

African American Studies

The African American Studies Department at Oberlin is over three decades old and is today one of the best known undergraduate programs of its kind in the United States. Courses in the field were first offered in the late 1960s in response to student demands for a more socially relevant education. Since its inception, African American Studies has been regarded as one of the most dynamic departments at Oberlin College. Students from all disciplines take full advantage of courses that offer a unique opportunity to substantively expand their knowledge of Africa and Africa descended peoples.

As a multi-disciplinary area of study, the department's courses offer an unusually rich intellectual experience for all members of the Oberlin community, who themselves bring a variety of ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds to their learning. While the department's primary commitment is to elucidate the many facets of the African diasporan experience, its pluralistic approach is consistent with providing students a deeper appreciation for the distinctiveness of the world's cultures and a rigorous education in several academic disciplines.

The department offers an outstanding array of courses in the performative and fine arts, humanities, and social sciences that explore the histories and cultures of peoples of Africa and the African Diaspora. Students enrolled in the program are asked to explore key areas of black life in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Americas with the aim of developing a more nuanced understanding of the African Diasporan experience.

The Curriculum

The range of courses in African American Studies at Oberlin is broad and includes introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels of instruction. Such courses include African, African American and Caribbean histories, urban education, African and African Diasporan literatures, politics and black women's studies. Black cultures also may be explored through the Black Arts Workshops, dance, film and visual arts courses, and through artistic productions. Courses in African American music are offered through the Conservatory and are cross-listed with the department.

For students interested in surveys of black life, "Introduction to the Black Experience" and "Traditional African Cosmology" are available. These two introductory courses are taught within a multidisciplinary framework, involving most areas of the humanities and social sciences. The department also offers a variety of more advanced courses. There are opportunities to study on international and domestic programs and to travel individually or on faculty-sponsored trips. Some students study African languages abroad for Oberlin course credit through African American Studies.

Major Requirements

Requirements for the major in African American Studies are consistent with our view of the field as a multi-disciplinary and area studies program. We have designed the major so that students will gain comprehensive knowledge of African peoples in different parts of the world. The major has also been constructed to give students a strong background in a single field of study with the requisite research skills. This guarantees our majors both breadth and depth in the field. General as well as highly specialized knowledge of the black experience is expected of all our students.

Students are expected to develop a balanced program of study consonant with their special interests. These courses may be complementary to relevant courses from other college departments and programs. Our department, in fact, encourages interdisciplinary study and grants credit for selected related extra-departmental work. African American Studies 101, "Introduction to the Black Experience," is currently required of all majors. This course constitutes the foundation for all other courses in the department. For that reason, it is usually taken during the freshman or sophomore year. It explores the birth and evolution of the field, the African origins of western civilization, European imperialism in Africa and the Americas, slavery and racism in the Americas, black culture, urban black life, class stratification among black Americans, black political economy, African American expressive culture, black feminist history and literature, and the politics of black liberation.

In addition, the department has recently developed a seminar for senior majors. This required course allows seniors, who

have different concentration areas, to develop methodological skills through special projects. The course also provides opportunities for students to learn from one another by sharing information as their projects progress.

Afrikan Heritage House

In addition to this comprehensive program of study, the department sponsors numerous extracurricular activities on campus, often under the auspices of the Afrikan Heritage House. Since the late 1960s, this black cultural living facility has been an integral part of African American Studies at Oberlin. It is located in a spacious double-dormitory building and houses a campus dining facility, a Black Studies library, and ample space for meetings and gatherings.

The "House" provides a common living experience for students seeking to expand their knowledge of black life and the black cultural heritage. It also serves, very importantly, as the center of black culture on campus. In, and through, the House, which has its own Faculty-in-Residence, the African American Studies Department presents numerous activities, such as Kwanza and Kuumba week. Several community outreach programs are also conducted through Afrikan Heritage House.

Career Opportunities

As in the traditional liberal arts disciplines, Oberlin's African American Studies majors are well qualified to pursue professions in a variety of areas, including law, medicine, fine arts, and Ph.D. programs. Research shows that majors in the field are being accepted into the very best graduate and professional school programs. In those areas where knowledge of minority affairs is desirable, students holding African American Studies degrees have a decided advantage. Of equal importance to the African American Studies Department is that students are equipped with values and knowledge they can use to improve the human condition. African American Studies seeks to educate students not to succumb to the world as it is, but to transform society as they dream it to be.

Faculty and Staff

The faculty and administrative staff in African American Studies currently numbers more than ten continuing and visiting scholars. In addition to teaching responsibilities, faculty members are available to students as academic advisors and mentors. Students are encouraged to seek faculty out for the expertise they offer in a number of disciplines.

PAMELA BROOKS, Associate Professor of African American Studies; B.A. in History, New York University; M.A. in History, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Ph.D. in History, Northeastern University. Ms. Brooks' research is comparative and deals with the formation of black women's political consciousness and activism during the 1950s in the U. S. South and South Africa. In the coming year, UMass Press will publish a book-length manuscript on her research entitled, *Boycotts, Buses, and Passes*. Other areas of her teaching and research include the early and more contemporary histories, literatures, and politics of African Americans and black South Africans, especially women and those of the working classes.

JOHNNY COLEMAN, Associate Professor of Art and African American Studies; BFA, Otis Art Institute of the Parsons School of Design; MFA University of California at San Diego. He has worked collaboratively with Ulysses Jenkins, Collage Anseble, George Lewis, Kimara Dixon, Albert Chong, Quincy Troupe, The Hittite Empire, Adenike Sharpley, and Michael Early. Mr. Coleman has created sound installations for The Akron Art Museum, The College of Wooster Art Museum, MOCA Cleveland, Randolph Street Gallery, Hall Walls, William Cannon Art Center, Urban Evidence (SPACES Gallery, Cleveland), in SITE 94 (Santa Fe Depot, San Diego), Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Centro Cultural (San Diego), and David Zapf Gallery. Additionally, he performed on stage at BAM, Majestic Theater: Next Wave Festival 96, and his work is included in the permanent collection of The San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, and the California Center for Contemporary Arts.

JUSTIN EMEKA, Visiting Assistant Professor, African American Studies and Theater and Dance; B.A. African American

Studies from Oberlin College; M.F.A. in Directing, University of Washington in Seattle. He works professionally as an actor, writer, director, and capoeirista. His directing credits include *Dutchman*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Macbeth*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *StopKiss*, directed at Oberlin during the spring of 2006. In addition, Mr. Emeka creates original works including *Sankofa Theater*, *Pressure: A Hip-Hop Theater Experience*, *Where the Wild Things At!* and *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised!* Mr. Emeka is a member of Actors Equity and has performed at the Yale Repertory Theatre, ACT, the Intiman Theater, Seattle Children's Theater, Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center, and the Seattle Group Theater. He has studied Capoeira Angola for over 10 years, and was one of the first students of Mestre Jurandir in the United States.

MEREDITH M. GADSBY, Assistant Professor of African American Studies; B. A. in English, Vassar College; M.A. and Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, Binghamton University SUNY. She has several teaching and research interests, including International Black Literatures, Literatures of the African Diaspora, Black Women's Writing, Cross Cultural Theories, and Migration Studies. Much of her work centers on issues of migration and identity. Ms. Gadsby is currently the President of the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars. She has received many fellowships and awards, including the African-New World Studies Dissertation Year Fellowship, 1997-1999, and Clifford Clark Fellowship at Binghamton University. Ms. Gadsby's research has taken her to Barbados, the United Kingdom, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Grenada. At Oberlin she teaches courses in African American, African and Caribbean Literature. Her first critical books, *Sucking Salt* (2006) was recently published by the University of Missouri Press.

GORDON E. A. GILL, Assistant Professor, African American Studies; B.A. in History, University of Guyana; M.A. and Ph.D., in History, Howard University. His research interests include Caribbean History, History of the African Diaspora, Slavery in the Atlantic World, Pre-Colonial West and West-Central Africa, and blacks in Great Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He is currently preparing a publishable manuscript based on his dissertation entitled Labor, Material

Welfare, & Culture in Hydrologic Plantation Enterprises: A Study of Slavery in the British Colony of Berbice (Guyana). Professor Gill's most recent publication was "Slavery on the Guyanese Frontier," in The Slave Societies of the Caribbean, 2d ed. Edited by Franklin W. Knight. vol. 3, UNESCO General History of the Caribbean. (Forthcoming)

CAROLINE JACKSON SMITH, CHAIR, Associate Professor Theater and African American Studies; B.A. Yale University (with distinction in Afro-American Studies); MA Program Yale University. Professor Jackson Smith teaches Theater, Film, Creative Writing, and African American Studies at Oberlin as well as directing student productions for the Hall Mainstage. Some of her productions include The Wiz, The Piano Lesson, for colored girls, and Ominum Gatherum. She also directs professionally and has worked for theaters locally and nationally, including Cleveland Public Theater, Karamu Performing Arts Theater, Kuntu Rep (Pittsburgh), Portland stage (Maine) and Signature Theater (NYC). From 1981-1989 she was Director of the Afro-American Cultural Center at Yale University. She has been at Oberlin since 1989.

JAMES MILLETTE, Professor of African American Studies; B.A. (Hons.) in History, University of the West Indies; and Ph.D. in History from King's College, University of London. He has taught for more than four decades on Caribbean, African, African American, and imperial history with specific reference to comparative slavery, colonial government and administration, labor history, and the societies and politics of the modern Caribbean and the Third World. Mr. Millette has also published two books: *The Genesis of Crown Colony Government: Trinidad, 1783-1815*, and *Freedom Road*, a study of the post-emancipation period in Caribbean history. His articles include a study of the integration movement in the Anglophone Caribbean, and an assessment of current trends in democratic government in the post-independent Caribbean. He has also written two chapters in the UNESCO General History of the Caribbean.

COURTNEY J. PATTERSON, Faculty-in-Residence, Afrikan Heritage House, B. A. Afro-American Studies, minor in African Studies, University of Pennsylvania; semester abroad at the University of Ghana, Legon. She holds a certificate in

Secondary Mathematics from University of Pennsylvania's Teacher Certification Program. She has also completed a two-year commitment with Teach for America, Philadelphia. At Penn she was active in the Black Student League, The Afro-American Studies Undergraduate Advisory Board, Umoja, and Asé. In addition, she served as actress, producer, president, writer and director. Her research interests include Black Women's Studies, Theatre Arts, and sociological foundations of body image among young women of African Descent. She has also served as African Community Coordinator in Oberlin's Multicultural Resource Center.

BOOKER C. PEEK, Associate Professor of Black Studies; B.A., Florida A.& M. University; Master of Art in Teaching (MAT), Oberlin College; advanced study at the University of Florida. Mr. Peek has held appointments at Hampton Junior College, Albany State College, and in the public school system of Jacksonville, Florida. His special interest lies in black urban education. Formerly Coordinator of Oberlin's Student Teaching Program in the College of Arts and Sciences, Mr. Peek was a member of the Education Department for many years. He has a fine reputation for his practical and theoretical knowledge about teaching in general and the teaching of minorities in particular. Mr. Peek operates W.A.V.E., a tutoring program for students from the town of Oberlin and serves as official or unofficial advisor to many college students interested in the teaching profession, medicine, law, and graduate school. His research interests focus on the academic problems and challenges of black and oppressed children and the production of materials and programs designed to address their problems. He has been at Oberlin since 1970.

YAKUBU SAAKA, Professor of African American Studies. Professor Saaka has taught at Oberlin College since 1972. He was educated at the University of Ghana where he took his B.A. in Political Science (1970) and M.A. in African Studies (1972). He received the Ph.D. in Political Science at Case Western Reserve University in 1976. Professor Saaka's main area of interest is Government and Politics of Africa. He is the author of *Local Government and Political Change in Northern Ghana*. During an extended leave of absence from Oberlin (1979-1983), Mr. Saaka was elected a Member of

Parliament in Ghana, and later appointed Deputy Foreign Minister. In this latter capacity, Mr. Saaka represented Ghana in several international bodies, including the United Nations where he was Ghana's Chief Delegate to the General Assembly, and at the Organization of African Unity where he was the Vice-Chairman of the Liberation Committee in 1980.

MIRIAM ADENIKE SHARPLEY, Lecturer and Artist-in-Residence. She received her B.A. in Sociology from Western New England College and the M.A. in Sociology at Oberlin College. Ms. Sharpley has been a dance instructor, culturalist, dance performer, and choreographer. Ms. Sharpley has been the choreographer for several Oberlin productions and offers courses in African and African American dance. She was formerly Faculty-in-Residence, Afrikan Heritage House at Oberlin.

ADRIENNE L. JONES, Emerita Associate Professor of African American Studies; B.A. Fisk University, M.A. and Ph.D. in American Studies from Case Western Reserve University. Ms. Jones specialized in African American History and Black Women's History during her years at Oberlin, 1983-2000. She was also Chair of the department.

REJOICE A. ACOLATSE, Administrative Assistant. Attended the Government Secretarial School in Ghana. She worked at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) for 10 years as Private Secretary in various departments. In 1998 she worked for a short time in the Student Life and Services Department, Oberlin College as temporary Secretary to the Acting Dean, and later joined the Department in September 1999.

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