedagogies

by Shelby Pumphrey
First Year PhD Student

As many of you know, Tamara Butler is one of the newest members of the African American and African Studies core faculty with a dual appointment in the English Department. The new professor comes to MSU from Johns Island, South Carolina, by way of Columbus, Ohio, where she completed the PhD. program in Education with a specialization in Multicultural and Equity Studies at The Ohio State University. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry from Xavier University of Louisiana and Master of Arts degrees in African American and African Studies and Education from The Ohio State University. Her research interests include youth activism, community engagement, critical multiculturalism and critical literacies. Her dissertation focused on educator and activist Septima Clark’s work with the Sea Island Citizenship Schools in rural South Carolina during the 1950s and 1960s. To complete the project she also worked with students in middle and high school classrooms to get a better understanding of how students negotiated difference and diversity to develop their own social justice-oriented projects.

The Ohio State and Xavier University alum taught the AAAS 832: Multicultural and Critical Pedagogical Methods in African American and African Studies core course with Dr. Lee June this past fall and will teach AAAS 495: Advanced Research in African American and African Studies in the coming spring semester. She stresses the importance of forming a relationship to the texts as students critically engage assumptions and implications of knowledge production. One of her favorite aspects of teaching is the opportunity to learn with her students, and she works especially hard to create and maintain an open and inviting learning space.
Dr. Butler has lots of great ideas about how she can help increase visibility for both AAAS and English at MSU and in larger Lansing community. Earlier this semester she helped to bring Dr. Valerie Kinloch, professor of Literacy Studies and Chief Diversity Officer in the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University, to MSU for “Crossing Boundaries: Engaging, Serving, and Learning with/in Communities,” which started an engaging dialogue among with students and faculty from units across the University, including AAAS, WRAC and English. Dr. Butler hopes to help bring similar speakers to campus in the future, as a way to start larger conversations about education, social justice and literacy.

Her long-term goals include earning tenure and publishing more information about St. Johns Island. She would like to work with her mother, a Johns Island native as well, to publish histories of the people living on Johns Island.

When asked about designing her ideal course, Butler said that it would be a mixed graduate and undergraduate course entitled *Youth Activist Narratives*. The reading list would be made up of non-fiction texts of understudied heroines and heroes and would serve to help students understand how these stories fit into or collide with traditional activist narratives. The cross-listed AAAS and English course would include texts like Guy Carawan’s *Ain’t You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?* and Endesha Ida Mae Hollins’ *From the Mississippi Delta*.

Please help me in extending a warm welcome to one of the newest members of the AAAS family.
The Fall 2014 New Grad Student Cohort

Welcome!

Bernie, Juan, Joyce, Shingi, Leah, and Shelby
STATEMENT ON THE FAILURE TO INDICT DARREN WILSON

Sankofa Graduate Student Union

November 25, 2014—On Monday evening shortly after 9 p.m. EST, a grand jury decision out of Clayton, Mo., sent shockwaves of grief, despair, anger, and frustration across the country. A jury of three Blacks and nine whites decided not to proceed with a trial against Officer Darren Wilson in the murder of Michael Brown, a Black, unarmed teenager in Ferguson, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. The detailed report from prosecutor Robert McCulloch, in which he gave a timeline of events leading up to and after the shooting, raised more questions and provided very few answers. The failure of the grand jury to proceed with a trial has sent a very clear message to not only people of color, but the nation as well--race, as an identifier, has and will always have a place in American democracy, justice, economics and/or the lack thereof.

The Sankofa Graduate Union and its executive board, stand with not just the family of Michael Brown, but with the enraged residents of Ferguson and the countless Black and brown victims of police violence across the country. As an organization of Black master’s and doctoral students, our program of over forty students is a testament to our dedication in sustaining, developing, and historicizing the Black experience in this country and throughout the world. Moreover, we accept the responsibility as scholar activists, the title on which the field of Black Studies was founded on. We also support and ask Attorney General Eric Holder and the Justice Department to seek criminal charges against Wilson, an investigation into the Ferguson Police Department, and establishing a government oversight group of such cases so that the victims of these crimes are not relegated to the periphery of national memory or statistical data.

In the midst of this specific, incredibly tragic, chain of events it is important to remember that the case of Michael Brown and Darren Wilson is far, far from an anomaly. Violent forms of police
brutality and vigilante justice are enacted onto the bodies of Black and brown men and women (both trans and cis) constantly. A Black person is killed by a police officer every 28 hours in this country. Even this staggering statistic does not take into account the countless episodes of harassment, abuse, racial profiling, and hyper-policing enacted by law enforcement that are consistently and widely reported by Black Americans. It is within this context of racialized, systematic, and pervasive violations against Black bodies that phrases that speak to “the big picture” become critical—phrases like “militarization of police,” “mass incarceration,” “criminalization of Blackness,” and ultimately “anti-Blackness.”


As scholars of both domestic and international Black experiences, it is our duty to speak truth to power in this case and others. We offer counternarratives to the distracting messages of “Black on Black crime” and “looting.” From our experiences, we speak to the hurt of our communities and seek to offer spaces of solace and healing through education and advocacy of justice.

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3 “A Black person is killed every 28 hours by police”
See also:

3. “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the ‘Race Question’ in the US” Loic Wacquant

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201.983.3787
Professors Mahomed Bamba is Visiting Scholar with the African American and African Studies program at Michigan State University from Bahia, Brazil. In Brazil, Dr. Bamba is a “Professor Adjunto 3” of the theory and history of cinema, the equivalent of an Assistant Professor in the US, at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil. Professor Bamba teaches courses in film and cinema studies, and his research focuses on film reception in African and African Diaspora cinema. Dr. Bamba has published several books, including “A Recepcao Cinematografica: teoria e estudos de caso” translated as “Film Reception: Theory and Case Studies”, “Filmes Da Africa E Da Diaspora” or in English “Films from Africa and the Diaspora”, and finally, “O Legivel e o Visivei no Cinema: O Signo Escrito na Construcao e na Leitura Filmicas”...” or “The Visible and the Readable in Cinema: the signs of writing in film construction”.

In 2012, Dr. Bamba began a research project on film reception in the African Diaspora. The research objective sought to expand his research on reception modes of African films in Brazil to the larger African Diaspora in the United States. Then, Dr. Bamba would be interested in examining and comparing the protocols and mechanisms of audience receptions of films exhibited at African film festivals in both Brazil and North America, including Canada and the US. This research brought Dr. Bamba to a 2013 conference in Princeton where he was invited to present a scholarly paper on the topic. There, Dr. Bamba met African American and African Studies’ core faculty and African literature and film professor, Dr. Kenneth Harrow.

In discussions with Professor Harrow, Dr. Bamba discovered the African American and African Studies
program at MSU. Dr. Bamba was excited about the distinctiveness of the African American and African Studies curricular and research agenda, which would reveal deeper questions and inquiries of the multi-dimensional and multi-subject lived experiences of Black peoples around the world. He would see in the academic unit the prospects of conducting film research in such a program preferably to a cinema studies program. That is to say, Bamba’s research raises questions about the African Diaspora experience outside of Brazil. He considered how this experience was negotiated in a racialized state society that was different from Brazil. Dr. Harrow introduced Dr. Bamba to Dr. Edozie, the program’s Director who in turn approved Dr. Bamba’s Brazilian Senior Professor Fellowship application to be a visiting scholar at MSU’s AAAS.

As visiting scholar of African Diaspora film at AAAS, Dr. Bamba hit the ground running in immersing himself into engaged research and scholarship in the US, Canada, and the UK. Since April 2014, Dr. Bamba has conducted field research on the Vues D’Afrique (The Montreal African Film Festival) and the African Film Congress in Canada. He has attended the New York African Film Festival, and has presented a paper on African Diaspora film festivals at the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom (ASAUK). In describing the value of these experiences to his research, Dr. Bamba says that he is more observant of the many factors that are involved in the construction and negotiation of African Diaspora community-making and experiencing. For example, he now sees how film can be used in these experiences as cultural objects that provide an artistic experience that serves to construct an imaginary and symbolic attachment for African Diaspora consumers of film. At a screening and community panel discuss of Raoul Peck’s film, Lumumba, at the Charles Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Bamba not only observed the way that the audience learned about the political struggles of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; but especially observed the way that the same audiences linked the Congolese experiences to their own socio-political realities in Detroit.

Dr. Bamba has conducted intensive research at the Africana Studies and African American Studies library at MSU. He will combine the findings that he draws from both this research and his field research to complete a new book on the comparative study of African film reception at film festivals in North America. Dr. Bamba will also contribute a chapter to an edited volume research project on the Study of the African Diaspora. His chapter will use the research that he compiled at the New York African Film and Montreal African film festivals presenting them as a case studies to explore audience reception of African films in Northern American Black community contexts. Already, Dr. Bamba
has observed the preeminence of Nigerian films represented at African Diaspora film festivals. Such films, he says, attract large Nigerian diaspora audiences who seem to explicitly resonate with the film’s themes. Bamba observes in this regard that the audience reaction is an intentional strategy of the African film festival organizers who wish to provide these festivals as platforms for African diaspora dialogues.

Dr. Bamba will complete his visiting scholarship at MSU’s AAAS in February 2015 when he will return to Bahia, Brazil. So far, at MSU’s AAAS, Dr. Bamba says that he has benefitted tremendously from the Brazilian-US faculty exchange. He has not only met but has collaborated with several AAAS scholars and students to deepen his research and scholarship. When he returns, Dr. Bamba hopes to build upon these relationships to formulate a shorter scholarly and academic bridge among the African Diaspora academy. He welcomes Dr. Edozie, Dr. Harrow, Dr. Hamilton-Wray, and AAAS students to Bahia, Brazil to follow-up on the African Diaspora bridge-building.
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