My comments in this newsletter will be relatively brief, as has been my tenure as program director. It was scarcely two weeks ago (I'm writing this on April 11) that Dean Owens invited me to serve as acting director of AAS from now until the end of December, when Professor Osumare will begin her three-year term as director.

I accepted Dean Owens' offer for several reasons, some personal, some professional. A personal motive has been the need to keep busy. I retired as a professor in the English department in November 2007, and after about four months, I began telling people that retirement was fine, but that every time I became bored, I either spent money or ate something. Coming back to work in the dean's office, as I did in September 2008, and now serving as interim director of AAS, has helped to keep my money in my wallet and my waist line (more or less) in trim.

A far more important, and more serious, motive mingles the personal and the professional. The motive is my profound admiration for AAS, its faculty, its students, and its staff. My association with the program goes back nearly twenty years, to my time as chair of English, when I worked closely with Professor Jon Stewart, then the AAS.

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The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

a joke about the panic referring to Douglas Adam's book

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By Bettina Ng’weno,

Teaching “African Descent Communities and Cultures of Asia”

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seats, their eyes open wide like deer in the headlights, their

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like a wave as I cross the threshold of the classroom. I have

never in eight years of teaching experienced anything like this. I do not know what to do. My initial reaction is one of

nerves. I feel like laughing, a typical nervous reaction.

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The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy where the first rule is “Do not Panic!” I write this on the board. Somehow I fear the joke is not working and not only because it is a joke of a different generation, but because no one is hearing me anymore. I try to tell my students to be confident, to trust themselves and to realize that they know much more than they think they know. They do not believe me.

They do not believe me because together my students and I have taken a walk into uncharted territory and in the process we have totally gone beyond our comfort zone. We have ventured into an area where our assumptions no longer stand and our theories about the way the world works are shattered. My students do not believe me because they have no easy answers to fall back on. Few have information learnt in other classes to mobilize for this class. They must rely on their own logic and critical thinking and their understanding of the new, difficult and challenging material they have learnt in class. They don’t believe me because they don’t realize the place they stand is on the edge of discovery. They underestimate their ability. On the first day of class I did a survey of the class to see how much they already knew about African descent communities in Asia. Most people knew very little and as one student stated

continuing on page 3

Dr. Milmon Harrison's term as Director of the Program in African American and African Studies comes to an end in 2010-2011 school year. During his tenure as Director, he helped to foster a congenial working environment in which the African American and African Studies program continued to experience high student enrollments. We also conducted a successful search to hire an Africanist who attracted a very talented pool of applicants. We began implementing our Graduate Designated Emphasis and enrolled the first students in the Graduate Designated Emphasis for African American and African Studies. We are happy to report that the student in question will be earning his doctorate degree in history at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Dr. Harrison also worked to revive communication lines between the program and various student groups on campus. He helped the program manage a smooth transition to the new administrative arrangements that we had to adopt as a cost-cutting measure in our section of the college. Thanks to his leadership in this area, the transition was not as difficult as might have been expected despite the time-intensive nature of his administrative service on behalf of the program, he continued to teach very popular and highly subscribed classes. Dr. Harrison has earned a well-deserved sabbatical and he will be succeeded as Director by Dr. Halifu Osumare in the winter quarter of 2012.

Dr. Milmon Harrison

Our Gratitude to Milmon Harrison

By Moradewun Adejunmobi

Teaching “African Descent Communities and Cultures of Asia”

By Bettina Ng’weno, Associate Professor, African American and African Studies

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continuing on page 3

“what are the prerequisites for this class because I could not answer anything.” I answered that there were no prereq-

usites but he should not worry since all of the rest of the class also did not know anything about the subject either.

I should have answered, “the only prerequisite is confi-
dence and a willingness to take a chance.”

Now at the end of the quarter, I am immensely impressed by the willingness to take a chance exhibited by my students this winter quarter 2011, as I taught the class AAS 107C for the first time. The class is officially called “African Descent Communities and Cultures of Europe and Asia.” While the class has been part of our course offering for many years, I realized just before I taught the class that it had never been taught before. So this was a first for many of us, for the program, for me and for my students. Since I wanted to utilize my experience doing new research on the Indian Ocean region, I decided that I would concentrate on Asia in my teaching of the class. I announced this on the first day. I thought there would be mass exodus because I assumed they would have more interest in Europe, as people of African descent in Europe are more visible and known. Only eight students dropped the class and I was left with sixty students, sixty students who from that moment on ventured into the unknown.

This class was a challenge in many ways for me. Not only did I experience totally new things within the classroom (like mass panic), but the preparation was also dif-

ficult. The subject is very little researched and the reading sources are few, of varying quality and hardly comprehen-

sive. It was a huge struggle to put together a syllabus. I designed the course to get a comparative understanding of people of African descent in Asia and the course examines people in many countries with varied rich histories. Stu-

dents thus needed to understand the histories that brought Africans to Asia, as they were located in specific places in Africa, the Indian Ocean and in specific Asian countries. These histories were both recent and ancient histories, that have established diasporic communities in Asia. They also needed to understand the context into which Afri-
cans entered Asia and the resulting consequences for their lives, their communities and legacies. They also needed to know how ideas of Africa, slavery and race changed with time and place. And, which is important, they had to think about slavery newly. They had to think of what it meant at different times and how it was different from or similar to what we know about slavery in the Americas.

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However students were not the only ones with new things to think about. I quickly realized that I needed

extensive external reading on things like; the caste system in India, the expansion of Muslim empires, Sufism, or

musical instruments, to be able to put the cultures and practices of people of African descent in Asia into wider

social, political, religious, or musical contexts. I too had to think differently about how to approach the region of the

Indian Ocean with its varied and multiple influences that changed the way Africa and Africans were and are thought about. How were the poor communities of African descent in India today related to the ruling African elite of India of the 16th and 17th century? What do you do with a problem of silences? What was the best approach when teaching? How do I balance the acquisition of knowledge with the acquisition of tools to critically use, interpret and produce knowledge? How do we critically think about things we have very little information about? Throughout the whole course I was plagued by the struggle between providing sufficient knowledge or developing the theories to interpret or analyze this knowledge.

My students came to class everyday with questions. I think that after the midterm most students settled into the space of discovery and took up an interest in the subject such that they would ask questions that troubled them. One of the assignments of the class was a presentation about current African descent communities in Asia. Here

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**Afro-descendent communities in Asia: A Reader’s Experience**

By Michael Apamaku, Graduate Student

AAS 107C examines the lives, cultures and religious practices of African descent communities who have been translocated to various countries in the Middle East and Asia over many centuries. Newly conceived by Dr. Bettina Ng’weno, this exciting and informative class had its inaugural lecture in Winter, 2011, with 65 very enthusiastic enrollees majoring in international relations, history and linguistics, to mention a few.

In this class, contemporary diasporic Afro-descendent communities in Middle East and Asia were analyzed; the origins of these communities were traced, and the extent to which their cultures remained static or evolved over time was explored in detail. Given the dearth of publications on the history and lives of diasporic African communities in Asia, and the persistent questions regarding the origins of these communities, this class is relevant to reconstitute the identity of diasporic communities removed from Africa over past centuries. It is also relevant for anyone interested analyzing the origins of diasporic groups and the resultant evolution of cultures over time.

**“Historically, waves of Africans had been translocated to Asia to provide slave labor, and to participate in trade and commerce.”**

– Michael Apamaku

Historically, waves of Africans had been translocated to Asia to provide slave labor, and to participate in trade and commerce. In some countries today, some of these communities are still recognizable African in phenotype and religious and cultural expressions. Other communities—hybrid communities have resulted, depending on the need to maintain a distinct cultural identity, and the need to integrate into their adopted societies.

Before this class, my knowledge of the subject of diasporic Afro-descendent communities had been limited to what I had read in different books: diasporic African communities in the Americas had been brought to the new world in response to the insatiable demand for slave labor on plantations. Indeed, the word “diaspora” in my mind was synonymous and restricted to what I had read of the African American experience. My education on this subject was soon to change. In the class, well-chosen publications for class discussions coupled with lively contributions from a very enthusiastic class helped accelerate the learning experience for me and all involved.

While the current living conditions of Afro-descendent communities in the Middle East and Asia are characterized by discrimination (for the most part), with communities barely existing at the fringes of mainstream society, these poor living conditions belie a past rich in great tales of conquest by military slaves like Malik Ambar (1549-1626). Born in Ethiopia, Malik Ambar played an important role in shaping the history and politics of the Ahmadicq Sultanate in medieval India. An unlikely candidate, Malik Ambar rose out of poverty and enslavement to become Prime Minister of the Ahmadicq Sultanate, and was notably a kingmaker not to mention his renowned administrative acumen.

Highlighting such historic facts is very necessary to educate, change prevailing perceptions, and help reconstruct the identities of these Afro-descendent communities greatly stigmatized by slavery. Situating in on class discussions, frequent meetings with Dr. Ng’weno, and grading highly insightful student papers provided an excellent opportunity to learn about a history not highlighted in the available textbooks, for little research effort has been directed to the subject. I now have a greater appreciation for the diasporic Afro-descendent communities and the roles these communities have played in shaping the cultures and histories of their adopted lands.

Now that my interest in the subject has been stimulated, I will be very interested to follow the history of Afro-descendent communities in my spare time, and hopefully even be a part of the class the second time it is offered. I highly encourage anyone with an interest in the subject to enroll in this very exciting class which will be offered every winter!

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**“The many trade routes that aided the movement of people from Africa’s lengthy eastern coast to the many Asian countries were complicated...”**

By Carolina Oguz, Senior Sociology and Psychology Double Major

I was born and raised in California. I lived here until I had the opportunity to spend my high school years in Minnesota. I moved at age fourteen to a completely different environment. I lived in a house with twelve other teenage girls of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, most of them, however, were African American. Every February the girls and I would go to events held in downtown Minneapolis celebrating Black History month and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (every May we would also go to downtown Minneapolis to celebrate Cinco de Mayo). One time during Black History month, even the chance to hear Spike Lee speak at an event and I felt the event feeling shocked, because when he mentioned the NAACP I did not know what he was talking about. The girls and I were among the small percentage of racial and ethnic minorities at my high school and because of this and our participation in the ABC program we would constantly have conversations concerning race, ethnicity, culture, and inequality (the girls told me what the NAACP is and stands for).

I had never realized how much impact my experience in the ABC program had on me until I decided to minor in African American and African Studies. I began my exploration of African American and African studies courses this past Fall Quarter. I enjoyed the courses because they were nothing like I had ever taken before. I took courses on “West African Social Organization”, “Education in the African American Community”, and “Race and Ethnicity in Latin America”. I want to become a school counselor and I feel that taking courses like these will only help me make a well rounded person and counselor. The AAS courses I took fall quarter were interesting to me because I wanted to know more about West Africa, all I knew up until then was that there were francophone countries in that region of Africa. I thought the “Education in the African American Community” course was relevant because it would discuss challenges in the education of African American students...

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**Teaching “African Descent Communities and Cultures of Asia” continued from page 3**

students had to do their own investigation (among decid- edly little data) into the current issues and creative prod- ucts of people of African descent in Asia. Projects ranged from looking at sports, food, music and dance, to poetry, literature, art and fashion, to medicine, to domestic servants, refugees and peacemakers. Students investigated African descent communities in China, Pakistan, India, Iran, Bahrain, Qatar, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Their presentations were of outstanding quality demon- strating their ability to mobilize what they had learned in class, investigated outside and thought about critically. This was also demonstrated in their final papers.

This class totally changed the way I looked at the region of the Indian Ocean. Often the best moments of learning are when teaching. When you have to explain something to others you need to know it in a more profound, broad and particular way. There were connections between regions and populations made visible in class. Also made visible were the political management of information about communities of African descent and the immense effort to distance country and community from slavery. These con- nections and politics made visible over ten weeks of teaching and repeated from country to country provide exciting new spaces of research. In sum, this class was a journey for us all. A journey of hard work, new discoveries, surprises and transformed thinking. I compliment my students for the willingness and effort they put into making the journey possible.
“In CLASS and BEYOND…” continued from page 5

that could also be expanded to challenges experienced by other minorities. Finally “Race and Ethnicity in Latin America” was especially interesting to me because of my exposure to my two host families in the A Better Chance program. My host families were from the Caribbean: one Puerto Rican and the other Trinidadian and Antiguan. It baffled me to know that they both had African roots and were so different even though they were from islands not too far from each other. I wanted to know anything that might lead me to understand why these changes occurred.

Enrolling in Dr. Ng’weno’s “African Descent Communities and Cultures of Asia” course was a big step for me. Unlike the past AAS courses, I had no background knowledge or specific goal for taking the class. The only thing that motivated me to enroll in the course was curiosity: I had no idea that there were African descent communities in Asia, and when I thought of Asia, I only thought of the most common countries associated with Asia: China, Japan, Korea, etc. I came home after the first day of lecture asking my roommates if they knew where Yemen and Oman were, I certainly did not, nor did I know such countries existed. I was not familiar with the geography of the area going to be discussing in class, so I went on the Internet, and printed maps of countries and areas covered in class. I even color-coded my maps. I wanted to make sure I knew that Oman was in Asia and not part of the Swahili coast.

The course began with a few dense readings. The readings were on the history of the movement of people from Africa to India. The spelling of names of the important historical characters and terms we needed to know varied from article to article, Hebshi was equivalent to Habshi and Habshi, and the professor advised us that in order to better learn these and know that they are the same, to pronounce each name out loud. The general rule was that if the word sounded like something or someone we had heard before then, the probability that the author was referencing to the same thing was high. This advice slightly helped solve my encoding issues. I had figured out that Habshi and Hebshi were the same thing but now I needed to know and remember its relationship and connection between the eastern coast of Africa and which country or countries it corresponded to in Asia.

I think the scariest part of this class was the midterm exam. I received the study guide a week in advance and I began working on it only to realize that I may not know as much as I thought I did. The many trade routes that aided the movement of people from Africa’s lengthy eastern coast to the many Asian countries were complicated and thus also had a complex history attached to them. In addition to that, the trade between countries may have stopped for a reason and begun with a different country only to come back to the beginning country. These dynamic relationships that involved economics, religion, and politics were a bit overwhelming for me. I am accustomed to learning about one topic and building on from there, in this class the overlap of topics in addition to the fact that I had no background knowledge of the general subject, added more to my anxiety as I was not being able to learn and do well.

After I left the midterm exam, I honestly thought I had failed. Prior to the midterm we had learned about how people got to India, Pakistan, Oman, and United Arab Emirates. I felt like I needed to know all of the relevant information and also know Malik Ambar’s birth date. Of course, we never knew his birth date but we did learn about his significance in reference to the power relationship between slave and slave master. Military slaves were slaves but they did have the slight chance of upward mobility via military training and experience in politics – which of course was all controlled by the slave master.

I was able to learn about the history of the movement of people from Africa to India. The Diaspora of that I had no idea existed. Upon enrolling I simply thought we were going to be discussing recent immigrants and refugees in Asia, not Siddis, Afro-Iranians, and Malik Ambar. The discussions in class really stimulated my thinking and I believe this is something that really helped me learn. This has been one of very few courses that made me question my learning habits and abilities. I am also thankful for Dr. Ng’weno’s availability and support throughout the quarter for without it I would have surely found a way to drop it or petition for a pass/no pass grade.

In this class, I considered the course to be an historical and present day look at how people of African descent got to countries such as China, Japan, England and Ireland. On the first day of instruction, Dr. Ng’weno informed us of three things:

1) For the quarter, we would not be learning of African descent communities in Europe because the relationship between African people in Europe and Asia have little to do with each other and that the focus would be on the lives of African descent people in the Indian Ocean world.

2) Despite the course being on the books, it remained untaught due to the fact that there isn’t a wealth of information on the subject in terms of scholarly research.

3) Finally, we would learn a lot about a lot of things that we had no idea about.

Despite this information, many students didn’t go running from the class but stayed to learn about the unique subject – though many were hesitant about what was expected of them. While the topic itself seemed daunting, after a few lectures, we came to learn about the fascinating and complex nature of how identity formation, culture, survivals and forms of movement shaped how African descent people live in countries in the Indian Ocean world.”

By Mitchell Faust, Double major in English and African and African American Studies

Encountering the Siddis of India and Pakistan

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While there hasn’t been extensive research done on the subject – which we discussed in the class, including issues of silences and cultural barriers – Dr. Ng’weno’s lively personality, evident passion for the subject, personal field research and a genuine understanding of the difficulties students could have in tackling such a course all played into helping many students come to understand many of the new terms and concepts this class focused.

This certainly wasn’t a class one could sleep through or play on Facebook while the instructor taught. But this certainly was a class that opened up many students’ eyes to the rich, complex and intriguing narrative of African descent communities in Asia. Most importantly, by taking this class, we learnt about a fascinating man named Malik Ambar. It’s a guarantee that no person who took the class will likely forget about him. Who was he and what made him so memorable? I suggest that any person wanting to know take AAS 107C the next time it’s offered or find Dr. Ng’weno and inquire about him. He’ll definitely leave an impression.
In Spring Quarter of 2011 I had the privilege of taking the relatively new UC Davis course African American Studies (AAS 107C) about African Heritage in Europe and Asia, offered by Professor Bettina Ng’weno. I came across it while seeking to take an African American course that would fulfill my minor requirement. As a Biological Sciences major with NPB emphasis, minorin in AAS gives me the opportunity to diversify while also allowing me the chance to study about the continent from which I originated. The focus of AAS 107C on East Africa was especially topical for me, being ethnically Ethiopian, as was its focus on the Diaspora - as I have mainly taken African American classes that focus on issues related solely to Africa itself.

This class was very interesting. Despite the title, the course mainly focused on African descendants in Asia, a subject more than interesting enough in its own right. We discussed how and under what circumstances Africans came across the Indian Ocean to several countries abroad, the current status of these people and how they affected their host society or were influenced by the cultures they found, among other things. These people had different nuances for leaving, but were capable of integrating to an astonishing degree, though often keeping their own distinct cultural flair for generations.

What was really amazing and inspiring is that in all the different communities, though they came from different places and reside in different countries, what was really important to them and what they retained was their culture through music and dance. We had several opportunities in class to watch several videos showing these dance celebrations. I truly enjoyed watching the devotion these people showed to their African roots through unique traditions.

Studies of the African Diaspora has mainly focused on African descendants in the Americas and had completely ignored the Asian or European aspect, this class is here to change that. The existence of African descendants in Asia is a rarely talked about and researched topic. I was shocked and upset to realize that most of us really have no idea that larger numbers of African descendants exist in Asia. Thus, because this Diaspora in Asia has been largely ignored and neglected it was really hard to find any material for this class. This is the only thing that made this class a little bit challenging since it was so hard to find any credible scholarly articles. Though articles are hard to come by, the professor had made sure that required and supplemental materials were posted on Smartsite, saving students lots cash, in these economic hard times.

At the end of the quarter students were required to do a ten minute presentation on a country of our choice and one creative aspect to focus on the community of interest. I enjoyed working with my group members in researching Yemen and the African descendants residing there. Their coffee tradition was a creative aspect that was especially enjoyable for me to discover, as Ethiopians are also well known for our coffee culture. This part of the course was both challenging and fun while it was hard to find reliable sources or just sources at all for this project, it was entertaining just trying to figure it out all.

Despite being set in the afternoon, the engaging subject matter and lectures kept one from wanting to eat or nap. I would recommend this class to anyone.
Advocating for the Peace Corps: Internship in Washington

By Norah Mutuma, Fourth Year Sociology – with an emphasis in Comparative Studies and World Development – and African American and African Studies Double Major

It was always a dream of mine to visit the nation’s capital. That dream became reality when I was given the chance to go to Washington D.C. this past fall quarter through the UCDC program. I had heard such great things about the program from past participants that were in my classes and from my Sociology major advisor last year which led me to check out the UCDC website and fill out an application.

Spending fall quarter in DC really opened my eyes to another world outside of the university. The city is very work-oriented for everyone is always professionaly dressed going to their jobs and you can feel the historical presence of the city when you look at the architecture of the buildings, especially those nearby the White House. The city reminds me of San Francisco without the skyscrapers. The metro system was very easy to learn, but since my internship was less than 10 minutes away I, like most UCDC students, was able to walk to work everyday.

The program really opened up a lot of doors for me in that I was able to find out more avenues where I could channel my interests by attending nearby grad school fairs and by talking to different people that I met through the weekly discussion sessions of the program.

I was given the opportunity to intern in the Advocacy Department of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA). NPCA is a non-profit organization (separate from the Peace Corps federal agency) which works with Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) to rally support for Peace Corps issues through lobbying and other methods. As an advocacy intern, I assisted the Advocacy Director in advancing several Peace Corps projects, including increasing Peace Corps funding and promoting uni- versal basic education. I was able to gather support for these projects by contacting NPCAs 139+ Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) Member Groups located around the nation through email and by phone. I also stressed how important it was for Member Groups to make sure they support a sign-on letter NPCA made urging President Obama to increase Peace Corps funding from his proposed $470 million to $500 million.

In addition, I wrote and co-authored blogs for the website and helped edit videos that discussed issues that affected the Peace Corps community. I was also given the privilege to attend several meet- ings on Capitol Hill where I was able to sit-in and give input within the discus- sions we had with legislative aids of Congressmen from both Houses. The classes I took within the program were tough yet very enjoyable. We had to write a final paper for each class we took and we were given a lot of support from our professors throughout the program. For my Bureau- cracy class, my final paper critiqued NPCAs work with the Peace Corps federal agency as a bureaucratic institution and I looked at how NPCAs could better achieve the Peace Corps third goal which is to bring the Peace Corps experi- ence back home to the United States. My second paper for my Interest Group class looked at the lobbying practices of NPCA and how they are currently trying to gather support from Congress and the President to increase his current proposal from $470 million to $500 million for Peace Corps funding.

Being able to discuss and advocate for Peace Corps issues really helped me affirm my decision to join the Peace Corps upon graduation. I was also able to apply a lot of what I learned in my courses to the issues that I worked on. This internship allowed me to talk with RPCVs who implemented programs that dealt with international issues like climate change while they served in the Peace Corps, and now in their local communities in the U.S. NPCA has allowed me to see the Peace Corps as more than just an international volunteer organization, but as an organization that too offers cross cultural solutions to solve many of the world’s toughest problems.

I advise everyone to apply to the Washington Program. It will be very beneficial in whatever career one chooses. It’s a great way to acquire a mentor and start the networking process with those in your field of interest. I still keep in contact with my mentor, the Advocacy Director of NPCA, for he’s always there to write me a letter of recommendation and to give me advice. The program also gives you the opportunity to get that practical, hands-on experience in the field of your choice. You also get to experience the East Coast through the different tours to different buildings like the Pentagon and the State Department, and to other neighboring states like Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. The student advisors and Cheryl Purifoy, the Washington Program Manager for UC Davis, were such a great help to me throughout the application and interview processes so I encourage everyone who’s interested in applying to check them out on the second floor of South Hall.

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Documentary Filmmaking in the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago Summer 2008)

By Angela Rodgers

When I entered UC Davis as a freshman in the fall of 2006, I had no desire to participate in a study abroad program. I would be too focused on my pre-medical requirements to venture off to another country to study topics not related to medicine. Also, being from southern California, I was enjoying my assimilation into northern California and I didn’t want to be bothered with another change.

Studying abroad didn’t cross my mind until my sophomore year when I discov- ered the African and African American Studies (AAS) Program. I couldn’t believe that UC Davis had an entire department dedicated to the history of my own people. My passion for medicine never wavered, but my natural connection to AAS was undeniable. While I learned about the Introduction to Afro-American Culture and Society (AAS 10), Survey of Ethnicity in the U.S. (AAS 100), and The Black Family in America (AAS 133), I frequently heard announcements regarding a popular study abroad program that offered AAS units.

It was called “Documentary Filmmaking in the Caribbean” and it took place in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) for one month during the summer. Initially I ignored the announcements and emails because I knew I didn’t have the money to pay for the trip. However, after talking with a past student of the program, I found out that financial aid was available. Also, doing this program during the summer would not affect my studies during the school year. The more I talked with past students of the program, the Summer Abroad employees, and the program’s instructor Dr. Christine Acham, the more I wanted to study abroad.

I had never been out of the country before and I had no experience with documentary filmmaking, but I was interested in learning something fun and new. After researching the beautiful and diverse islands of Trinidad and Tobago, I was excited to get a different perspective of the people and life around me. Moreover, I thought that taking a break from my rigorous pre-med curriculum would be good for me. So, I applied for the program.

Before I knew it, I was in Trinidad and beginning my first week of documentary film classes. The first week of the pro- gram was all about learning the techniques of documentaries and the art of filming. Each student wrote a film proposal and Dr. Acham chose the proposals that she believed could be feasibly transformed into documentary films. The proposal I was interested in the most was about the critical endangerment of leatherback sea turtles written by Terry Singleton. Even though I had traveled to T&T to take a break from medicine, I learned that as a pre-med you never take a break from helping others. Everyone in Terry’s film group felt the need to advocate for these voiceless turtles and with Terry’s leadership advocate we did.

The “turtle group” film crew (as Dr. Acham called us) was very diverse, but we never had problems working together. Terry served as our director and was open to the suggestions or opinions of the crew. I was amazed at how easy my group interacted with each other on

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Documentary Filmmaking in the Caribbean

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the island despite our little knowledge of filming. Now, I can’t help but see the connection between working with a diverse film crew and working with diverse medical employees. This summer abroad program was preparing me for medical school and I didn’t even realize it. Overall, we each understood that the purpose of this film was not to credit our own name, but it was to notify locals about an endangered species on their island and what they can do to prevent extinction of the leatherbacks. I wanted to go on this trip to take an educational vacation. However, this trip became an ecological advocacy mission.

For the 2nd, 3rd, and part of the 4th week, we contacted potential interviewees, interviewed, filmed, and edited our film. I did most of the interviewing and a little filming. The most exciting and humbling experiences of the trip were watching the female leatherback turtles lay their eggs and witnessing the eggs hatch. My group members and I watched in awe as nature took its course—as God’s creatures were born. Terry was so happy. We all were as we shared that special experience together as a group.

During the rest of our last week in T&T, we viewed our films and relaxed. Our film was finally completed. My summer in T&T was soon over. But many aspects of my trip will live on. The documentary film about the leatherback’s critical endangerment is the tangible evidence that my group was on the island, but I also learned things about myself throughout this trip as well. My ability to work with a diverse group of individuals to produce a meaningful result, my desire to be an advocate for those who are voiceless, and my ability to have fun while working are some of them. I learned a lot not only about documentary film, but also about T&T. I was able to do a great service for the leatherback turtles. And lastly, I got a chance to relax and spend time away from the stressful and sometimes mundane university environment.

Sometimes as a student, we begin to take on tunnel vision—zeroing in on our future career goal without taking the time to try something new. Participating in Documentary Filmmaking in the Caribbean allowed me to break my pre-conceived tunnel vision. I learned that it was okay to take a summer off from clinical volunteering and scientific research. Medicine will not just be a career for me; it will be a lifestyle. But it is okay for that lifestyle to include a little something different. Professional schools want to see well-rounded, dynamic applicants and by doing an abroad program, it shows those schools that you are multi-dimensional. I know this first-hand because I recently applied to medical school and was graciously accepted by UC Davis School of Medicine in February 2011. I’m not saying that doing a study abroad program will guarantee graduate school admission, but abroad programs will serve as an enlightening experience that will make you stand out as an applicant.

Summer Abroad Ghana 2010

BEYOND...

In CLASS and BEYOND...

All Fighters in the Field: It is Now Condition Red

By Andrea L. Smith-Moore, PhD Candidate, Cultural Studies

Congratulations are in order to Dr. Christine Acham, Associate Professor in African American and African Studies, who has been in the field promoting her award winning film, “Infiltrating Hollywood: The Rise and Fall of the Spook Who Sat by the Door.” It is an independent documentary on the controversial and FBI repressed 1973 Black film, “The Spook Who Sat by the Door.” Through interviews with author Sam Greenlee, Bertie Dixon, widow of director Ivan Dixon, Academy Award winning editor, Michael Kahn, and Melvin Van Peebles, the film explores one of the most gripping stories of the last thirty years.

Dr. Acham and co-director Clifford Ward, were motivated to work on this project because of the fascinating film history associated with “The Spook Who Sat by the Door.” Dr. Acham initially became interested in “The Spook” as a graduate student at USC. She first saw the film on bootleg videotape that was passed around amongst her graduate peers of the time. The actual film was absent from theaters immediately after its original release in 1973. As a graduate student, she had heard rumors about what happened to the film and how allegedly the FBI was involved in its mysterious disappearance and immediately became intrigued. She found the ideas presented in the film interesting considering the time that it was released. The alluring details of why the film was pulled were such a controversial story in American film narration that Acham felt compelled to learn more.

She decided to pursue the topic with an interest in 1970’s Revolutionary Black Cinema. During her research, she actually called the writer of the novel and screenplay Sam Greenlee. To her surprise, he was easily accessible and was very helpful in providing the specifics about the why the film disappeared. In their original conversation in 2004, Greenlee mentioned that he was going to be in San Diego and agreed to a film interview to further her research. Acham later presented her research entitled, “Subverting the System: The Politics and Production of The Spook Who Sat by the Door” at the Society of Cinema and Media Studies in Research Conference in 2005. The article was soon published in, Screening Noir: Journal of Black Film, Television & New Media Culture (Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall/Winter, 2005.)

After the interview, Acham continued to think about how Greenlee would make an interesting character for a documentary. “He was an exceptionally charismatic character and he had such an intriguing story that it ended up being one of those perfect documentary subjects,” discloses Acham.

She wanted to create a documentary about the film, but she was also deeply interested in Sam as a figure as well. “It was how he interacted with the camera and looked on film, and he had an incredible history! Documentaries have a way of bringing these types of stories to a wider audience because it has a different kind of reach,” Acham adds. She thought about how important it would be to tell Sam’s story in a visual medium to create and share his experience. After completing her additional research about the film industry during the 1970’s, the character investigation, and forming the background for the film, Acham and Clifford Ward began shooting in 2005. Clifford Ward is largely responsible for the technical aspect of the project. The two shared the producer, editor, and director titles.

Originally, the film was shot in the DV (Digital Video) form but because technology was rapidly changing they had to move the film from DV to HDV (High Definition Video). They decided to reshoot everything in order to have a better quality film and to hopefully get it out to festivals. Well, their efforts paid off and they have since won “Best Film” at the January 2011 San Diego Black Film Festival. The film was also selected to be presented at several festivals in California such as the Opening Film at The Big Muddy Festival at the Southern Illinois University in February 2011, it was showcased as the Feature at the Cine-Soul Sacramento International Film Festival, The Beverly Hills Film Festival and the Athens International Film and Video Festival in April 2011.

The methodological filming approach Acham and Ward took was similar to the independent film making of “back in the day,” individual efforts with minuscule budgets and a passion to tell a story. In such a tough marketplace, the

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AFRICAN AMERICAN & AFRICAN STUDIES PROGRAM • AAAS NEWSLETTER
**Heart Hall**
by Cheyenne Wohltme

Why, Beige girl, do you study Black? 
Why not Yellow, Red, Brown, or none? 

I am an American &
African American history is black history. 
Built on its back, purified by its pressure. 
Enriched by its rhythm - worth study. 
Why not know what you are made of? 

Can I get a hallelujah? 

Plus, 
Once you’ve felt Milmon’s charm you need to 
Get back on track with Halifu’s sass & Finish it up with Moradewun’s laugh — 
The others don’t know what they’re missing 
How could they? 

Can I get a hallelujah?

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**“All Fighters in the Field: It is Now Condition Red” continued from page 13**

road is even tougher for minority filmmakers. “With studios scaling back on the number of films they make and focusing on less risky ventures such as sequels, those going the independent route have to be creative.”

Dr. Acham states that what was most important to her as the producer of this film was to highlight the UNSUNG African American Heroes. “People who put their entire lives on the line because they believed in something and often times were swept under the rug. Because of the revolutionary apprehension during this time, there is only a small amount of key people whose efforts were acknowledged.”

As is the case with Sam Greenlee, and his film, “All Fighters in the Field: It is Now Condition Red” is the story of how political movements take on a life of their own, especially because of the FBI repression of the message, which was - the political movement was a by-product of a larger social and political upheaval.

Dr. Acham was also quoted in articles appearing in CNN Entertainment, “Minority Filmmakers Struggle to get Projects Made,” June 22, 2010, and The Sacramento Bee, April 2011. Since the film’s release, it continues to receive favorable reviews in a number of online publications.

Dr. Acham regularly teaches courses on Black Documentary: Theory and Practice, both as part of the UCD African and African-American Studies, and Film Studies curriculum, and as a summer session abroad in Trinidad and Tobago.

Check out the Facebook page for the film and learn more about her fascinating documentary. 


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**Moradewun Adejunmobi**

Professor Moradewun Adejunmobi was invited as a keynote speaker at: a conference on African cultural production jointly sponsored by the Michigan State University and the University of Michigan in October 2010. The title of her keynote address was “Provocations: African Societies and Theories of Creativity.” She has also been elected to a three-year term (2010-2013) on the governing council of the African Literature Association. Additionally, Adejunmobi was invited to join the editorial board of a new international journal on literature, Authorship.

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**Halifu Osumare**

Associate Professor Halifu Osumare was an integral part of Playwright Ntozake Shange’s “An Evening with Ntozake Shange” on February 22, 2011 at Freeborn Hall, UC Davis campus. The event was part of the Leslie Campbell Speaker Series presented by the African Continuum & Campus Unions for Black History Month. Osumare was a contemporary of Ntozake Shange in the early 70s in the S.F Bay Area when the poems, which would eventually become her famous Broadway Chorepoem, For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf, were being created. Osumare, then a dancer, performed with Shange in Bay Area poetry venues. During the campus event, Osumare introduced her and conducted an Audience Q&A with Ms. Shange that spoke of their long history as artistic collaborators during an era when ethnic and women’s collectives were becoming established in communities.

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**Wale Adebanwi**

Assistant Professor Wale Adebanwi co-edited two volumes with Ebenezer Oladare assistant professor in the Sociology Department of University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS. The first, Encountering the Nigerian State (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), is described by Professor Michael Watts of University of California, Berkeley as a ‘magisterial collection of essays [which] offer some provocative, exciting and often counter-intuitive answers to the questions of the “conflicted, turbulent, and chaotic worlds of postcolonial Africa.”’ The second volume, Nigeria At Fifty: The Nation in Narration (Routledge, 2011), examines fifty years of Nigeria’s nationhood. Adebanwi also appeared on Al-Jazeera TV as an expert commentator on Nigeria’s April 2011 elections.
**Student News**

**Tometi Gbedema**


The book examines the effects of natural resources extraction on the living standards of the individual and the ways in which they generate adversity among the people, affect political stability, social relationships and community development. The author considers the case of Rio Vista, a very small California town in the Sacramento valley which is endowed with natural gas resources.

Tometi also co-authored a paper “The nexus between agriculture and tourism in Ghana: a case of underexploited development potential” in Janet Momsen and Rebecca Torres (eds.) Tourism and Agriculture: New Geographies of Consumption, Production and Rural Restructuring.

**Julia Ruble Gets Undergraduate Fellowship Research Grant**

Julia Ruble (Anthropology Major) was granted the President’s Undergraduate Fellowship Research Grant for her proposed research “The Social Life of the Beat.” She will be working with musical artists in rural Jamaica who make the beats (or riddims) that are then sold to popular artists throughout the island. Julia will be completing the ethnographic research and filming a documentary this August. Her work will be supervised by Professor Bettina Ng’weno of the AAS.

**Mitchell Faust Wins Sam C. Allen Rising Star Award**

Mitchell Faust (third year, Double Major, English (Literature) and African & African American Studies) won the 2011 “Sam C. Allen Rising Star Award”. Mitchell is a transfer student from Sacramento City College. Ken Barnes, the coordinator of UC Davis Internship and Career Center (ICC), announced that the award is given to a student who is not a senior, but has shown promise in his future academic and community endeavors. In his short time at UC Davis, Mitchell has been a part of the Pan African Student Organization and volunteered with various campus organizations like the Cross-Cultural Center, the LBGTRC and the AAS program. He is currently working on two independent research projects, one entitled, “It’s Gonna Be Alright!” An Analysis of Big Mama in the Black Community and American Culture through Historical Representation, Visual Media and Literature. His second research project is a comparison of representations of black male sexuality between the works of James Baldwin and E. Lynn Harris. He will be continuing both these research projects with MURALS next year.

**...Like the Grand Canyon**

I took a road trip with my partner to the Grand Canyon last summer, its’ rock-solid magnificence inspired awe and caused me to reflect on much that is grand within our universe and, more specifically, that which is spiritual, radiant, vibrant, and grand within each of us. As the outgoing Student Affairs Coordinator within the African American & African Studies Program, I’d like to reflect on a bit why I do what I do and the “grandness” I witness and expect in our students.

My higher educational philosophy is simple and straightforward — I believe every student who enters an institution of higher learning has the capacity to be grand within that academic environment. Grand for completing what they have begun, grand for pursuing the degree that is best suited to their passion and professional interests, grand at sharing what they have learned with others, and grand for making contributions to self and society. I understand that some students need to be reminded of their grandness a little more so than others.

My educational philosophy extends to this student in a holistic manner; I am curious to know who this young scholar is aside from her/his primary role as a student, what is her/his background, how may these influences affect academic performance, is she/he financially stable, is there familial support, and have they been exposed to their rich cultural heritage? It is the whole student I am interested in before I hope to inspire “grandness”.

In addition to helping students realize that which is grand in them, I am committed to encouraging the scholar to explore opportunities outside of the classroom environment that will supplement and enhance her/his educational journey. I question their choices and ask them to reflect on their purpose. Are they taking advantage of undergraduate research opportunities, participating in internship programs, traveling abroad, or enrolled in graduate/professional school preparatory programs? Are they caring for the self in a way that not only helps to heal but that forgives them ahead in a supportive and nurturing way? I enjoy being the liaison between student and opportunity and between student and assistive resource; I believe these connections create for the scholar relevance, meaning, and purpose and that it brings them closer to their educational greatness while keeping their inner health unharmed and intact.

I’ve collaborated with several campus departments and staff personnel to create academic programming opportunities for students with the intent of helping them enjoy an academically resourceful, culturally rich, and socially positive learning experience. The first of these opportunities is the Leslie Campbell Residential Academic Theme Program that encourages participants to learn from and interact with UC Davis faculty (who teach in the fields of sociology, psychology, and African American and African Studies) to help support their academic, ethnic, social, and cultural identity development on a predominately non-black campus. The second is a collaborative seminar using African American and African Studies research as a point of departure to introduce students to research and writing skills. A third opportunity helps transfer students transition to UCD campus life in structured but culturally relevant fashion. Lastly, we offer a seminar designed to inform students about the dance, music, and dramatic arts of the African Diaspora while at the same time introducing them to several on-campus Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts events and off-campus field trips to museums, plays, and lectures (most recently the Dr. Cornel West talk at Stanford University). Again, it is my philosophy that knowledge of self and participation in supplemental academic and cultural enrichment opportunities assists in the development of a grand scholar and a positive self-concept.

Assisting students in reaching their academic potential and exploring their identity development coupled with my day-to-day responsibilities as Coordinator for African American and African Student Affairs, has satisfied me immensely — I do nothing in isolation — many staff, faculty, and administrators believe as I do and have a similar passion for the well-being and retention of high achieving but underrepresented students.

I love the work I have purposely associated myself with on the UC Davis campus and will continually wish for our students to be solid, radiant, energetic, vibrant and, Grand ... like the canyon!
The View From the (Acting) Director’s Chair (continued from page 1)

Acclaimed Actor, Barry "Shabaka" Henley Visits AAS

Acclaimed actor, writer, and director gave a talk in the “Performance and Culture in the African Diaspora” Seminar/Directed Group Study of the Program of African American and African Studies on Wednesday, May 11, 2011. Henley has appeared in films such as How Stella Got her Groove Back, Life, Bullworth, State of Play (with Russell Crowe) and The Terminal with Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg. He is a veteran of the films of Michael Mann (The Insider, Heat, and (most notably) The Untouchables), as well as the films of Spike Lee (Antz, Clockers, Do the Right Thing, Malcolm X, School Daze), and Martin Scorsese (Goodfellas, Gangs of New York, The Departed). He is also a director, on a number of productions and other initiatives. In the subsequent years, I also worked closely with Professor Patricia Turner, most notably during a year when Pat was interim dean of Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Studies, and I was interim director of the University Writing Program. In these working relationships, and in others, I’ve always found the members of the program to be dedicated, hard working campus citizens, excellent scholars, and outstanding teachers.

Given the drastic cutbacks in state funding, past and pending, these are perilous times for the university, and particularly for small and developing programs. In its commitment to the study of African American life and culture, of the African Diaspora, and of life in Africa itself, AAS has an important academic mission to fulfill. During my term as acting director, I plan to do all I can to protect the program and to enhance its ability to perform its mission. I’m confident that in this effort I will be assisted by the members of the program—faculty, staff, and students. I also invite alumni to contact me by e-mail (kfzender@ucdavis.edu) or phone (530 752-5153), should there be issues you’d care to discuss or advice you’d care to offer.

Ntozake Shange’s Poetics: Dispelling Myths of Mental Health Issues

By Funmi Ladeinde

On February 25, 2011, I had the great honor of seeing critically acclaimed playwright and author Ntozake Shange of For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf. She came to speak at UC Davis about her recent works and about the movie For Colored Girls. I was able to hear Ms. Shange at her talk “Dispelling Myths about Mental Health Issues in the African American Community” and her reading of her poems in the evening.

She talked about her life, which was reflected in her poems. She talked about her battle with depression and bipolar disorder and her denial of the disease despite having a mother who was a psychiatric social worker. But through the support of family and friends and also resources such as counselors and psychologists, she was better able to deal with her disorder and find the roots of what was causing her depression. This mental health workshop taught me so much. I learned that many times as African Americans we have a self-reliant attitude. The mentality of having to make it on our own and this attitude traces back from slavery. Another issue discussed was the labeling of counseling as simply for “crazy” people. Often times, when we in the black community go through issues we dismiss the need for counseling. We label people that have to go to counseling as “crazy or mental”. Also due to the history of religion in the African Diaspora, we often dismiss mental issues and believe we just need to pray a little more or talk to a religious figure.

As Ms. Shange later read some of her award winning poetry at night—so many important themes arose: issues that many black women face such as domestic abuse and violence, depression, the right to live and not to live with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, the strength that comes from unity and helping one another in our journeys in life. But Ms. Shange also emphasized that these were not just merely “black women” issues, these were human issues that people of all colors and both genders often times deal with.

We in the African American community need to have more frank discussions and conversations about mental health issues such as bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia rather than acting like these diseases like they do not exist or labeling these as “crazy people” diseases. Rather than labeling, we need to help our friends and family by supporting them to use resources such as CAPS, counselors, and psychologists to deal with and cope with these issues. Also, she taught me to be aware of my mental and physical self. Many times as students, we stress over so many issues from school, to homework to family and friends, and etc. but we need to be aware or know the limits to which we can push ourselves and that trying to be superman or superwoman—trying to be everything to everybody—can have dire consequences on mental and physical health.

Ms. Shange is beautiful, successful and intelligent—she taught me that the problems and issues that we face in life do not have to define who we are as individuals.”

Dr. Cornel West, Princeton University Professor, with Ntozake Shange (center) and Valerie Aduba (right)
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