

## **THE DIASPORA**

**Fall 2016**

**THE DIASPORA** is a biannual publication of the Department of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Contributions are welcomed from UC Berkeley's faculty, staff, and students. We also invite submissions from guest columnists and scholars who may not be affiliated with the university. Articles may be edited for length, clarity, and style.

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Essence Harden

### **COVER ART**

“Aria with Flowers 1 and 2” (2016)

Chinwe Okona

“The History of Black Protest and the Hypocrisy of Stephen A. Smith” Originally appeared on Truth-Out.org (*November 30, 2016*), and has been reprinted with permission from the author.

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# Notes from the Chair

*Leigh Raiford, Department Chair and Associate Professor*



*Photography by Rasheed Shabazz Photography*

I, for one, am grateful to put closure on 2016, a year marked by loss, increased global war, and incredibly vitriolic elections both here in the US and abroad. It seems everyone I know is suffering from exhaustion and world-weariness. But at the same time, there are sure signs of life and encouragement.

First and foremost and always, our students. In Fall 2016 semester, many classes in the department were filled to capacity. We even found ourselves in the position of increasing enrollment in courses like “Lives of Struggle: Minorities in a Majority World” and my own class “Black Intellectual Thought.” It is evident that as the world changes, students are recognizing the importance of understanding global racism and the lessons of black history and culture.

And our students brought incisive critique to our classrooms and then took the knowledge they garnered outside the classroom, organizing Trump Teach-Ins, and shows of solidarity with communities targeted by Trumpism and the so-called “Alt-Right.” On November 9, thousands of our students stood together on Sproul Plaza, with high school students from the area to express their dismay at the election outcome.

As 2016 turns into 2017, there is no guarantee that the stars will magically realign and it’s clear that there is much work to be done. I take heart in some of the lessons this challenging year has offered. We must hold space for the most marginalized amongst us. The important work of the Black Lives Matter movement remains vital.

But we must be increasingly vigilant about the ways different communities (Muslim, undocumented/immigrants, LGBTQ) will be made differently precarious in the face of revanchist economic policies and an increase in hate crimes, moral panics and saber-rattling around borders, heightened nationalism, xenophobia and white supremacy. We, and our values, are all made vulnerable in a turn to the right which racism is celebrated as merely a matter of taste and discrimination. In the face of these challenges, an intersectional African American and African Diaspora Studies as both an act of imagination and a refusal to normalize a creeping fascism, I believe is truly vital work. Solidarity now more than ever.

As you enter the New Year, I wish you fortitude for the challenges ahead. And a partial list of what has sustained me: Solange's *A Seat at the Table*; the Simones who dominated the Olympics; the election of Kamala Harris; the Netflix show *Luke Cage*; the remarkable film *Moonlight*; Colson Whitehead's award-winning *Underground Railroad*; and community, always community.

# Inside This Issue:

*Essence Harden, Editor and PhD Candidate*

2016. The year is nearly met with a close as I type this welcome to the fall issue of *The Diaspora*. Impossible this year, in its surmounting tragedies and in its gesture towards a volatile 2017; in its creative deaths and political failures; in its dogmatic strongholds and attempted erasure of voices and populaces who reside in the margins. And yet (and this is always quite true) there are those who continue on in demands for equity and freedom. Who find resistance in walk outs, in courses taught, in art made, in a queering remembrance of the Black Panther Party, in fictive black diasporic places, in BLM, in NODAPL, in sonic scapes, in the worlds of Octavia Butler, in the words of James Baldwin, in neo slave narratives, in the everyday gestures and styles of refusal.

I imagine the world has more than anti-blackness, Anti-indigenesness, anti-queerness, and Islamophobia; that there is not merely a scale from apathy to blood-lust towards the undocumented, immigrating, and economically vulnerable masses. That suffering and the endurance of violence for some are not the agreed upon cost of elections and representational democracy. This moment, and the moment before this, and the moments after this are of/for strategic action. In our Universities and classrooms, in our words and our gestures, in the demands we make of civic spaces and officials, and in our daily actions in life. Much is needed, much can be done.

In this fall issue you will find a selection of essays, much poetry, and photography. We have welcomes to our newest cohort and interviews with two recent graduates. Much was written before the election but remains as needed as Cherod Johnson, Brukab Sissay, and Malika Crutchfield who offer direct responses to Trump. As we enter these last few days of the calendar year, I wish you rest and strength for the times ahead.



# Artist Statement

*Chinwe Okona, Multimedia Artist and Curator*

Chinwe Okona is a multi-medium artist and curator based out of Los Angeles metropolitan area. Her work takes the form of photography, editorial content/design, and digital media, with a concentration on questions surrounding identity. Currently, she is working on the second issue of *Palmss Mag*, a print publication showcasing the thoughts, feelings, growth, and creative processes of every day, creative people.



# Staff News

*Vernessa Parker, Department Manager*

As Manager of the Cluster Staff, along with staff member Gillian Edgelow, we organized and coordinated a cluster staff retreat on October 6, 2016. We invited Julie Shackford-Bradley, Restorative Justice Center, to help us learn principles and concepts of Restorative Practice and exercise skills for responding proactively and restoratively to conflict or harm in the workplace. Through facilitated dialogue, we explored ways to apply these practices and skills in the work place with our peers. We ended up with a graphic of values we would like to have in our workplace.



We also invited Megan Amaral and Kate Jerman to work with us on a Staff Development Planning Exercise and Succession Planning. As staff we came up with several ideas as to the reason we should have a succession plan. These included to save institutional memory, set new people up for success, continuity, clarity of roles, staff morale, support leaves (e.g., family leave, personal medical leave, maternity), document responsibilities, advance planning, ease transitions for whole team and an intentional plan. We decided we would need preparation, training, ideas for when a person leave and contingency plans (e.g. Handbook, desk manual, clarity of job descriptions, manual on policies/procedures, shared folders, calendar of deadlines and events).

For our discussion for Career Development, we discussed ways to have equitable and robust staff development with varying budgets among the cluster departments, and shrinking budgets overall. We developed a grid for professional development opportunities brainstorm. We thought of ways to receive professional development which included: Staff reporting what they've learned at trainings; email etiquette training; email announcement to all staff about training session; career guidance library counselor; bring professionals from other units to the Cluster; Equity and Inclusion (MEP) Cultural Awareness; Database or WIKI or Calendar with Shared Opportunities, Learning Management System Courses, partner with other staff to reduce costs, check on cost share or trade or grants. With our discussion about career development, we thought of ways employees can be ready to take on new challenges. We will be organizing events in the future for staff development and ensuring we have staff available to take on roles for succession planning.



# The History of Black Protest and the Hypocrisy of Stephen A. Smith

*Ameer Hasan Loggins, PhD Candidate*

*“Of all Americans, Negroes distrust politicians most, or, more accurately, they have been best trained to expect nothing from them; more than other Americans, they are always aware of the enormous gap between election promises and their daily lives.”*  
– James Baldwin (Notes of a Native Son, 1955)

Colin Kaepernick is not a novelty. Far from an anomaly, the 49ers quarterback is part of a storied history of Black political protest. From refusing to stand for the National Anthem, to exercising his right not to vote, Kaepernick’s actions are part of lineage of skepticism over mainstream politics. The presidential election, of course, represents the height of mainstream politics. Blackskepticism, however, should not be read as lack of interest in politics, but rather a struggle to expand what is meant by politics. Black skepticism says that if voting is the only way to be political, then we’re in trouble.

Colin Kaepernick is part of a tradition that predates the “Star-Spangled Banner,” the song that became the US National Anthem in 1931, and the ratification of the 15th Amendment which enfranchised Black men. This struggle predates Black folks fleeing the hellish conditions of chattel slavery being diagnosed by Dr. Samuel Cartwright (1851) as having a disease that he called drapetomania, to explain why Black people were risking their lives to escape antebellum oppression. Black people have been fighting for the human right to be free since the first Africans were kidnapped and brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619.

From rebellions on slavers like the Amistad, to something as seemingly innocent as learning to read -- our ancestors died not (exclusively) for the right to vote. Many of our ancestors were fighting against systems of oppression/oppressors for our right to be free.

So, no, Colin Kaepernick is not a novelty. And Just as George Wilson and Joe LaRoche -- who opposed Denmark Vesey’s planned 1822 uprising (which would have the largest Black revolt in American history) were willing to side with the master class at the expense of those willing to fight for their freedom -- not all Black people were willing to rebel against systemic forms of oppression in the this country.

Do not misread me. I am not suggesting that Colin Kaepernick is the Denmark Vesey of our generation. What I am saying that there are still Black people in 2016 that think the system is good to us.

So what does all of this have to do with Stephen A. Smith?

On August 29, 2016, Stephen A. Smith took to his televisual platform on ESPN’s “First Take” and spoke in support of Colin Kaepernick’s right to protest, noting that Kaepernick “personified what a protest is supposed to be.” Smith showed concern for Kaepernick, saying that “Colin Kaepernick may suffer because of this.” He added, “There’s a difference between bringing attention to something, and sacrificing. And I’m telling you right now, when you look at what Colin Kaepernick did, this was a sacrifice.”

Worried about the impact of Kaepernick's protest to bring attention to oppression/oppressors in the US, Smith went on to further express his concerns about Kaepernick and the potential effects of his stance, saying that:

*The reason I don't love it is because he's opened the floodgates of being scrutinized for his intent ... Colin Kaepernick, even though I don't question it, there are those cynics out there who will bring into question the motivation behind all of this. Because he's coming off a subpar year. They're talking about how his skills have dissipated ... So now because of those cynics who may not like what he did, they'll use those other things on the field as an excuse. That's why I didn't love it so much. Because he's in a vulnerable position.*

Smith anticipated the acrimonious racial backlash Colin Kaepernick would face as he continued his steadfast stance against systemic oppression/oppressors. The problem is that Smith used his multiple platforms to Pied Piper of persecution, publicly leveling vicious attacks on Kaepernick's political choices, player performance and all around personhood.

During the post-election day broadcast of ESPN's "First Take," Smith weighed in on the results of the 2016 presidential election, reflectively noting that, "We all know if we're looking at the election here, it's undeniable that you had a whole bunch of white folks who came out and voted for Donald Trump. Certainly he did better in the Black community than was anticipated ..." Indeed he did. According to NBC Exit Polls, Donald Trump performed better than Mitt Romney among Black voters, claiming 8 percent of the vote, as opposed to Romney's 6 percent. Barack Obama, the first Black president, carried 93 percent of the Black vote against Romney. Hillary Clinton came in five points below him against Trump. One obvious factor that contributed to this relative spike in Black votes shifting from the Democratic

Party to the Republican Party is the lack of a Black candidate running for president. While this news may have been alarming to many people paying attention to the inflammatory racialized rhetoric repeatedly employed by Trump, this nationwide bump in Black support for Trump should come as no shock to Smith. Since at least 2010, Smith has publicly urged the Black community to vote for a Republican presidential candidate.

In 2012, Smith said that he would "strongly, strongly consider voting for Mitt Romney" on the basis of the fact that, "the man knows how to make money." During a 2015 talk at Vanderbilt University, Smith is quoted as saying that, "I dream that for one election, just one, everybody Black in America vote Republican." He continued by saying that all Black America "has to do is upset the apple cart, by not doing what's predictable, and it will force everybody to pay attention to us." In a 2015 CNN interview following his comments at Vanderbilt University going public, Smith made the leap from a non-specified "one election" that the Black community should vote for the Republican presidential candidate, to specifically the "next election," which would be the 2016 election between Trump and Clinton that just took place on November 8. Smith also added that:

*When I'm talking to Black folks, and I'm thinking about what's in the best interest of the Black community, it's because you are suffering. The country could be prospering, but if Black folks have nothing to show for it ... if Black folks are suffering, and we have been suffering for decades, upon decades, upon decades, and we've tried something, one thing after another, and it's the same thing happening over, and, over, and over again, and it's not reaping any results, then what do you expect somebody to do? You're going to address it with the fervor, directness, and candor that it deserves.*

Smith was urging “Black folks” to engage in non-conventional forms politicization, to avoid being predictable to address the systemic suffering taking place in the Black community. Systemic oppression takes on many forms, but one of the issues that the Black community was bringing global attention to while Smith was making that speech was fatal forms police-induced violence on Black citizens.

When Smith was talking to “Black folks” in 2015, young Black men were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by police officers. Despite making up only 2 percent of the total US population, Black males between the ages of 15 and 34 comprised more than 15 percent of all deaths logged this year by an ongoing investigation into the use of deadly force by police. Their rate of police-involved deaths was five times higher than for white men of the same age.

The “Black folks” that were “suffering” systemic oppression, by way of fatal forms of police brutality in 2015, was a continuation of the terroristic policing of “Black folks” that has been going on, undisturbed, since its slave patrols roots for “decades upon decades upon decades, and it’s the same thing happening over and over and over again, and it’s not reaping any results ...” As Smith asked, “What do you expect somebody to do?”

Why, then, was Smith perplexed on November 9, 2016, when he said on live television that, “We thought no way in hell would Black folks vote for Donald Trump.” In truth, based on Smith’s on previous assertions, I would have expected him to proudly poke out his chest, as a practice of peacockery, and not only say that he predicted Black folks voting with the GOP, but he also encouraged it, and Black America listened to him, and answered his call. Smith, by the way, claims he voted for Hillary Clinton. If Smith feels like Trump supporters have the right to vote for

“whoever the hell they want, with no explanation required to any of us,” and that when faced with the prospect of Americans being mandated to vote, he spoke of citizens freedoms to participate as voters, making their voices “heard,” or to flex their rights as citizens and exercise their “freedom not to speak,” and avoid (for whatever reason) voting. In light of all these claims, how could Smith be so upset with Colin Kaepernick deciding not to vote in the 2016 presidential election?

Smith said copious incendiary things about Kaepernick not voting that contradicted his stances on everything from Trump supporters having the right to do whatever they wanted to do during the election “with no explanation required to any of us,” to citizens having the right to avoid the polls during the election, devoid of scrutiny, because American citizens are not mandated to vote, to feeling empathy towards Kaepernick’s “vulnerable position,” because there are “cynics out there” that would “question the motivations” behind his protest. And here Smith is, leading the charge against the man that he has called “a flaming hypocrite” that can “go to hell” for his consistent, though not always popular, informed protest against systemic oppression, and the oppressors who reinforce it. I think that Stephen A. Smith is unaware of the meaning of being a “flaming hypocrite.”

Hypocrites feel entitled to point out (or invent) the most minor mistakes in others -- and they’ll point them out repeatedly, to negate, conceal and excuse all of their own horrible actions. So, for example, when Smith exclaimed that, “Colin Kaepernick is absolutely irrelevant,” and that he did not want to “hear a damn word about anything that he has to say,” he became his own worst enemy.

He continued his hypocritical tirade by “personally making a request, to the media in this nation” to avoid talking about Colin Kaepernick, outside of the context of football, and proceeded to not only

talk about him later on during his nationally syndicated radio show, he then tweeted about it to his 3 million followers, and came back the next day, after “personally making a request to the media in this nation,” to keep a tight lip on Kaepernick, and he came on television, radio and as ESPN’s “First Take’s” Twitter page tweeted out to its 1 million followers: “@StephenASmith is doubling down on his criticism of Colin Kaepernick’s decision not to vote.”

Stephen A. Smith is wrong, but he is not alone.

On November 21, in response to Kaepernick not voting, a veteran Los Angeles Times political columnist took to his platform to echo Smith’s hot take by saying that, “Kaepernick is the classic hypocrite. And a bad role model. He hasn’t been connecting the dots between griping and voting to fix what he’s griping about.” This is not to mention the legion of Twitter members that expressed Kaepernick’s similar sentiments.

The truth is that every American citizen, based on the 15th and 19th Amendments, should have the right to vote, but no citizen is obliged to do so. As Yale law professor Stephen Carter reminds us,

*Participation in governance might be said to be obligatory, but voting is only one form of participation, perhaps not the most important one. Democracy at its best rests on a thoughtful, reflective dialogue among the citizenry. It’s the dialogue, not the vote, that matters most ... trying to shame people into voting isn’t just creepy -- it’s wrong. It seeks to deny the individual the basic liberal freedom to choose his or her own version of the good life.*

Vote shaming veiled as patriotism relegates the citizen refusing to vote as ignorant and un-American when, in fact,

the decision not to vote should interpreted as an actively informed political choice to not support candidates that one deems unfit to leading this nation. W.E.B. Dubois wrote a piece for The Nation in 1956:

“I shall not go to the polls. I have not registered. I believe that democracy has so far disappeared in the United States that no ‘two evils’ exist. There is but one evil party with two names, and it will be elected despite all I can do or say.”

Would the Stephen A. Smiths of the world have the unmitigated gall to say that Dubois was ill informed, ignorant or un-American? Would the Stephen A. Smiths of the world have an issue with Malcolm X, during his April 3, 1964, speech “The Ballot or the Bullet,” when he said, “I’m not anti-Democrat, I’m not anti-Republican, I’m not anti-anything. I’m just questioning their sincerity and some of the strategy that they’ve been using on our people by promising them promises that they don’t intend to keep.” Malcolm continued by urging the Black community, “Don’t be throwing out any ballots. A ballot is like a bullet. You don’t throw your ballots until you see a target, and if that target is not within your reach, keep your ballot in your pocket.”

My question for the Stephen A. Smith is this: Did Malcolm X have no right to discuss politics because he exercised his right not to vote? Is all of the work that Malcolm X did for Black people worldwide, dismissible?

I’m all ears, Stephen A.

# To Be Held

Jamal Batts, PhD Student

*I. “Rock the boat / Rock the boat / Work the middle / Work the middle” – Aaliyah*

This essay thinks the slave ship as archive, or as a “literal and figural site of” archiving that “both permits the ‘commencement’ of and provides the ‘commandment’ for intellectual labor” [1]. The slave ship is the point of origin that links, one, our ability to account for blackened relations as such; and, two, a desire to touch the ship’s blackened bottom, or be held [2]. The transatlantic slave trade and the intellectual discourse that follows it, in a symbiotic relation of ongoingness, always seem to meet at the slave ship’s lower deck [3]. In their materiality and metaphors, these ships are a privileged site of scholarly attention and affective impact. There’s something in that unimaginable mingling of bodies reduced by commerce (or analysis) to nothingness—on the verge of rebirth, extended breath, or obliteration—that keeps drawing some of us back to the static of the hold. What follows is an attempt at describing two of my own experiences with diasporic aesthetic objects on Berkeley’s campus. I engage these experiences in order to critically reflect on scholarly investments in ships and the blackened bodies that they have the facility to carry below.

Paul Gilroy, who may be credited with some of this endless interest in ships, argues that how we see the future, or think our utopias, is of the utmost importance [4]. How we envision the bodies on slave ships is important too. These lives, beings often nothing but numbers captured on a ledger, may also be nothing “but the sum of what” we say about them [5].

As we seek the feel of the flesh, it might be helpful to ask what our investments are in claiming the depths of the black Atlantic’s bottom. Or, if as Gilroy writes, “gender is the modality in which race is lived” what are our multiply diasporic investments, now, in the supposed ungendering of the flesh in the hold?[6] And why do our interests, politics, pockets, aesthetics, or ancestors keep us there?

*II. “We went on a voyage, dahling!” – Catherine Baba*

*Fruit* is Berkeley student and artist Andrew Wilson’s avant-garde engagement with the commodification of anti-black terror. Featuring five shirts and sixteen hangers dangling from the ceiling on silver chains, the installation collapses an array of devastating moments into a *mélange*, unsettling in its order and beauty. Each of the cotton shirts has been dyed using a cyanotype printing process. Some shirts display faded portions of the slave ship *Brookes*. This ship, I’d argue, is the privileged schematic vessel of black diasporic thought, and it provides a central site for the installation’s polyvalent allusions. In 1789 the abolitionist London Committee distributed a rendering of the *Brookes*’s plan with the desire to make “an instantaneous impression of horror upon all who saw it.” The horrors of Wilson’s work, however, do not end in the Middle Passage. Split between the shirts are the cyan-blue traces of body parts, cut from the thoroughly obscured image of a lynching—tree, rope, arms, knot, handcuffs, branches, head or severed circular figure, torso, all faded into chemical, into cotton, into pattern. The bottom ends of the sleeveless garments are frayed, their crew neck collars feature a gentle cut or opening attached by a small button at the neck.



*Andrew Wilson, Fruit, 2016. Photo by Behnaz Khaleghi. Image courtesy of artist.*



*Andrew Wilson, Fruit, 2016. Image courtesy of artist.*

The thick wooden hangers that hold the garments are inscribed with enlarged images from the drawing of the Brookes slave ship accomplished by laser etching. Through this inscription one may notice, maybe for the first time, that each of these nameless, exchangeable slave figures is different. “With [the] closer” look that Wilson’s work provides, one notices what Simone Browne’s recent study of blackness and surveillance elaborates, “that each of the tiny black figures are not replicas of each other; rather, some have variously crossed arms, different gestures, or seem to turn to face one another, while some stare and look back at the gaze from nowhere.” For Browne this representation can “be understood as depicting [resistant] black looks and the trauma of the Middle Passage as being multiply experienced and survived”[7].

I’m standing in the middle of Wilson’s installation *Fruit*, alone. People circle the installation, looking at the shirts from a distance or chatting with friends, but I am the only person surrounded by it. I have a heightened sense of self-consciousness because I am in a space that feels like the simulated showroom floor of a designer whose collection features not predictable allusions to Africa, or some pale waif of a model in blackface, but instead, the least appealing features of the afterlife of slavery, “the ongoing production of lives lived in intimate relation to premature death” [8]. My ancestors eyes are staring at me through hangers made of poplar wood, which might as well be wood from the Brookes itself, and they’re asking me to cry for them, and just as I feel a tear welling up in my eye I look over to my right and find a white woman looking at me. I decide not to cry. My tears are not for her.

Perhaps I’ve missed my chance at what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call hapticality, a feeling instantiated by the felt experience of the slave ship’s hold and the flights therein. Hapticality, as they define it, is “the capacity to

feel through others, for others to feel through you, to feel them feeling you” or “the feel that what is to come is here” [9]. I suspect, here, that she wants to see me cry, so that she can feel the visceral impact of these histories on my flesh. I don’t want to give her the pleasure. But then again, I’m standing in the midst of a fashion statement, wearing a fashion statement; so maybe I drew her look to me. I’m wearing a white t-shirt that spells out the words “VERY BLACK” in all caps, in the middle of this very black exhibition, containing the opened signifiers of my making, my reason, and my reasoning. I feel like, I look like, a strange fruit.

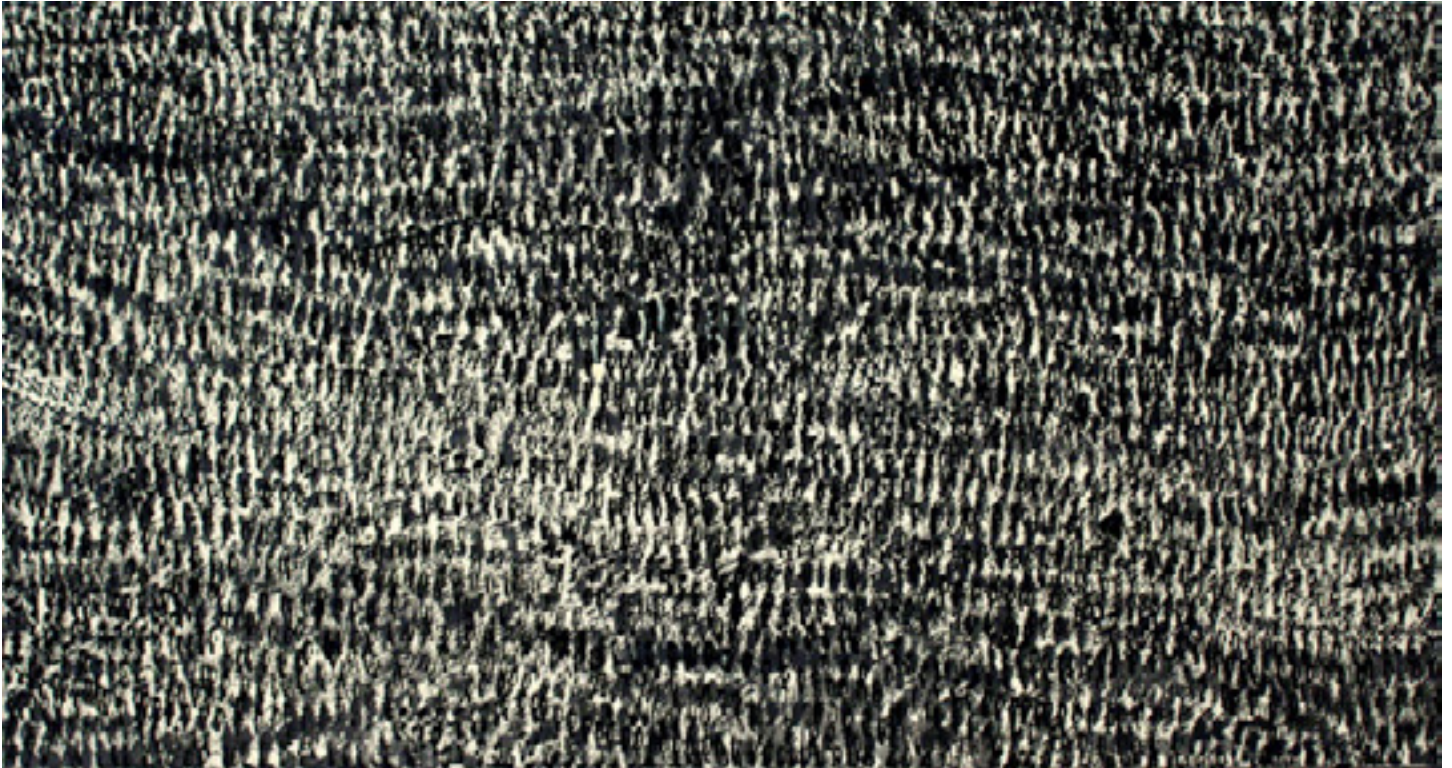
The affective problematic here, is, as usual, the admission of desire. A confession from my thirteen year old self: every Sunday, as my deaconess mother and deacon father dragged me to church, there was a VHS tape in the VCR recording either *Style with Elsa Klensch* on CNN or *Fashion File* on E!, hosted by Tim Blanks. A few years ago, feeling nostalgic, I looked up Blanks on YouTube. I found a clip of him covering one of Belgian high-end fashion designer Dries Van Noten’s shows. I doubt I’ll ever be able to reasonably afford anything Noten makes, though I lust to layer myself in his designs, feel Noten against the skin. The YouTube clip begins with Blanks interviewing stylist Catherine Baba about the collection, a return to Noten’s use of “ethnic” patterns and silhouettes. Baba proclaims, “We went of a voyage, dahling!” [10]

Standing in *Fruit*, I’m confronted with what could easily be a Van Noten showroom or window display at Bergdorf’s, if this wasn’t a “high tech lynching.” The shirts’ bright blue geometric shapes are formed by what could be the rope and tree, a body swinging in suspended motion (floating in handcuffs)—bodily forms removed from bodies dissolved into cotton meant for bodies. These clothes are too ready-to-wear.



*Andrew Wilson, Fruit, 2016. Images courtesy of artist*





*Andrés Weissman, Peregrinaje, Enamel on canvas. (Source: <http://www.andresweissman.net/2d12.html>).*

III. "I dwell within a land that's meant / meant for many  
men not my tone"  
-D'Angelo

I'm new to Berkeley and I'm intent on impressing. I'm nervous and sweating on a balcony. The food is delicious but I need more wine, never enough wine. All of the servers are black women. I'm the only other noticeably black person who is on this balcony not serving an entrée; I'm free to eat. Many of my black friends have told me this story again and again, but I've never had the privilege of being forced into tokenism. I'm the first in my department to receive this fellowship, I'm told. I'm used to being in predominantly white environments but somehow being the *only* one is new for me—a representative, a curiosity, and most often invisible—at the two year mark I'm starting to get the hang of it. But every now and then, I experience such a strong feeling of utter displacement that it seems somehow ordained, spiritual even.

For example, one time a professor came to give a talk to the recipients of the fellowship I'd received. This professor has specific political beliefs that I won't mention, but their recent work does not talk about race or ethnicity while attempting to attend to a historic moment of ethnic strife. The other adult in the room (a.k.a. the only other person with tenure) luckily asked this professor where the discussion of race was in their text. They responded by referring him to one short endnote and then admitting they had not given the topic much thought. It didn't seem to trouble them much. I couldn't believe it. If only I could begin to shake my shock at this arrogance. I was left wondering how the other adult in the room, the speaker's colleague, a person of color, could keep a straight face.

During the talk, I take a look at the art installation covering the walls and I begin to feel like I've been caught in some vicious trick. Those tiny indelible black figures in the hold of the slave ship Brookes seem to appear once again,

but now unbound from the hold and splayed against a white canvas—black paint leaking one body through the other, threatening to overflow, to take over all of the spaces I encounter. I'm a long way from home. I'm a long way from agreeing with the fact that I no longer have a home. I'm experiencing what Saidiya Hartman might call "phantom limb" syndrome or "the very consciousness of disconnectedness" [11]. I'm not here for this. Everything I want, if there's anything I want, is not in this room. My mimetic vision has conscripted my deadened affect to the black paint on the walls. Am I having an aesthetic experience or a black one? Either way, I feel simultaneously caught and undone, though I could walk out the door at any moment and be a credit to my race.

On the way out, having no knowledge about the piece I'd just viewed, I read its description. It's by Argentinian artist Andrés Weissman, from his series *Multitudes*. "The location of the multitudes is always different, but to some extent always the same. It is the territory of the crowd...and of nomadism, exodus and permanent search. Within those boundaries, the locations vary: football stadiums, ships, deserts. These are always temporary, transient places" [12]. "Crowd," is the term anthropologists Sidney Mintz and Richard Price suggests might best describe the mixed groupings of African peoples in the hold of the slave ship, living and dying often attached to one another—living and dying in another other's lap. This crowded multitude of peoples, this forced collision of flesh, Mintz and Price argue, came with no definitive shared cultural lineage, just widely varied heritages and languages [13]. Then static and noise, turned into "skin...[sensing] touch," was put to work in the Americas, creating dynamic cultural forms in response to powers both sovereign and disciplinary; or, so the story goes [14].

- [1] Anjali Arondekar. "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14.1 (2005): 10–27.
- [2] On origins and relation see Leo Bersani. "Sociality and Sexuality." *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (2000): 641–656.
- [3] On "ongoingness" see Lauren Berlant. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry* 33.4 (2007): 754–780.
- [4] See Paul Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
- [5] Michel Foucault. "The Life of Infamous Men." *Power (The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 3)*. Ed. James D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: The New Press, 2001. 161.
- [6] Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic*, 85.; See Hortense Spillers. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 65–81.
- [7] Simone Browne. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. 50.
- [8] Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman. "Fugitive Justice." *Representations* 92.1 (2005): 13.
- [9] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Autonomedia, 2013. 98.
- [10] Style.com. Fashion Show - Dries Van Noten: Spring 2010 Ready-to-Wear. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK9ap5O-Q4EI&feature=youtuube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK9ap5O-Q4EI&feature=youtuube_gdata_player).
- [11] Saidiya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 73-4.
- [12] Rodrigo Alonso. Weissman. *Buenos Aires, Argentina: Autores Editores*, 2005.
- [13] Sidney Mintz and Richard Price. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- [14] Harney and Moten. *The Undercommons*, 98.

# Being Bad Queers on The Eve of Donald Trump's Presidential Win. Or What's Left of the Anti-Social Thesis in Queer Studies?

*Cherod Johnson, PhD Student*

On the eve of Trump's presidential win, I was at a bar with friends. Despite the vast ideological positions at this bar, there was a growing consensus that we on the left should kill our public criticism and electoral dissent. According to a white cis man sitting next to us: "This is not the time to be against Clinton." "Say what?" I asked. Arguing for the centrality of race, sexuality, and queerness as essential to electoral politics despite the possibility of Trump's presidential win, we were "cautioned" about our leftist criticism and public skepticism of electoral politics. According to him, our public dissent and distaste of politics and arguments against both Clinton and Trump were, and are, too critical and idealistic. As we pushed back with political arguments to call both political platforms into question, he screamed louder: "YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ARE BAD QUEERS. BAD, BAD, QUEERS."

Even worst, we were told to be more critical of the right, not the left. According to this white cis liberal man, our public dissent of the left and politics as usual was politically divisive and destructive. Surely, our public criticism and political denouncement of Clinton's anti-black and anti-queer neoliberal policies could wait until after the presidential election? Heart broken, but not surprised, we decided as "bad queers" to leave this "good queer" to his liberal politics. But for us to be called "bad queers" is to be reminded of the public role of radical dissent. In being called a bad queer, I started to ponder the strategic importance of how to be bad queerly? And how might being a bad queer give rise to another way of study and

allow us to say not-yet and no to neoliberal policies of inclusion? I started to ponder those "bad queers" who came before me, such as bad feminist killjoys and radical queer faeries of the 1970s and 1980s, and in finding a queer intellectual community, I turned more to queer studies, especially the anti-social turn in queer studies [1]. It is the anti-social turn thesis as a critical analytic for thinking about an otherwise, elsewhere that I find most compelling as a queer studies scholar. For me, the anti-social turn in queer studies opens up a condition of possibility for alternative imaginings and radical dissent in and against a field of political assimilation and inclusion.

To counter white cis heteronormative logics of futurity, as well as to dislodge the telos of reproductive sex, often mirrored in and through the spectacle of the child, the anti-social turn in queer theories posits a queer epistemology and queer world making in failure, loss, passive stupidity and unbecoming practices to open up another way of being in relationship to others. Historically, a bad queer studies project might call for us to contend with "bad queer figures" who are hard to honor and bring into the present. Here I am historically thinking of Gary Fisher and Valerie Solanas—and their complex relationship to identity and queer politics [2].

A rhetorical move away from the hegemonic spectacle of politics as neoliberal inclusion and reproductive futures means reading against the grain to activate non-teleological formulations and aesthetic practices that are non-reproductive,

non-hierarchical, non-western and non-capitalistic. Lee Edleman, for example, proposes a queer potentiality in non-becoming practices and alternative aesthetics forms that are without telos. It is through decentering heteronormative logics of time that the anti-social turn in queer theories offers radical, queer counter logics and epistemologies in the wake. For Lee Edleman, public consensus makes impossible what kinds of futures can be imagined because “the social consensus,” elaborated in and through the political and extended in, and outward to the social, informs what is “impossible to refuse” [3]. How, then, can one refuse politics? Or, in other words, how do we continue to refuse the toxic emblem of the future as anti-black, anti-immigrant, anti-queer, anti-semitic, etc.? What makes queer as a verb promising is its radical edge that it marks the outside of political consensus and public deliberation. For me, queer marks an otherwise commons of radical dissent. And it is in not-becoming, or failing to conform, that we are much more open to critique, radical dissent, and better suited to plan and imagine otherwise.

As a bad queer, I still dare to dream. I dwell in non-becoming queer social practices and aesthetic forms that are cultural and political resources for radical critique. Jack Halberstam, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, also propose negativity to be a queer epistemology by arguing for stupidity, passivity, forgetting, and losing as a way of queering time and history and to consider failure as a deliberate means to advance alternative modes of knowing and queer world-making. As Halberstam suggests “the queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” [4]. In sum, how to be bad queerly might be to seek radical dissent in and against a political field of affective resolution and to be disruptive to the normative fabric of the social.

[1] Anti-social theories include: Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (2009); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990); Leo Bersani *Homos* (1996).

[2] For scholarship on Gary Fisher, see Robert Reid Pharr in *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York: NYU Press, 2001). For Valerie Solanas, see an essay by Karma Chavez on “Valerie Solanas and the Queer Performativity of Madness” in ed. *Journal Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, (2011).

[3] See Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[4] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer of Failure*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 88.

# Reflections on “Resistance”

*Malika Crutchfield, PhD Candidate*

In the wake of a Trump presidency, there are key questions we as scholars and activists must confront.

One of them is, what does activism look like in new political landscape where neo-fascist values are brought to the very forefront of civic and social life? I myself have found few words to bring to the conversation at this point. I have, however, been able to to make art in order to release some of the built up tension. This photo reflects one small message that may help form the new agenda for organizers and intellectuals in a Trump presidency. Taken in downtown Oakland the morning after the election results created demonstrations that tore through the area, it represents an ethos of local politics, regeneration, protest, and visibility. The graffiti shown on was erased by Oakland officials 25 minutes after this image was captured.



*Malika Crutchfield, "Resistance," (2016).*

# Foreign Tongue

*Anthony Osei*

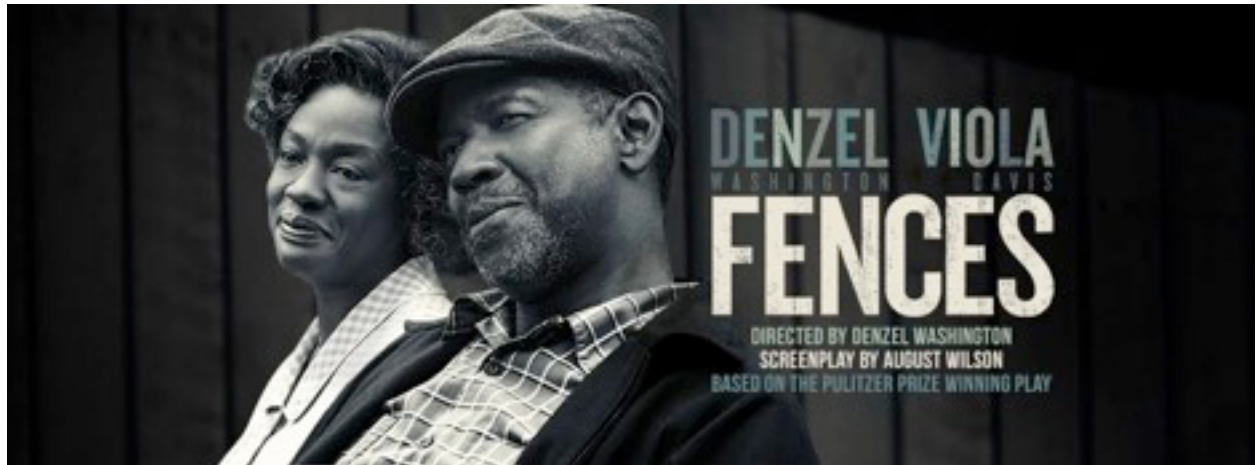
Ironically,  
Communication is my Limitation.  
Ironically,  
Limitation is my Addiction  
Ironically...  
My Tongue  
It's Thoughts and its thickness  
Succulent  
Slithering  
Sensually within it's Cage of 32 Bars.  
It lacks restraint  
And so I gift it with Chains.  
A Present based on my Past.  
But you can hear its will  
You can feel its desire  
In my Lisp  
As it Lazily hydrates my lips  
In every stutter and stammer  
You hear the Beast that is my tongue  
Yearning for full release  
Searching for self control  
Finding only Self Restraint  
Resulting in a Limitation of my communication  
My Words are too heavy  
And my Tongue bears the Gravity



Ironically  
Communication is my Limitation  
Ironically  
Limitation is my addiction  
Ironically  
My Voice Its accent and Its Reach  
Vast  
Volatile  
Varied by memories of Countries visited  
Lands explored  
My Voice is the result of a sound that never had a  
chance to hear itself.  
My voice is the motherless child  
Son of No One, and yet Offspring of All  
The mirror that paints an Image you Feel  
Like the roar of Thunder  
It Strikes  
Like the Clap of an Aerial Aviator's sonic boom  
It Resounds  
Like the Impact of Trauma  
It Resonates  
My voice is the Breaker of Worlds  
Reality its canvas, Verity its Vivid Paint  
Divider and Great Unifier  
Truth and its Burden  
Lies and their Karma  
Balance and its Miracles.  
And yet my Voice is the antagonist to my greatest tale  
My Limiter.  
A limitation that is easily my addiction.  
An Addiction to Overcome, an addiction to Imitation.  
My Imitation of Communication.

# Seeking a Bright and Hopeful Future in the film adaptation “Fences”

*Grace Gipson, PhD Student*



How do we define Black manhood? How do we interrogate the complexities of Black masculinity? What constitutes an inherited and/or lasting legacy? These are all questions that are discussed in the upcoming feature film *Fences*. Set in 1950s Pittsburgh, PA this film adaptation is based on the 1983 play by African-American playwright August Wilson. As a well-known play; is interesting to note that Wilson, before his passing, had expressed an interest in seeing the play as a movie. However, he did not consider any proposals unless it were to be directed by a Black man. This speaks to the importance of telling the *Fences* story from a Black male point of view, seeing that not only is the writer a Black man, but the central character(s) are Black men. Inspired by the influence and impact of such individuals

as Malcolm X, movement's like the Black Arts Movement, and the blues Wilson along with his experiences growing up in Pittsburgh played a significant role in his career as a writer and playwright. Wilson's work, particularly *Fences*, plays a role in championing Black America by representing and dignifying African-American culture during a time when it was not otherwise acknowledged and/or appreciated.

Directed by and starring Academy Award winner Denzel Washington, Academy Award nominee Viola Davis and newcomer Jovan Adepo, *Fences* as a Black American story is sure to bring families together during this upcoming holiday season.

As a possible snapshot into Wilson's own family upbringing, *Fences* centers on Troy Maxson, a 53-year-old city garbage worker who struggles with providing for his family and moving on after not making it far as a baseball player. *Fences* is often viewed as a push-pull, father-son story, as the main conflict centers around the emotional and physical tension between Troy Maxson and his son Cory. The film in many ways demonstrates how Troy repeats the mistakes of his own father while raising Cory.

Therefore, *Fences* cinematically will offer a creative, visual experience into Black manhood and masculinity. This experience specifically asks the questions: What is a good man? What does it take to be a good man? And what is the duty of good man to his family? Considering the state of affairs during the setting of Wilson's play Black men were constantly battling race-relations, equal access, and the opportunity to climb the leadership and power ladder. To revisit this story, via film, is quite timely because one may ask have things changed within race-relations, are fathers and sons still trapped in past struggles of survival, is there hope?

What is also intriguing about what *Fences* offers is a metaphorical reading of the fence. The fence is not simply just a physical structure, but has multiple meanings. Whether it's the fence/barrier that Troy must climb to obtain higher rank as a sanitation driver, the strained fence that stands between Troy and his devoted, understanding wife Rose, or the emotional and complex fence/barrier between Troy and Cory, the fence transcends boundaries. More specifically, Troy's perception of what is right or best for Cory speaks to a fence and or barrier that stands between the two and the lack of willingness to change or potentially make a better life.

Also, the story told within *Fences* is not relegated to one-time period; the struggles of the Maxson family cross time.

As mentioned earlier although the setting of the play and the film takes place in the 1950s this story crosses generations. To be able to see the experiences of the men at different stages and ages sparks a conversation that the Black male experience is not monolithic. The men in this story seek love and acceptance, encounter sacrifice, work hard, and some even want to embrace change. To be able to look back at the past and correct the mistakes is a valuable tool to capitalize on future success.

Hopefully, *Fences* can be a family experience that takes on multiple tasks; the ability to explore the possible damage of "fences" to one's self and the people around them, spark a dialogue about different life experiences, creating legacies, interrogate how the damaged dreams of one generation can potentially destroy the dreams of the next, and propose a type of healing from past wounds through the envisioning of a better future.

# Maximizing a Fellowship Year (or Semester) after Gaining Candidacy

*Amani Morrison, PhD Candidate*

A semester or year off from instructing with the support of a fellowship can yield substantial gains. What follows are some tips for maximizing a fellowship year. The list, of course, is not exhaustive.

## **Conduct fieldwork.**

If your dissertation project relies upon ethnographic or archival research, or any travel, use your fellowship year to complete it. If possible, plan out the logistics for your fieldwork prior to the start of your fellowship award period, so that you are able to dedicate the most time possible to research collection.

## **Figure out the best time of day to write. Then write.**

While in the whirlwind of taking coursework, teaching, and studying for quals, grad students may have difficulty identifying optimal times of day for completing certain tasks. The priority is often to get things done, not necessarily to maximize efficiency. However, if granted the opportunity to have a semester solely dedicated to research and writing, it would behoove you to spend time understanding your productivity rhythms. Experiment with writing and reading at different times of day to discover when you are most focused and motivated to complete these tasks. It is important to give your best writing self to your writing time. No need to zone out at a blank screen at 2 p.m. when you could have cranked out a few paragraphs or pages (or sentences!) at 9 a.m.

At times of day when you have less mental energy, complete lower-energy tasks such as cleaning up footnotes or transferring handwritten notes to your computer.

## **Keep a list of tasks, organized by energy requirement.**

This builds on the prior point. Don't foreclose your productivity because of a lack of motivation to complete your most complex tasks. Maintain a list of tasks divided by high (mental) energy, mid-energy, and low energy. With this list you are able to be productive at any point in the day. High-energy tasks are those that require the most clarity of thought, focus, and motivation, such as writing. These tasks should be prioritized and tackled with your "best brain." Mid-energy tasks may be those like reading and note-taking—they require some concentration but perhaps not as much creative energy as writing. Low-energy tasks, as mentioned above, may include completing citations, sending emails, transferring notes, or free-writing.

## **Take a course, or two.**

Many fellowships cover tuition fees in addition to providing a stipend, so while you may not be required to take courses, any courses taken would be covered. If this is the case, be open to exploring courses offered across campus and enrolling in or auditing one.

The course may fill in a key gap in your knowledge about your research area, or it may simply satisfy an intellectual curiosity. Of course, be aware of the amount of time and energy any such course requires, and be sure you can dedicate your precious resources without detracting from your research productivity.

### **Go to a conference and present (or don't).**

Academic conferences can be great places to network. Whether or not you decide to submit a proposal to present, identifying and attending a conference that key thinkers in your research area attend enables you to access your interlocutors. Cultivating intellectual community outside of your home institution will prove invaluable as you continue to progress in your academic and professional career.

### **Expand your skill set, knowledge base, and/or methodological tools.**

If you need to become savvy with any research tools, take the time on fellowship to do so (if not before the award period). If there are key texts that are foundational to your research area that did not make it to your quals list or that need refreshing, read them and take good notes on relevant information. If there are methods you are interested in trying out, find useful models and try them out.

### **Apply for other fellowships and enrichment opportunities.**

Grant applications can be a time-suck, but who doesn't need more money? Identify grants and fellowships of interest and apply for those for which you are most or moderately qualified and which best serve your intellectual interests and research needs.

Large fellowships are nice, but also be sure to apply for small research grants that can support travel to archives, purchase of books, or other related research expenses.

### **Identify things that keep you grounded, and actively pursue them**

Grad school can be stressful, writing the dissertation can be isolating, and life is always bound to throw a curve ball or two. Finding activities that are enjoyable, cultivating spaces that are peaceful, and nurturing relationships that are life-giving are crucial components to surviving and thriving in this key period of research and writing. There are a vast supply of resources on and beyond campus to assist with keeping you grounded. Look them up and ask around—you won't be the first or only person to do so.

### **Did I say write?**

# Life After Graduate School: An Interview with Dr. Charisse Burden-Stelly

*Selina Makana, PhD Candidate*

**Thank you for taking time to share with us your reflections on life after graduate school. I read somewhere that you are still getting used to being referred to as Dr. Burden, how does it feel?**

It feels surreal, humbling, and rewarding all at the same time. I dedicated the majority of my twenties to getting the PhD, so the respect and recognition that comes with the “doctor” label is definitely gratifying. On the other hand, because I’m still in a kind of transition stage, it’s easy to forget that I’m done with graduate school.

**What academic position do you currently hold?**

I am the Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**That is exciting! Can you tell me about the research you’re currently working on?**

Right now I am working on a book proposal and revising dissertation chapters for a manuscript that looks at the phenomenology, materiality, and epistemology of what I call the antiblack/antiradical conjuncture. I am essentially arguing that one cannot understand antiblackness in the U.S. state and empire without an interrogation of its antiradical underpinnings. With respect to phenomenology, I argue that the antiblack/antiradical conjuncture is reproduced and recodified in relationship to shifts in regimes of capitalist accumulation.

I argue for phenomenology as opposed to ontology because the latter elides possibilities for analyzing the marginalization of political economy analysis, the denigration of socialism/communism, and the repression of persons that demand redistribution and material equality, and their integral and indispensable instantiation in antiblackness. Second, I argue for the materiality of the antiblack/antiradical conjuncture insofar as it reproduces and reifies Black social, cultural, spatial, and physical dispossession, and the universal reality of racialized lack and structural inequality. Finally, I argue that as epistemology, the antiblack/antiradical conjuncture willfully distorts the meaning of Blackness and its metaphoric tie to radicalism, and intentionally misrecognizes political liberalism as the only possibility for Black freedom.

**What do you find the most exciting about your new research?**

What is most exciting about this research is that it offers a new perspective that aims to put radical political economy back on the map, so to speak. While there are myriad texts that interrogate either the effects of antiblack racism or the suppression of radicalism on Black liberation struggles, these perspectives fail to engage the entanglements of antiblackness and antiradicalism. My project addresses this scotoma.

**In your new position, do you get to teach? If so, what courses are you teaching this semester?**

Fortunately, I am able to dedicate the fall semester to writing, publishing, applying for jobs, and conference presentation. Next semester I will teach AFR 490- Theory in African American Studies, which is a required course for the major here.

**Prior to graduating you were a Five Colleges Fellow in the Department of Black Studies. How was the experience for you coming from UC Berkeley and teaching at a liberal arts college?**

The experience was quite good. There were abundant resources at Amherst College, and I enjoyed the small class size. There was also a protracted student protest during my first semester I was there, and I benefitted greatly from hearing students' grievances and shaping my course around their concerns. The cost of living differential was also nothing to scoff at!

**What are some professional challenges that you've faced since transitioning from graduate school to life as a postdoctoral fellow?**

I think the biggest challenge has been shifting my mentality from being a graduate student to a faculty member, and from writing dissertation to writing articles and proposals in which the work of others is much less important than my own original contribution. People still have to insist that I call them by their first name instead of Professor!

**What advice do you have for current ABD grad students?**

Develop a writing practice, and write every single day. At some point, you have to stop reading and researching and trust that you have enough information to start, or finish, a chapter.

Save each day's writing as a new draft (shout out to Professor Jones for that gem). Don't hide from your committee; check in often and don't get discouraged by unfavorable feedback. Most importantly, take care of yourself. If you need a day or two off, take it without hesitation or guilt. You want to have plenty left to give after the dissertation process is over.

**Finally, what would you say you miss the most about UC Berkeley, and this department in particular?**

By far I miss my friends the most! I developed some really important bonds in the department, and at times it's difficult to be so far removed and out of the loop. And Lindsey Herbert! She stands alone in her work ethic, support, positivity, and beauty—but luckily I can follow her on Instagram!

# Gramscian Orchards: An Interview with Dr. Christopher Petrella

*Zachary Manditch-Prottas, PhD Candidate*

*It can, at times, be difficult to distinguish oneself from one's work. Perhaps it is the merging of self and study that inspires a particular sort of commitment and yet, perhaps it also is that which obstructs the balanced life that eludes many academics. With such challenges in mind, recent graduate Dr. Christopher Petrella provides a sterling example of one who replaces impasse with prospect. Christopher has a knack for deft navigation skills that allow him to map his academic interests across an array of terrains. Recently, I was fortunate enough to catch up with Christopher to ask him about his research, his view of academia and to get the details on his recent collegiate homecoming as newly hired staff/faculty member at Bates College.*

## **Tell us about your new position at Bates?**

My position at Bates is unorthodox and exciting. Half of my job entails serving as the College's writing specialist for the social sciences. In this capacity I collaborate closely with fellow faculty members to ensure that their courses utilize effective writing pedagogy in a way that's consonant with the College's mission: "to engage the transformative power of our differences, to cultivate intellectual discovery and informed civic action...to prepare leaders sustained by a love of learning and a commitment to responsible stewardship of the wider world." The other half of my appointment at Bates is that of teaching faculty in the social sciences. Beginning this spring it looks like I'll be teaching a few courses a year in African American Studies, Sociology, or a cognate department.

Thankfully, my position is neither temporary nor tenure-track and so I'm able to avoid the precarious nature of academic labor without having to adhere to traditional norms of publishing.

## **From my understanding you are alumni of Bates. What has it been like to return to a space you experienced as undergraduate from this new vantage point of staff/faculty member?**

Indeed, I am! I'm a proud 2006 graduate of Bates College. My experience of returning to campus as a faculty member has been beautifully disorienting. Associating with faculty and staff as an equal has enlarged my appreciation of my undergraduate experience. Faculty and staff here are preternaturally kind, caring, and generous with their time. I can't tell you how many faculty members have offered simply to take me out to lunch in order to welcome me to campus. The magnanimity I've experienced since having arrived here has been dizzying.

## **Tell us a bit about your research; where do you see this work going upon completion of your dissertation?**

Well, I'm currently under contract with a major trade press to write a book on the relationship between U.S. prisons and Wall Street. Unfortunately, I can't provide all too many details on the nature of the project at this time but I will say that I'm excited to craft a text which balances the rigor of academic analysis with clear, accessible, and confrontational language. I've always been chaffed by the staid



conventions of academic prose and so it's enlivening to be working on a project with incisors.

**As one who has attended both research-driven universities and a liberal arts college what advice might you give Ph.D. students who are weighing these two, sometimes seemingly dueling, avenues as they begin their career in academia?**

What a good question. What I'm about to offer isn't so much advice as an honest meditation on academia. To begin, I've always endeavored to be a living, breathing person who happens to work in academia rather than an academic who occasionally gets around to living. To me, making the time to pick apples is just as important as making the time to read Gramsci. I also operate under the maxim that "I am not my job." I think it's healthy to avoid spaces which can't honor this fact. So, try to find an institution whose values comport well with your own. And finally, there is no one "right" way to be an academic. There are no maps; we make the road by walking. Get with the people who are willing to walk with you.

**One of the things I have always admired about you is that you don't allow your work to be limited to the space of the academy. How has your research manifested outside of university circles?**

Thank you, that's very kind of you to say! Dr. King once mentioned that "religion that ends at the church door ends." I feel similarly about academic work: "research that ends at the library ends." My general disposition, my working class upbringing, and my area of inquiry (race and carcerality) make it such that I have very little patience for academic work which simply serves as a repository for dust. I feel fortunate that over the past few years I've had a number of opportunities to give public talks around the country,

to have my research featured on venues like NPR, to offer legislative testimony, and, most importantly, to organize with local communities around the goal of decarceration. I wish I had something more profound to add here but, honestly, I'm just trying to "do me" the very best I can. And, without getting too saccharine, I suppose I credit my thirst for public engagement to my undergraduate years at Bates, which, taught me the importance of "informed civic action...and a commitment to responsible stewardship of the wider world." I guess I've come full circle. It feels pretty good.

# rememory

*Malika Imhotep, PhD Student*

My body soft  
fresh milled cotton.  
A deep brown of dried  
blood stain.

Stumbling into  
the spots  
blood spilled into my  
internet. Look up

on the train, I'm in  
Fruitvale.  
Can hear the protest of asphalt  
that know it ain't  
made for mausoleum.

In Brooklyn, I follow  
Cousin up dark  
'Pink Houses' stairway.  
Grab my chest,  
try to catch Akai's  
last breath. Cousin  
already at the door,  
ain't look back  
or think twice. This  
where she live.

Here  
I am, blood  
blackened girl.  
All up in other  
niggas memories  
on accident.

If I cried every time  
I stood where some  
body colored like  
mine lost life

don't think I'd be soft

no more. Think  
I'd dry up.  
No time

for the little  
joy I find pressed  
against a body  
that ain't dead  
yet.

Just salted fault lines  
down my face,  
cracks in the fullness  
of my lips

And what then  
will they call me

but dirt.



*Nicole Denise Ramsey, "Diasporic Enterprise," (2016).*



*Nicole Denise Ramsey, "Jamaican Town," (2016).*

# The Last Flight is Always Free

*John Mundell, PhD Student*

*For Nick*

Silence neglected  
the unturned stone  
his long-ashen baritone  
lies embalmed in albums  
going gaunt  
    swelling sarcoma of  
    baby pictures  
  
in fading tinctures  
the curious smile telling  
of a newfound old friend  
    unearths me  
holding him holding him  
he has since forgotten how  
his arms have cradled  
the appaloosa in extremis  
he aids speechless swan songs  
of grit strapped to a bed  
unwanted angel outside the door  
remediate famine  
meditate infamy  
immediate family  
  
so much unsaid  
after not before  
  
from an envelope  
the address bled

a per annum secret revealed  
the specter of holiday greetings  
where past neighbors pass recipes  
ex-girlfriends bear a boy  
pain now trimmed with joy

the whispers between  
stamps and spit perspire  
a life no longer known

Silence dropped in on  
a naïve headstone  
    tell me that story you  
can't remember  
buried in an autumn haze

he wasn't your last  
coffee grows cold  
laughs and then  
asked bold  
    what did you do  
    growing alone

flew them home

# Meet the 2016-2017 First Years



**Nicole Marie Cotton** lives at the intersection of race, science, and environmental organizations. Nicole did her undergraduate work in Environmental Studies at Ohio Wesleyan University, where she concentrated in microbiology and zoology. She presented her research on medicinal plants birds use to build their nests at the National Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology. Her research project was featured in *New Scientist Magazine* (U.K.). Nicole pursued a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning at UC Irvine where she concentrated in Environmental Planning and Policy. Her current work involves documenting the current state of engagement of environmental NGO sustainable development programs with Afro-Mexican communities in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, Mexico. Nicole created the first GIS map of Afro-Mexican communities in Oaxaca (with data collected by Afro-Mexican community groups) in the article “Drawing the Lines: Racial/Ethnic Landscapes and Sustainable Development in the Costa Chica” in the *Journal of Pan African Studies* as the primary author. She recently published an article “State Regulation and Environmental Justice: The Need for Strategy Reassessment” with Laura Pulido and Ellen Khol in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. Nicole plans to continue to mentor students of color in the sciences and encourage Environmental Justice.





**Nitoshia L. Ford** is an alumna of the University of Illinois-Chicago (B.A. in Gender and Women's Studies) and Dominican University (MLIS with emphasis in Archives and Cultural Heritage). Broadly, Nitoshia's research interests include the interplay between power, archival theory and practice, the documentation of historically marginalized groups, and memory. Specifically, she is interested in the self-documentation of second wave Black feminists against the archival grain through their various modes of cultural production. Previously, Nitoshia worked as a public librarian in a suburb of her hometown, Chicago.

# Reflections on Teaching the Day After the Election

*Brukab Sissay, PhD Student*

I, perhaps like you, was not excited about a Hillary Clinton presidency, but a Donald Trump presidency was unimaginable. Despite the projections, we woke up to a reality that few of us expected or even believed possible. On my commute the morning after election day, I was troubled by the realization that I would be meeting my students shortly, and they would be looking to me for guidance. What could I say to them, when I myself couldn't make sense of what had happened? The class periods following election day turned into collective mourning sessions, with students sharing their thoughts about what the results of the election meant, many moved to tears by fears of hate speech and violence. Coincidentally, in one of my courses, we were scheduled to host a guest speaker who gave a timely talk. Mr. Elmer Dixon, a co-founder of the Black Panther Party's Seattle chapter spoke to the class and offered a few challenges. He challenged us to not be immobilized by the election, but energized by the possibilities of collective resistance that a Trump presidency would demand. He challenged us to build collaborations across movements and issues rather than individualistically. He spoke to the need to study history seriously, and to understand how the law and government work at local, regional, and federal levels. Lastly, he historicized the Panthers' emphasis on pragmatic actions on the ground level, and challenged us to act similarly. In this last point, I heard a particular call to academics that our research be community engaged. That as scholars, we ought to make our work meaningful to the communities that we interact with, and that we come from. This lesson was particularly useful to hear in that moment, and has been something I've returned to since.



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