The Program in African & African American Studies
Stanford University
Faculty, friends, alumni, and affiliates, welcome to the Program in African & African American Studies (AAAS) 2011 Newsletter! Within this publication you will find information on some of the exciting events that have been happening here at Stanford University’s AAAS Program over the past year. This year marks an important celebration in our history as we commemorate the Anniversary of the 100th Birthday of Dr. Saint Clair Drake, who was the first AAAS Director back in 1969. The commemoration of Dr. Drake’s legacy couldn’t be inaugurated in a more appropriate year than this one: a year in which former astronaut and AAAS alumnus, Dr. Mae Jemison, spoke on the importance of AAAS in today’s world; a year in which multiple AAAS affiliated faculty were recognized for their outstanding contributions to Stanford’s community; and a year in which several AAAS students made their mark on the University through their academic distinction, commitment to service, and involvement in their community. Please join us in celebrating 2011, another year in the continuing legacy of excellence that is Stanford’s Program in African & African American Studies!
2011 Saint Clair Drake Memorial Lecture

May 2, 2011

In commemoration of the 100-year anniversary of the birth of Dr. Saint Clair Drake, Dr. Mae Jemison ’77 presented the 2011 Saint Clair Drake Memorial Lecture. During his life, Dr. Drake was recognized as one of the forefathers of serious research of Black history and, appropriately, this year’s speaker was a living and breathing gem in the crown of Black history: the first African American woman to travel in outer space.

While studying at Stanford, Dr. Jemison experienced the legacy that is Saint Clair Drake while on the course toward completing all the requirements of a Major in African & Afro-American Studies (as it was called then). In addition to AAAS, she majored in Chemical Engineering and felt the pressures of being the only person of color in most of her classes.

In spite of obstacles, her persistent efforts reaped the rewards she so passionately pursued. During this lecture Dr. Jemison focused on how her Major in AAAS impacted her ability to reach her goals.

“There’s a confidence about knowing yourself and your people that’s really important,” she said. “It gave me the confidence to know that every group of people had made contributions to this world.”

“You have to believe in yourself first, then you have to believe that you have a right to be involved. That’s what AAAS helped me to know.” With those words, she went on to present to the audience a thin slice of history by highlighting some of the many unsung heroes in the history of African American women in aero/astronautics. This brief lesson even included three lesser-known Black women that have also gone into orbit, yet who’s achievement often is overshadowed by Dr. Jemison’s prior expedition into space!

A returning student, 2011 graduate April House, brought her children to see the lecture. Inspired by Dr. Jemison’s words, her eldest daughter Alexis remarked, “I’m really interested because I’m going to be a doctor when I grow up, and I thought it would be really cool to be an astronaut and a doctor like her.”

Sparking the same inspiration that Alexis felt is the goal of Dr. Jemison’s international science camp, The Earth We Share, which motivates students and teachers to strengthen their science education. Dr. Jemison concluded, “How can we expect the world to go on if we’re not educating the next generation? Whether the future ends up like Star Trek or Blade Runner, it’s our choice. And we have to take that.”
2011 AAAS Commencement and Awards Ceremony

June 12, 2011

AAAS Graduation is always one of the most exciting events of the year, and 2011 was no different. This year’s graduating class included students with a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and achievements all celebrated together in Vidalakis Hall at the Schwab Center on June 12.

Victoria Asbury, B.A.H. in AAAS and a Masters in Education, not only earned the Academic Achievement and Service Award, but she also was one of two recipients of the Kennel Jackson Research Award for her honors thesis, and Professor Rosenfeld pointed out, “Among more than 1,000 undergraduates I’ve taught at Stanford, Victoria is the writer with the most talent and promise.” Catherine Howard, the other recipient of the Kennel Jackson Research Award, received a B.A.H. with Distinction in International Relations, and was awarded the J.E. Wallace Sterling Award for a GPA among the top 25 in the graduating class. She looks forward to applying to law school and an eventual career in education reform.

Both Melinda Grant, B.A. in Urban Studies, and Darius White, B.A.H. in AAAS and Minor in Education, will be continuing in education as Melinda is entering UCLA’s Teaching Program to earn a Master in Education and Darius White will earn a Masters in Stanford’s STEP Program. Darius White not only earned recognition for his service at Stanford through the Trustee Leadership Award, but he also earned distinction in AAAS with the James L. Gibbs Award for Superior Academic Achievement, and his honors thesis gained university-wide distinction by earning the

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-Professor Michael Rosenfeld
Firestone and Golden Award. April House, who earned two Bachelor degrees (AAAS and Psychology), will be a doctoral student in Psychology at the University of Texas in the Fall. Kiana Shelton, B.A. in International Relations, will also be involved in the educational world as she goes on to teach French as a second language to elementary school children.

As Yvorn Aswad, B.A. in Human Biology, continues in his journey toward fighting for social justice through healthcare, he will continue with his post-baccalaureate studies at UC Riverside before entering into Medical School. Both Ekinadese Osayande, B.A. in Political Science, and Albert Gilbert, B.A. and M.A. in Sociology, seek to continue the fight for justice and equal rights as they look forward to law school in their futures.

Senior Paper and Honors Thesis Presentations

May 24, 2011

On May 24, the AAAS Class of 2011 presented the culmination of a year’s labor to an attentive audience of undergraduates, faculty, and staff at the Barnum Clock Tower. The works they presented were senior papers and honors theses of award winning and awe-inspiring quality. These masterfully written research papers challenged entrenched mindsets and communal paradigms, they broadened academic perspective into various disciplines, and they exposed readers to those often ignored and overlooked in history and sociology. The following are the honors theses and senior papers of the AAAS class of 2011:

Victoria Asbury (Major, Honors Thesis) “I Ain’t Hood! I Grew Up in the Suburbs!”: An Alternative to the Dominant Narrative of Black Adolescents Residing in Predominantly White Middle Class Suburbs

Shamika Goddard (Major, Senior Paper) “You So Crazy”: Assessing the Resources of Stanford University for Its Mentally Ill Black Students

April House (Major, Honors Thesis) Black Indians in America: Denied Histories, Trampled Legacies

Catherine Howard (Minor, Honors Thesis) “¡Hola Negro!”: A Comparative Exploration of the Intersectionality of Black Movements and Black Identity in Brazil, Cuba, and Colombia

Darius White (Major, Honors Thesis) Too Young to “Know,” Old Enough to Tell: An Analysis of Youth Mentoring from the Perspective of Youth of Color
AAAS at the BCSC Awards

May 27, 2011

As is consistent with the legacy of excellence that is Stanford’s Program in African & African American Studies, AAAS Majors and Minors made an outstanding showing at the annual Black Community Services Center Academic and Community Awards. In fact 18 of our 20 AAAS majors and minors were recognized for their academic achievement and/or service to the community and of the 18 different awards presented for service, 8 were earned by members of the AAAS community!

Academic Achievement Awards for a GPA above 3.5 (Exceptional) or above 3.75 (Superior) were awarded to the following AAAS students for one or more of the past three quarters: Jessica Anderson, Victoria Asbury, Laurel Frazier, Albert Gilbert, Shamika Goddard, Melinda Grant, Marjani Hing-Glover, April House, Catherine Howard, Kalyn McCall, Garry Mitchell, Kiana Shelton, William Wagstaff, Darius White, and Alyssa Wisdom. In addition to such a distinction, the Crossfield, Coley, and Black Award was awarded to Melinda Grant and April House for 6-8 quarters with a 3.5+ GPA; Victoria Asbury and Darius White for 9+ quarters with a 3.5+ GPA; Albert Gilbert for 6-8 quarters with a 3.75+ GPA; and Catherine Howard for 9+ quarters with a 3.75+ GPA.

In fact, Catherine Howard’s GPA earned her the Female Salutatorian Award for the second female GPA in the Black Community and the J.E. Wallace Sterling Award for Academic Achievement for having one of the top 25 GPAs among graduating seniors in the School of Humanities and Sciences.

Victoria Asbury, Catherine Howard, and Darius White were among the graduating seniors recognized at the BCSC Awards for the rigorous achievement of completing honors theses.

The Male and Female Senior of the Year Awards were presented to Yvorn Aswad and Catherine Howard respectively. Milton Achelpohl received the Program of the Year Award on behalf of the Black Student Union for his work in putting together “Stanfunk.” The Black Arts Award was presented to amazing musical artist and vocalist, Jessica Anderson. Matthew Miller was recognized for Black Volunteer Student Organization of the Year for his leadership as co-President of the NAACP. Yvorn Aswad received the Director’s Award along with three other seniors that led an impromptu protest against the inappropriate offensiveness of Gaieties 2010 production. These fours seniors followed through with organized efforts that have prompted Gaieties to refocus on its original mission of...
I never would have guessed that I would eventually choose AAAS as my minor. Deeply engrained in the falseness of the fuzzy/techie divide, I felt that I had no business studying AAAS. Human Biology was fuzzy enough for any self-respecting techie! Moreover, I did not value the intellect required for and of African/African-American Studies.

In my own way, I already "thought Black" and brought that to the classroom setting, so I found no need to specially study "Blackness." Thus, whenever someone mentioned AAAS, I would jokingly say "I don’t need to take a AAAS class; my LIFE is a AAAS class!" And I felt justified in saying that! After all, I was raised in the quintessential pro-Black household. Coming to age in South Central Los Angeles, my parents found it necessary that we were fed a diet of Black History served with Harlem Renaissance, Spike Lee joints and Distrust of the LAPD, washed down with Kwanzaa and, to top it all off, a huge slice of Black Church for dessert. Needless to say, I felt the souls of Black folk stirring within me long before ever actually studying WEB Du Bois in class.

However, things changed for me when I attended the AAAS graduation ceremony for the Class of 2010. This event shamed me for ever having thought less of African/African-American Studies and showed me the sheer

A Student’s Perspective

By Yvorn N.H.K. Aswad-Thomas

I came to African/African-American Studies rather late in my college career. Deep in the trenches of the premed battlefield, I was a committed Human Biology major with no serious intention of studying anything else. I had flirted with the idea of minoring in Creative Writing, Psychology and even Modern Languages, but I never experienced the right fit with any of those programs. African/African-American Studies was different.

"I felt the souls of Black folk stirring within me long before ever actually studying WEB Du Bois in class."

Dr. Cheryl Brown (right) receives the Faculty/Staff Mentor of the Year Award from Carolus Brown (left)
brilliance of my peers who pursued their passion and chose to either major or minor in the program. From their detailed and nuanced theses to their aspirations for graduate education and tackling large scale social issues, I found kindred spirits in the 2010 AAAS Cohort. Leaving that ceremony, I knew that I needed that in my life; I had to minor in African and African-American Studies.

Minoring in African/African-American Studies gave me the opportunity to truly evaluate, reflect upon and synthesize the Black experience. Intro to AAAS allowed me to explore the fundamentals and cornerstones of Black history, literature and art. I looked at the politics of representation in classes like “Black Sitcoms” and “Black Cinema.” And, most meaningful, classes like “Urban Education” and “The Changing Face of America: Education and Civil Rights” gave me a chance to grapple with serious issues that face Black America and truly all citizens of the globe. Though Human Biology definitely permitted me to act Black in the classroom, African and African-American Studies encouraged me to do so. In fact, AAAS fully enfranchised and legitimized my thinking, acting and doing “Black” and provided me with an appropriate framework for how to view many issues. I can without a doubt say that AAAS provided balance to my college career; truly giving me a full liberal arts education that made me into a better scholar and leader.

My educational gains from AAAS really did have a profound impact on me as student. But, more importantly, AAAS impacted me as a person and contributed to a phenomenal capstone for my undergraduate career. My own classmates in AAAS provided me with great encouragement, motivation and many laughs. They are amazing, magnanimous people (anomalous, even 😊). They came from such diverse backgrounds, only to achieve such great feats! They are scholars, mentors, survivors, co-RAs, activists, parents, singers, dual-degree holders and above all things friends. Moreover, AAAS gave me a home. It was a shelter, a lighthouse and even holy place.

Now a proud alumnus of Stanford University, I go forward still unchanged from my desire to be a great doctor. But with AAAS as an essential wisdom source for me, I am encouraged to not just be a great doctor, but to be a doctor who elevates the health and status of Blackness. And I do this not with shame and not for the purposes of furthering negative race relations in our healing nation. Instead, I do it to show to the world that Black enterprises have equal value in this world. I thank AAAS for opening my eyes.

Race and the Environment

2011 Race Forward Initiative

As part of the “Race Forward” initiative, the AAAS Program seeks to promote the study of the African Diaspora through the various lenses of academia. AAAS accomplishes this task by focusing programming for an entire academic year on one central theme. This year’s theme, Race and the Environment, was thoroughly investigated by Dr. Courtney Bonam’s course, “The Environment in Context.”

Throughout the Winter Quarter, Dr. Bonam invited prominent guest lecturers from across the US to engage with the class on issues of Race and the Environment. Focuses ranged across a broad spectrum. While Dr. Antwi Akom presented the case for a youth-driven climate justice movement, Dr. Alison Aklon focused on the politics of a green economy and its relation to race. Noa Lincoln encouraged students to look at America’s history of Race and the Environment through a case study of Hawaii, and Dr. Monica Perales shifted that historical perspective to the US-Mexico border and public health. Dr. Robert Bullard showed how environmental justice is a basic focus of human rights, and Dr. John Powell taught students about re-interpreting their metropolitan space in order to strive for justice.
2011 Events

The Gospel of John concludes with a verse stating that the events of Jesus’ life were so great that “if they were all written down, I suppose not even the world would have space for all the books that would be written” (John 21:25). While the Program in AAAS did not have such an unfathomable record of events this year, it would suffice to say that this Newsletter does not contain the space to give appropriate attention to all the sponsored and co-sponsored events this year. However, the following section can at least list off the names of several (although not all) events that were not highlighted in this Newsletter.

**Diaspora Table Discussions** offer an opportunity for critical discussion of various topics relevant to the African Diaspora, which are presented in dialectic forums that faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate simultaneous participation. This year’s Diaspora Tables included the following:

- “Imagining Black Space” with Dr. Courtney Bonam
- “No She Did Not Just Say That: Being Vicoria Ms. Anomalous” Shantrell” with Victoria Asbury
- “Race in School Settings: Subtle Clues & Disciplinary Activity” with Jason Okonofua
- “It May Be Free Speech, But It’s Not Without Consequences” with Elosha Cave and Justin Brown
- “Why Does History Matter” with Dr. James Campbell, Dr. Bob Crews, and Dr. Allyson Hobbs
- “The False Divide of Techie and Fuzzy” with Dr. Mae Jemison
- “Black Beauty Salons and the Ironies of Integration” with Dr. Ingrid Banks
- “My Soul Cries Out: Gospel Tradition and Its Social Commentary” with Aaron Grayson

**Other Sponsored and Co-Sponsored Events**

- “Access, Success, and Impact: How Low-Income Students of Color Succeed in College and Beyond” with Dr. Cornel West and Miriam Rivera
- “Africa Week”
- “Bob Dylan: Poetry and Blues”
- “Cultural Expedition to the UC Berkeley to Experience Alvin Ailey and to San Francisco for Dinner at 1300 Fillmore”
- “Intellectual Roundtable on the Class in the Black Community” with Dr. Richard Banks
- “Intellectual Roundtable with Ntozake Shange”
- “J is for Junkie”
- “Mixed: A One Woman Show” with Maya Lily
- “Of Panthers, Black and Dalit: Identity Politics and Cultural Nationalism in America and India”
- “The Annual Anne and Loren Kieve Distinguished Speaker Lecture with Dr. Lonnie Bunch”
- “The Black Faculty Reception”
- “What is White?”

AAAS at 1300 Fillmore, San Francisco, as part of the Cultural Expedition to experience Alvin Ailey and this historic Black restaurant
The Program in African and African American Studies

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