

# AAS *Newsletter*

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES AT  
YORK COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



## ***“Change We Can Believe In” African American Studies Program Updated***

A process began in February 2010, the interdisciplinary committee of the African American Resource Center revised the African American Studies curriculum. Presented to York College’s Curriculum Committee in Spring 2011, it has passed the CUNY system and because of a name change is at the state legislature for review. *See page 10 for a listing of new courses.*

The proposed changes reflect changes within the field based on new knowledge and perspectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, particularly taking into account the transformations, connections and dislocations triggered by globalization, the intervention of Black feminists, and certainly the recent election of the nation’s first Black president. As people, technologies, and ideas are moving across the globe, there is a greater understanding of Diaspora in general, the African Diaspora in particular. The new name reflects this greater inclusivity of people from Africa and the Caribbean, student populations that are large and increasing at York. The new design is specifically designed to facilitate students’ timely degree progress to complete the major,

which had been hampered by the current requirement of 21 specified credits, leaving little flexibility and making it harder for students to graduate on time.

The mission of the Black Studies Program is to provide an interdisciplinary intellectual arena in which students learn to critically examine, analyze, and interpret the African, African American, and Caribbean experiences. The Program offers a broad selection of courses addressing historical, cultural, sociological, political, economic, and psychological factors that affect the lives of African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean peoples. The curriculum stresses the skills necessary to think critically, write clearly, argue persuasively, and problem-solve effectively. Students are exposed to theory and research in a variety of subject matter and are encouraged to engage in active service and research beyond the classroom. The Annual Student Research Day, a recently created initiative, is a college-wide conference that gives outstanding undergraduate students the opportunity to present their own research to a forum of peers, family, faculty,

and friends. Faculty in the Black Studies Program expect that our students will participate regularly in this event.

The goal of the Black Studies Program is to prepare its majors and minors to take roles of effective agency, participation, and leadership in the intellectual and research domains of professional and community life. The program’s curriculum will prepare students for the rigors of professional schools and graduate work in traditional disciplines or in interdisciplinary fields of study. Moreover, the program’s curriculum aims to enhance the cultural life of the College and surrounding communities in association with SEEK, the African American Studies Club, and other student and community organizations through joint cultural activities, adult education, lectures, and tutorials. We anticipate that Black Studies majors will matriculate into such diverse career arenas as higher education and administration, law, primary and secondary education and administration, social work, medicine, cultural and artistic institutions, law enforcement, and local/state/federal public service.

*The African American Resource Center promotes the study of the history, culture, and society of Africa and the African Diaspora. The Center is a resource, community space, and forum for colloquy, presentations and discussion. The Center is available to faculty, students and community groups in service of this AARC mission.*

## **First Critical Events in Black Studies Series discussion to a full house – the “Prison Industrial Complex”**

Michael Sharpe, Political Science



Photo (l to r): Bill McKinney, Divine Pryor, Ruthie Gilmore, and Michael Sharpe

On Monday May 9, 2011 the Political Science program and the African American Resource Center held an event organized by Dr. Michael Sharpe (Political Science) entitled “The Prison Industrial Complex” with distinguished guest speakers Professor Ruthie Gilmore, Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences, CUNY Graduate Center, Dr. Divine Pryor, Executive Director of the Center for Nuleadership, Medgar Evers College/CUNY and Dr. Bill McKinney, Director of the Howard Samuels Center/CUNY Graduate Center. The —Prison Industrial Com-

plex” is a term to describe the nexus between the expansion of the prison population and the economic and political influence of business and political interests that profit from promotion of criminalization and imprisonment, including the privatization of prisons and the servicing of government prison agency contracts. Some think the solution to social ills such as crime and poverty involves mass incarceration and the building of more prisons without addressing the underlying systemic inequalities. In this way, vested interests literally capitalize on human misery.



Dr. Schuller, Director of the AARC, welcomed everyone to the event and began by informing the discussion with some enlightening statistics about mass incarceration in the United States. Dr. Sharpe introduced the panelists with their respective short biographical sketches. Each panelist brought expertise about some aspect of the Prison Industrial Complex. Professor Gilmore, a founding member of many grassroots organizations including the California Prison Moratorium Project, Critical Resistance, and the Central California Environmental Justice Network provided a conceptual framework for the —Prison Industrial

Complex”. Dr. Pryor, Executive Director of the aforementioned Center, the world’s first and only research, public policy and advocacy organization created and administered by formerly incarcerated professionals, talked about prison education, police community relations, and recidivism. Dr. McKinney, an ethnographer and evaluator in several areas including youth organizing, violence, and reentry of previously incarcerated individuals, discussed his work

with MIMIC, a Philadelphia community group, and helping formerly incarcerated people return home by supporting their ideas and goals, some of which revolve around the creation of organizations. The speakers brought a wealth of the information both conceptual and practical to a very attentive packed audience at the African American Resource Center. The panel educated and better informed the audience about the —prison industrial complex” and what can be done to reduce the recidivism of formerly incarcerated people and empowering them, their families, friends, and local communities.

## Schomburg Center Director Speaks at York College

Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako)

On, Wednesday, October 13, 2010, The African American Resource Center and The Interdisciplinary Faculty Committee on African American and Caribbean Culture led by Prof. Valerie Anderson (English) presented Dr. Howard Dodson in the Faculty Dining Room to speak on the topic, —Black Studies Matters.” In what was to be one Dr. Dodson’s last public presentations as director of New York Public Li-

brary’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a standing room audience was treated to a dynamic and engaging discussion.

Dr. Dodson elaborated on the rich and often left out history, contributions and accomplishments of African cultures prior to the colonization of the continent as well as what Africans contributed even while enslaved and

transported through the Middle Passage to the New World, the Caribbean, Central and South America by as many as ten European countries participating in the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. While the numbers vary, as many as 12 million Africans were enslaved and as many as 6 ½ million survived the voyage into slavery under the most horrific conditions imaginable. Although many believe Africans

were enslaved solely as free labor, it was the skills they possessed, tilling the soil, knowledge and varied uses of plants, herbs and spices; craftsmanship with metals and woodworking and other skills that made them invaluable and necessary to build the New World.

Dr. Dodson also spoke of the rich history and development of the Schomburg Research Center at 135<sup>th</sup> Street and Lenox Avenue which began with a small collection of items verifying Black history by bibliophile Arturo Schomburg that grew into an extensive collection purchased by the New York Public Library. This collection now stands at over ten million items covering the African Diaspora.

When answering the question, Why Black History? Dr. Dodson asked “*Why is it that after all this time Black History not a part of elementary, middle and high school education in this country? It certainly is not because the information is not available or no books have been written on the subject.*” With that he cited works written by historians, Dr. Lerone Bennett, Dr. Vincent Harding and Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Dr. John Hope Franklin among many others, as well as the works published by the Schomburg Center. With that Dr. Dodson also talked about

how “*Black victimization did not make history, but our accomplishments, grown, development, inventions and successes did. It is what we have done in spite of 400 years of enslavement*” that has is worth celebrating. He said, “*The most American community is the African American community because all of America is part of the African community. The transformation of Black folks, new forms of culture come from Africans in the process of transformation from Africans to Americans and Caribbean languages, religions, practices, etc.*”

Why Black History? Why should students take Black History while attending York or any other college or university? Dr. Dodson’s answer to that question was “*To know ourselves. To know what our ancestors already accomplished. To know what America is all about. The role of the slave industry in making America, Europe, African-Caribbean and Central and South America. If we don’t that that, then we do not know much about ourselves...*”

Dr. Dodson spoke to the concept of “*cultural dominance*”. “*...as long as America is what it is, no one is safe from America. There is a dominant culture in America that captures and imposes their European political and religious symbols and will in the best of*

*all. He likened it to control without policing. We are still living colonial lives in a post colonial society...*”

In the question and answer session that followed, Dr. Dodson encouraged all students to take at least one course in Black Studies before graduating, that there are hundreds of books and databases available, and to frequent and use the Schomburg Center in Harlem as well as Queens own Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center to satisfy their studies, research and assignments.

Dr. Dodson retired in February after 30 years as director of the Schomburg Center. Under Dr. Dodson’s leadership, the Center developed into the world’s most comprehensive public research library devoted exclusively to —documenting and interpreting African diasporan and African history and culture.” Dr. Dodson’s publications include: *Becoming American: The African American Journey* (2009); *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience* (2005); *Jubilee: The Emergence of African-American Culture* (2002); and *The Black New Yorkers: Four Hundred Years of African American History* (2000). He is replaced by Dr. Kahlil G. Muhammad.

## **Africana Colloquium Series**

Kelly Josephs, English

The African American Resource Center holds a monthly colloquium featuring the scholarly work of its members and invited guests. The series, titled “The Africana Colloquium Series (ACS)” convenes on Wednesday afternoons from 1-2:30pm. Featured faculty speakers circulate their presentations one week

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in advance of their Colloquium presentation, thereby stimulating the greatest possible discussion and interchange.

In Fall 2010, the Colloquium welcomed the following speakers and topics:

—~~Al~~ Haley: "The Silent Partner" from *Malcolm's Mood Indigo*  
Dr. Mychel Namphy, Department of English

—~~Alt~~ernative Landscapes and —~~Rod~~ness" in a Suburban Community"  
Dr. Elgin L. Klugh, African American Studies and Anthropology

—~~M~~aking Nations Within Dutch Sovereignty: Race, Color, and Nationalism in Aruban and Curaçaoan Political Identities"  
Dr. Michael Orlando Sharpe, Assistant Professor of Political Science

In Spring 2011, we have featured the following speakers and topics

—Race, Class, and Gender Language: How Language is Constructed in the USA"  
Dr. Charles Coleman, English

"Suriname: Political Acumen and Geopolitical Anxiety."  
Dr. Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, Provost and Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs

"Victim-Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: Understanding The Link Between Historical Trauma and Posttraumatic Growth."  
Dr. Selena Rodgers, Department of Social Sciences

The Africana Colloquium Series is open to all York College faculty and we encourage non-African American Studies faculty to attend and to propose presentations of work relating to the African Diaspora at this forum. Please contact George White ([gwhite@york.cuny.edu](mailto:gwhite@york.cuny.edu)) or Kelly Josephs ([kjosephs@york.cuny.edu](mailto:kjosephs@york.cuny.edu)) for more information.

## **The Grand Central Depot of the Underground Railroad**

Jacquelyn Southern

On Saturday, February 19, our section of AAS101 visited Plymouth Church in Brooklyn Heights. This is a storied church that was once known as the Grand Central Depot of the Underground Railroad. There the abolitionist Reverend Henry Ward Beecher (brother to Harriet Beecher Stowe) preached against slavery. From his pulpit he also held mock slave auctions where enslaved persons stood before the congregation and Beecher both roused those present to give the money to buy those individuals' freedom and used the occasion to raise consciousness about the human reality of slavery. He even raised money for guns shipped to the antislavery forces in Kansas before the Civil

War—all despite death threats and a famous attempt by a proslavery mob from Manhattan to storm up the few blocks from the docks to the church, burn it down, and kill Beecher (it was stopped by the Brooklyn police force). Our trip aimed both to learn more about the history of that period and to delve into forms of evidence and inquiry in African American studies.

We were more than fortunate in being guided by Lois Rosebrooks, the church historian. She is a small but formidable woman who grew up in Brooklyn and has been a lifelong member of Plymouth Church, and she has been a moving force in

efforts to recognize, document, and preserve traces of the Underground Railroad in Brooklyn. Ms Rosebrooks gave the students an extended tour of the church, showing them the specially designed sanctuary where Beecher preached to thousands and where Lincoln sat the two times he attended the church (Plymouth helped organize the campaign trip East that won him election). Others invited to speak



at the church included Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Booker T. Washington. In more recent times, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed the congregation in 1963 with an early version of his —Have a Dream” speech, and Ms Rosebrooks showed us her own hand; as a young member of the choir, she had the opportunity to shake his hand. The culmination of the tour was the church basement, a large, dark, unfinished space with low ceilings and many recesses; this was most likely the station where fugitives hid at the church.

Plymouth Church is a National Historic Landmark and also is a site on the State of New York’s Underground Railroad Heritage Trail. As Ms Rosebrooks led us through the church, she explained how it had acquired its landmark status and how she, as church historian, has researched and verified its history. Unlike so many churches and organizations, Plymouth saved much of its correspondence and written records (some of it is at the Brooklyn Historical Society); those have been very useful to her. However, the Underground Railroad itself was illegal and a closely guarded secret and, though many congregants were known or suspected to have stations at their homes, few wrote about it even after the Civil War, still fearing retribution. Hence that history has to be recon

Plymouth Church basement. In densely populated Brooklyn Heights, fugitives would have had to sit in the dark at night so that no one would see lights where they hid. Photograph by Natalie Walker.

structed from a mixture of indirect evidence, old newspapers, written fragments, published memoirs, oral history, and the physical record. For instance, Ms Rosebrooks described the triumphant moment when she found in the writings of Charles Ray, the great African American abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor in Manhattan, the unambiguous statement that he delivered fugitives to Beecher in Brooklyn.

Finally, Ms Rosebrooks described the social history of the church, a white Congregationalist congregation ranging from workers and modest middle-class shopkeepers to wealthy capitalists; when money was collected for the antislavery cause—sizable sums amounting to as much as \$10,000 in today’s currency—it came in as anything from small donations to jewelry that could be sold. In the nineteenth century, the neighborhoods around Plymouth Church were entirely or predominantly white, bustling with business and activity from the docks and filled with middle-class homes as well as boarding houses in which new Irish and German immigrants lived. Fugitive slaves had to get through these communities safely as they passed

through Brooklyn into increasingly mixed neighborhoods and, further out, communities of free blacks like Weeksville. Besides those who arrived with the help of conductors in Manhattan, fugitives came directly off the ships, and were helped by sailors who directed them to friendly faces in Brooklyn. Plymouth Church was only one in a network of safe houses that led to Brooklyn's free black communities and, for many, on to Canada.

This history is unknown to most New Yorkers, but is the subject of very current and lively research as well as preservationist struggles. There is much to see at Plymouth Church alone, where there are paintings, sculptures, and artifacts on display inside and in its garden; the students lingered over those after the tour. They include a 1914 sculpture by Gutzon Borglum (sculptor of Mount Rushmore) of Beecher and the first pair of sisters whose freedom was bought by the church (their father approached Beecher for help when he was unable to afford their purchase price). Ms Rose-

brooks also showed us a ring given to Sally Maria Diggs, a child called "Finky," when her freedom was bought; at age 76, she was a guest of the church, to which she donated the ring.

Today, despite the impact of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and new development, it is still possible to walk around Brooklyn Heights and see much of its history preserved in place. The former Bridge Street AWME Church and Duffield Street are both within walking distance; Duffield Street was renamed Abolitionist Place following a community struggle to protect it from the use of eminent domain to seize abolitionists' homes and sell them to developers of a parking garage. Further out, Weeksville Heritage Center preserves the last homes of that important community. In our tour, Ms Rosebrooks brought to life a dramatic story where—in violently proslavery New York City—fugitive slaves, free blacks, abolitionists, and people of conscience came together in the dangerous work of freeing people from bondage.

## **The Resource Center's First Book Party: Martin Atangana's *The End of French Rule in Cameroon***

Laura Fishman (History) and Mark Schuller (African American Studies and Anthropology)

*First published in the December 2010 Academic Affairs Update*

On Wednesday, November 10, a packed room of students and faculty gathered to celebrate the publication of a new book by Martin Atangana, Associate Professor of History both here at York and at the Graduate Center, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*. The event was sponsored by the African American Studies Program, the Department of History and Philosophy, and the Office of Academic Affairs.

Dr. Atangana's book explores the multiple dynamics of decolonization and draws on research conducted in Cameroon and France. It analyzes the reforms introduced by France in Cameroon after World War II, the circumstances surrounding the unsuc-

cessful attempt of the UPC to seize independence by force, and the subsequent eradication of this party by an alliance of Franco-Cameroonian forces. The book shows the length that the French were prepared to go in order to leave Cameroon in the hands of a government that would be sympathetic to their interests. The author, a native of Cameroon, provides insights based on his own cultural experiences.

Provost Ivelaw L. Griffith provided opening remarks. Commentary on the book was provided by Dr. Conrad Dyer (Political Science, Department of Behavioral Sciences) and Dr. Hamid Bahri (French, Department of Foreign Languages, ESL and

Humanities). Issues raised included the political legacy of European colonial policies in Africa, and the profound psychological impact of colonialism on native populations. Questions of power and identity were raised as the large audience continued a lively discussion. Unfortunately, the honoree could not be present due to a sudden medical emergency. However, his work inspired faculty and students and stimulated inquiry into the complex nature of colonialism and its aftermath.

The AARC hopes to continue this tradition of celebrating faculty's accomplishments by hosting more events. Academic Affairs pledged its support in this effort.

## A ThRiVing Summer of Service!

During the summer of 2011, Dr. Selena T. Rodgers, Assistant Professor of Social Work, at York College of The City University of New York was actively engaged in community service in the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn with the ThRiVe organization.

Felisha Michelle Bell is the Founder and Executive Director of ThRiVe, *an organization committed to empowering people of color through cultural awareness, health and wellness, education and the rebuilding of families and communities.* As a prelude to an initiative aimed at promoting the health and wellness of girls and women of African descent, this summer ThRiVe, launched *The Stronger Awareness Series* to discuss strategies and solutions to issues affecting Black families and communities and to build public awareness about the campaign. Black Women's BluePrint, Inc. and Queens Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center hosted the awareness forums.

In support of ThRiVe's *Stronger Awareness Series*, the planning committee: Dr. Selena T. Rodgers (Assistant Professor/York College), Farah Tanis (Co-Founder/Black Women's BluePrint), Fatima Friday (Artistic Director/FreeLaavéSól), along with ThRiVe volunteer Tiffany Cudjoe (Student/York College) assisted Felisha Michelle Bell (Founder/ThRiVe) to



successfully plan and promote the summer events.

Black Women's BluePrint, Inc. hosted the first awareness event in July. *Blueprint is a human rights and civil rights membership organization of women and men. Its purpose is to take action to bring Black women into full and equal social, economic and political participation in the mainstream of American society now.* Approximately 60 participants attended the forum. The documentary *Very Young Girls* was followed by a panel discussion, and a question and answer session with, Dr. Scyatta Wallace, teen expert and psychologist and Kalima DeSuze (a survivor of sexual abuse and prostitution and Harlem G.E.M.S. youth outreach coordinator). The dialogue focused

on sexual abuse and the exploitation of girls lured into a life of prostitution. [www.gems-girls.org](http://www.gems-girls.org)

In August, York College African-American Resource Center (AARC) Interdisciplinary



Selena Rodgers and Andrew Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako). Photo: Tiffany Cudjoe



Committee members, Dr. Rodgers and Professor Jackson along with Felisha Michelle Bell, Founder of ThRiVe, collaborated on *The Stronger Awareness Series 2<sup>nd</sup>* event titled, *Everyone's Sun: Helping Our Black Boys Shine*. Queens Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center served as the site for the panel discussion geared towards informing community members and constituents of strategies, best practices and solutions aimed at reversing the plight of black boys in our community. Located at 100th Street and Northern Boulevard in Corona, the Queens Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center *founded by activists from the Corona-East Elmhurst neighborhood as part of the Anti-Poverty programs of the 1960's, it is the first public institution named for the "Poet Laureate of Harlem."*

Professor Jackson posits —throughout the 1960's and 1970's it was not unusual to see a commodity of community activist unite for the collective vision of the Black communities - family day care and head start programs that served and educated multiple generations. Today, that level of activism has died and Black boys are the commodity of the criminal justice system through the rising presence of unlicensed guns,



high levels of crimes against other Black community members, drug sales and chemical dependency. The loss of unprecedented Black youth to the criminal justice system depletes our community foundation that becomes dysfunctional year after year.”

Moderated by Mychal Sledge, the nine-panel discussion, which included Black male community mentors, program directors, and activists from Queens, Brooklyn, New Jersey, Philadelphia and upstate New York was a frank, poignant, engaging and honest conversation. It was a great networking opportunity for the estimated 70 participants to identify and discuss obstacles and solutions. —The Langston Hughes Community Library is invested in hosting similar events on this and other critical issues involving the Black Family” stated Langston

Hughes Executive Director Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako). For most of the panel and participants, this was their first visit to the Hughes Library.

As we prepare for the official launch of the campaign, the series will continue to build community and public awareness with programming designed to both educate and empower. The vision for *The Stronger: Redefining and Reinventing the Strong Black Woman Campaign and Conference* is a 3-day intergenerational conference focuses on the physical, social and emotional wellness of Black females through dialogue, workshops, demonstrations and health screenings. “Stronger” employs a holistic approach that is aligned with the notion that healthy women create healthier families and communities.

Photo l to r: Thomas Sapp (Founder, Kareem D. Sapp Foundation), David Jenkins (Founder, Order of The Feather - Queens Chapter), Dr. Umar-Abdullah Johnson (Psychologist, African-American Psychological and Educational Service for Children), Matthew P. Stevens (Founder, Empower Today's Youth), Bernard Gassaway (Principal, Boys and Girls High School), Felisha Michelle Bell (Founder, ThRiVe), Clifford B. Simmons (Executive Director/Co-Founder, The Blue Nile Passage, Inc.), Mychal Sledge (CEO, The Sledge Group, Inc.), Kenneth Braswell (Executive Director/Founder, Fathers, Inc.), Dennis Rahiim Watson (President/CEO, Center for Black Student Achievement – not in photo).

For additional information about the conference, please email [Stronger2012conference@gmail.com](mailto:Stronger2012conference@gmail.com)

## The Minority Reporter Comes to York College

By Elgin Klugh



Frederick Gooding, a.k.a. the —Race Doctor—

On Wednesday evening, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2011, Frederick Gooding, Esquire (a.k.a) —The Race Doctor,” entertained and inspired the York College community with his *Minority Reporter* presentation. The *Minority Reporter* ([www.minorityreporter.com](http://www.minorityreporter.com)) is a media literacy enterprise that provokes critical thinking concerning common racial character patterns or archetypes in mainstream movies. Gooding’s presentation quickly drew the attention of students by the use of media images, humor, and eventual progression to the more serious and immediately relevant issues that demand a critical analysis of race. Through careful use of his minority character archetypes, Gooding explained how seemingly harmless, but persistent, media images lay the ideological foundation for continued social inequalities. Additionally, he explained that destructive stereotypes are exported throughout the world and therefore much more comprehensive when implanting negative ideas concerning minority populations (particularly African Americans). Students sat mesmerized throughout Gooding’s presentation and were highly interactive during the time for question and answer. Truly, as Gooding stated, they will never see movies the same way again!

## Dr. Rodgers Presents Research on Child Sexual Abuse

On April 8, 2010, Dr. Selena T. Rodgers, Assistant Professor of Social Work, presented her research paper titled, Imani Dream: Posttraumatic Growth and Spiritual Well-Being in African-American Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse at *The National Association of Black Social Workers “Keepers of the Village: The Role for Community Organizers” 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference*. The annual forum was hosted in Philadelphia, PA. The National Association of Black Social Workers Inc. is committed to enhancing the quality of life and empowering people of African ancestry through advocacy, human services delivery, and research [www.nabsw.org/](http://www.nabsw.org/)

On September 26, 2010, Dr. Rodgers was an invited panelist at *The International Black Women’s Congress (IBWC) 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference*, “Weaved in the Fabric: A Wholistic Perspective on Violence Against Black Women.” Unmasking Secrets of Childhood Abuse: *The Middle Passage* to Spiritual Well-Being among African-American women with experiences of Childhood Sexual Abuse was the focus of Dr. Rodgers’ talk. The yearly conference was held in Norfolk, VA. The IBWC’s vision is, to bring forth exemplary models of African Womanhood by defining ourselves and improving ourselves through social, political and economic empowerment [www.ibwc.us/](http://www.ibwc.us/)

***Some of the new classes in the new major are: The Unforgiving Mirror: Race and Racism in Contemporary Society; Intersections: Black Women in the Atlantic World; Contemporary Legacy of Slavery in the U.S.; Environmental Justice in North America; Africa and the Columbian Exchange; Heritage, Culture, and Memory; Race, Housing, and Community; and Boys to Men: from Black Macho to Black Male Feminist***

## Caribbean Class Visits Schomburg Center

Michael Sharpe



On October 27, 2010, Dr. Sharpe accompanied his students from his new course Advanced Topics in Political Science (Pol 311): Life in Debt: the Politics of the Caribbean for a presentation by senior librarian Ms. Alison Quammie on how to do research at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Har-

lem. Dr. Sharpe arranged and planned this trip both to show students some of the resources available towards doing the research for their class presentations and research papers and to expose them to the wonderful world of the Schomburg located in historic Harlem. At the end of the evening, Dr. Sharpe and his

students had the pleasure of meeting Schomburg Director Dr. Howard Dodson (in photo above), who, at the invitation of Professor Valerie Anderson, English, spoke at a York African American Resource Center event on October 13, 2010. (Originally Published in Academic Affairs November 2010)

*The African American Resource Center has a full Calendar of Activities for the fall: Colloquium Series, Film Series, fieldtrips, presentations, and workshops. E-mail interim coordinator mschuller@york.cuny.edu to join our mailing list.*

*For the fall, the Center is open Mondays through Thursdays, 10-8 and Fridays, 10-4*

## Black Women of Great Worth



L to R: Monica Pringle (Deputy Chief of Staff for New York State Senator Honorable Shirley L. Huntley), Vivian Cook (New York State Assemblywoman), Grace Ogiehor'enoma (Nurse Educator, Elmhurst Hospital), Selena T. Rodgers (Assistant Professor of Social Work/York College of the City University of New York. Photo courtesy of Lelio Dalencour/Rochdale Bulletin



L to r: Ruben Wills (NYC Council Member, 28<sup>th</sup> District), Selena T. Rodgers (AARC Member/Assistant Professor of Social Work), Anthony Andrews Jr. (AARC Member/Assistant Director of Student Activities and Campus Programming/Queens District Leader). Photo courtesy of Lelio Dalencour/Rochdale Bulletin

On March 26, 2011, Dr. Rodgers, a member of the Interdisciplinary Advisory Board for the African American Resource Center Committee (AARC Committee) and Assistant Professor of Social Work at York College, School of Health and Behavioral Sciences, was an invited distinguished panelist for the Rochdale Village Women History Month Forum. She had the honor to sit at the Dais with Black women trailblazers. They discussed the legacy, struggles, social issues, and collective vision for *Black Women of Great Worth*.

Among the distinguished panelist was Dr. Maria Hubbard of the Greater Bethel Community Development Corporation. Dr.

Hubbard is a descendant of Mary McLeod Bethune-Cookman. Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune-Cookman (1875-1955), African American great educators, distinguished adviser to several American presidents, and a pioneer and ambassador of racial equality. Honorable New York Assemblywoman Vivian Cook, a champion for York College of the City University of New York and the Queens community, is recognizable for her major role in the opening of the AARC in 1985. Honorable Assemblywoman Vivian Cook and Monica Pringle, Deputy Chief of Staff for New York State Senator Honorable Shirley L. Huntley bestowed Mrs. Elizabeth Singleton, age 103, with a proclamation and

citation for her great worth as a prominent Black women and the oldest resident in Rochdale Village. Dr. Grace Ogiehor'enoma, President of the Nigerian Nurses Association of USA, Inc. and nurse educator at Elmhurst Hospital, Queens NY has over 22 years of expertise in the health-care field. She discussed the staggering rate of diabetes and high blood pressure in the Black community and offered recommendations to promote healthy habits and living. She graciously spoke about her journey from Nigeria, West Africa to the United States of America and the significant role of her family, particularly her husband during the transition.

Dr. Rodgers discussed her research on child sexual abuse in the Black Community, confirming national statistics that children between 8-9 years of age are most vulnerable to child sexual abuse. Results from Dr. Rodgers' research also concluded that 80 percent of participants identified their perpetrator as a family

member, or someone they considered family. If we can birth a nation, then surely we can eradicate child sexual abuse!

New York City Council Member, Rubin Wills along with AARC Advisory Board member Anthony Andrews were also distinguished panelist at the *Women of*

*Great Worth* forum. Mr. Andrews, Queens District Leader and Assistant and Director of Student Activities and Campus Programming, affirmed the importance of men joining women in the discussion and collective vision.

## York College Students reaching greater heights

Since Spring 2009, the Resource Center has hosted a conversation between faculty and students about graduate school. Since that time hundreds of students have heard advice about choosing schools, writing the applications, writing personal statements, and have gotten information about funding opportunities.

Faculty members from diverse educational backgrounds continue to share their experiences with students:

Kathariya Mokruue (Psychology)  
Mychel Namphy (English)  
Selena Rodgers (Social Work)  
Mark Schuller (African American Studies/Anthropology)

Xiaodan Zhang (Sociology)

On March 1, 2011, faculty were joined by Stephen Smith, graduate student at the Graduate Center. Smith talked about the CUNY Pipeline. York College students who went through the program also shared their experiences, who have worked with Prof. Namphy.

The CUNY Pipeline Program is administered by the Office of Educational Opportunity and Diversity Programs (OEODP) at the Graduate Center – CUNY. The program is designed to provide educational and financial support to students who are cur-

rently underrepresented in our nation's Universities. Undergraduates from underrepresented groups interested in pursuing the Ph.D. in preparation for college-level teaching and advanced research in any discipline except law and medicine are encouraged to apply.

This greater interest paid off: Five York College students attended the Pipeline Program this year.

For information about the CUNY Pipeline program, visit <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/oeodp/pipeline.asp>

## York College and Haiti: an Ongoing Engagement

The African American Resource Center hosted several events on Haiti in 2010-11, since the devastating earthquake that killed as many as 316,000 people. York is one of the few colleges with a Haitian Creole program, coordinated by Dr. Jean François. York serves a large Haitian student population and the neighborhood, Jamaica Queens, has a large and growing Haitian community.

On November 16, 2010, two days before the anniversary of the final battle of the Haitian Revolution in 1803 that ended slavery and established the world's first free black republic, York invited several activists to discuss the on-the-ground earthquake response. Because the event had over 200 people, it was held in the Atrium. Prof. François began the event and moderated the discussion that

included Prof. Mark Schuller and several Haitian activists in New York City: Ray Laforest (WBAI, Pacifica Radio, AFSCME), Lily Cerat (Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees), and Lionel Legros (Kingsborough Community College and also the host of the first Haitian radio program in New York), and solidarity activist Lisa Davis (MADRE, CUNY Law School). The discussion focused on the conditions in the

internally displaced people (IDP) camps, including a rise in rape and other gender-based violence.

In the Spring, the Resource Center hosted three Haiti events. York was honored to have long-time activist *within* Haiti, Reyneld Sanon, to discuss the movement of people within IDP camps to demand housing. News from Haiti, which experienced a devastating earthquake, had all but disappeared by March 8, 2011, the day of Sanon's presentation. Despite this, Haiti still experienced an ongoing humanitarian crisis that includes cholera, killing more than 6,000 as of summer 2011 – a disease brought to Haiti last October by U.N. troops. At least 800,000 still lived in makeshift camps, under tents and tarps, with almost no progress on rebuilding permanent housing. Confronting this, a growing movement is organized to advocate for IDPs' rights.

Reyneld Sanon was a founding member of FRAKKA, a coalition of 40 grassroots groups founded in March 2010, two months after the earthquake. Before this, Sanon has been a founding member of a range of civil society groups, including Chandèl (popular edu-

cation), Atèn Ouvriye (workers' rights). Sanon has three decades of experience as a community animator, coordinator, or consultant for a range of local and international groups.

On March 10, the Resource Center hosted a talk by Prof. Valerie Kaussen, —Occupation, Space, and Surveillance in Post-Earthquake Haiti.” Kaussen placed post-earthquake conditions and humanitarian aid in the historical context of US imperialism, specifically the US occupation of 1915-34. She discussed how some of the effects and policies of the occupation led to the —man-made” disaster of the 2010 earthquake (rural/urban migration; the centralization of government, services, and capital in PAP; —modernization” of police surveillance and population control). Finally, she suggested ways that the post-earthquake moment (failures of neoliberal humanitarian aid and development plans) model the shift in US colonialism from the so-called —civilizing project” of early twentieth century to the post-colonial benevolent imperialism of today.

Kaussen is an associate professor of French at the University of

Missouri-Columbia. She is the author of *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and US Imperialism* (Lexington Books, 2008).

Distinguished Lecturer of Political Science, longtime African American activist Dr. Ron Daniels has founded many organizations. For over a decade he has been involved in Haiti solidarity. He has led dozens of delegations of African American business, political, and media leaders to Haiti. He organized an event at the Resource Center on April 12, 2011, —Haiti after the Election of a New President.” Much is happening in Haiti in the year 2011: the Return of Baby Doc, the Return of President Aristide, the election of its next president, and continuing crises in the earthquake's aftermath. This event featured presentations by York College student Natasha Lewis who visited Haiti in October, 2010, excerpts from award winning journalist / filmmaker Herb Boyd and Eddie Harris' documentary on Haiti, and observations by Jean Francois, Associate Professor Department of Foreign Languages and Dr. Daniels, who founded Haiti Support Project.

## MEET OUR FACULTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Mesfin Araya** is Associate Professor of African American Studies at York, where he teaches intro to Africa, the Black Family, Black Revolutionary Thought, and Historiography in Black Studies. He produced numerous scholarly works on Ethiopia and Eritrea from a political science perspective; his next book analyzes Eritrean nationalism.

**Martin Atangana** holds a Ph. D. in History from the University of Paris 1-Sorbonne (France), a M.A. in History from the University of Paris X-Nanterre (France), and a B.A. from the University of Yaoundé (Cameroon). He is currently an Associate Professor of History at York College and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His research interests focus on the relationship between West Africa and Europe with a special emphasis on Franco-Cameroonian relations. He is the author of *The End of French Rule in Cameroon* and *Capitalisme et Nationalisme au Cameroun au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*; *French Investment in Colonial Cameroon*; and articles published in *Matériaux Pour l'Histoire de Notre Temps*, *African Studies Review*, and *The Cana-*

*dian Journal of African Studies*. In addition to doing research and teaching, Dr. Atangana is an accomplished musician who had worked with artists such as Paul Simon, Jean Luc Ponty, Many Dibango, and Ronald Shannon Jackson. He frequently performs with band —African Blue Note.” His solo albums include *Oyenga Fam* and *Mot Songo*.

**Coleen Clay** is Associate Professor of the Department of Teacher Education at York. Dr. Clay teaches courses in literacy development, child and adolescent development and teaching and learning in urban schools and supervises student teachers. From 1999- 2001 she was an Associate Professor of Education at CUNY Medgar Evers College. From 1994-1999 she was the Coordinator of Educational Programs and Research at the Caribbean Research Center, Medgar Evers College. Early in her career she was a member of the Faculty of Education and Educational Research at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, WI where she taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in child development and education. She is a member of the Editorial Board of WADABAGEI, a scholarly journal of the Caribbean and its Diaspora. In the 1990’s she served on the New York City and New York State Committees on Education of Caribbean Creole Students and the Bilingual Special Education Advisory Council.

As former Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights and a veteran social and political activist, **Ron Daniels** has an extensive familiarity with issues and policy affecting African Americans and other people of color. In addition, Daniels is conversant with First Amendment issues, the Patriot Act, torture, rendition and related issues. As former Deputy Campaign Manager for Rev. Jesse Jackson’s 1988 presidential campaign and a former independent candidate for President, Daniels regularly comments on electoral and political issues in weekly column Vantage Point and a WBAI show. His principal international work is Haiti via the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and the Haiti Support Project. Daniels is conversant with U.S. policy towards Haiti and political trends in Haiti.

**Andrew P. Jackson (Sekou Molefi Baako)** has been executive director of Queens Library’s Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center since August 1980. He is also a Library Consultant and Advisor. A graduate of CUNY’s York College with a BS in Business Administration and Queens College’s Graduate School of Library and Information Studies with a Master of Library Science, Andrew is a published author, essayist, lecturer and adjunct professor at both of his alma maters. His most recent book, *Queens Notes: Facts About the Forgotten Borough of Queens, New York* was published in August 2010. He wrote the Foreword to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> editions of the *African American Almanac* (2003 and 2007) and numerous articles on African history and culture. He is currently working on a new book project, *The Black Librarian in America: Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

**Kelly Baker Josephs** is an Assistant Professor of English at York College. She teaches courses in Anglophone Caribbean Literature, Postcolonial Literature and Theory, Literatures of the African Diaspora, and Gender Studies. Prof. Josephs is also Managing editor of the journal *Small Axe*. She is currently working on a book manuscript, tentatively titled "Disturbers of the Peace: The Aesthetics of Madness in Caribbean Literature," which considers the ubiquity of madmen and madwomen in Anglophone Caribbean literature between 1959 and 1980. Josephs coordinates the CUNY-wide Caribbean Epistemologies seminar series at the Graduate Center.

**Tania Levey** is an associate professor of sociology at York College. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology and a Certificate in Women’s Studies in 2006 from the Graduate center, City University Of New York. Her primary research interests are in sex and gender, race and ethnicity, social stratifications, higher education, and work and occupations. Dr. Levey contributed to *Passing the Torch: Does Higher Education for the Disadvantaged Pay Off across the Generations?* (Russell Sage, 2007). In *Passing the Torch*, Paul Attewell, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey follow students admitted under the City University of New York’s “open admissions” policy, tracking its effects on them and their children, to find out whether widening college access can accelerate social mobility across generations. Her co-authored article in *Journal of African American studies* was reprinted in *Free at last? Black America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, edited by Juan Jose Battle, Michael Bennett and Anthony J.Lemelle (Transaction Publishers, 2006). Dr. Levey is also published in *Sociological Forum International*.

For over a decade, **Mychel J. Namphy** has been lecturing, teaching, and writing about African American literature, culture, and politics, in such diverse venues as churches and mosques, police academies and drug treatment centers, Ivy League colleges, graduate schools, high schools, elementary schools, and prisons. His B.A. is from Columbia University, and he completed his Ph.D in English and African American literature at Princeton. Dr. Namphy currently has a book manuscript, titled *Malcolm's Mood Indigo: A Theodicy of Literary Contests*, being reviewed by various academic presses. This book is a study of Malcolm X as an aspect of contemporary history, and a close analysis of Malcolm's collaboration with Alex Haley that in 1965 produced *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, one

of the most dynamic spiritual and political autobiographies of our time. Dr. Namphy has held teaching positions at Princeton University and at Rutgers University. At York College, he teaches courses on African American and Native American literature, art, and music, and constantly encourages his students to explore the connections between our cultural practices and our struggle for freedom, justice, equality, and dignity.

**Jonathan Quash** is the director of the York College's Men's Center/ the Male Initiative, as well as an instructor in the Performing Arts (Music). Quash is the director and faculty advisor to the Gospel Choir at York. An accomplished musician, Quash has several CDs and recordings with a range of artists, including Mark Adams and K. Joy. Quash graduated from York College and is completing his Ph.D.

**Selena T. Rodgers** is an Assistant Professor of Social Work and Director of Social Work Field Education at York. She teaches Social Research Methods and Social Work Practice: Field Placement and Seminar. Her primary area of research is posttraumatic growth and socio-cultural factors in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic groups who experience forced migration, child sexual abuse and secondary trauma. In 2010, she collaborated with several authors and published a chapter titled, *Our Survival, Our Strengths: Understanding the experiences of African-American women in abusive relationships*. Dr. Rodgers is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW-R). She has had over 17 years of experience in the field of Social Work, with a specialization in administration. Prior to her academic appointment at York College, Dr. Rodgers was the Associate Vice President for Safe Horizon's Queens Community and Criminal Justice Programs, one of the nation's leading agency in the field of victimization. She earned her Ph.D. in Social Work from Adelphi University and her Masters Degree in Social Work from Syracuse University.

**Mark Schuller** is Assistant Professor of African American Studies and Anthropology at York. Supported by the National Science Foundation and others, Schuller's research on globalization, NGOs, gender, and disasters in Haiti has been published in over a dozen book chapters and peer-reviewed articles as well as public media, including a column in *Huffington Post*. He is the author of forthcoming *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International aid, and NGOs* (Rutgers, 2012) and co-editor of four volumes, including *Tectonic Shifts: Impacts of Haiti's Earthquake*, to be published in January by Kumarian Press. He is co-director / co-producer of documentary *Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy* (Documentary Educational Resources, 2009). He chairs the Society for Applied Anthropology's Human Rights and Social Justice Committee and is active in many solidarity efforts.

**Michael Sharpe** is Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Department of Behavioral Sciences. His areas of specialization are comparative politics and international relations and his research interests include looking comparatively at globalization, the politics of international migration, immigrant political incorporation, and political transnationalism. The research has thus far been published in a journal, encyclopedias, and forthcoming chapters in books. Dr. Sharpe volunteered with Operation Crossroads Africa in Kajiado, Kenya when he was an undergraduate and remains interested in the African Diaspora all over the world. He is a board member of the United Nations affiliated NGO, the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR).

Dr. **Jacquelyn Southern** is a geographer with research interests in labor, environmental justice, and racialized landscapes. She is coordinator of the African Humanities Program at the American Council of Learned Societies, and is adjunct assistant professor of African American Studies at York.

Associate Professor of history, **George White's** first book *Holding the Line: Race, Racism, and American Foreign Policy Toward Africa, 1953-1961* was published in 2005. His second book will be an edited volume of the papers of a World War II Chaplain, entitled "On the Battlefield For My Lord: The Papers of Rev. Robert Boston Dokes in World War II." In addition to his Ph.D., Dr. White also has a J.D. from Harvard Law School and has taught courses or portions of courses on the impact of the American legal system on society.

**Tom Zlabinger** is a full-time lecturer of music at York College / CUNY and is the director of the York College Big Band and the York College Blue Notes & Summer Jazz Program. He is a professional bass player and an ethnomusicologist with a focus on jazz. He is finishing a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at The Graduate Center / CUNY and his dissertation topic is the contemporary jazz and improvised music scene in Vienna, Austria. Tom has performed at ABC No Rio, Angel Orensanz Center, the Austrian Cultural Forum, the Bowery Poetry Club, the Brecht Forum, Carnegie Hall, Downtown Music Gallery, Issue Project Room, Lincoln Center, the Local 269, the Living Theatre, Smoke, the Stone, and the University of the Streets.