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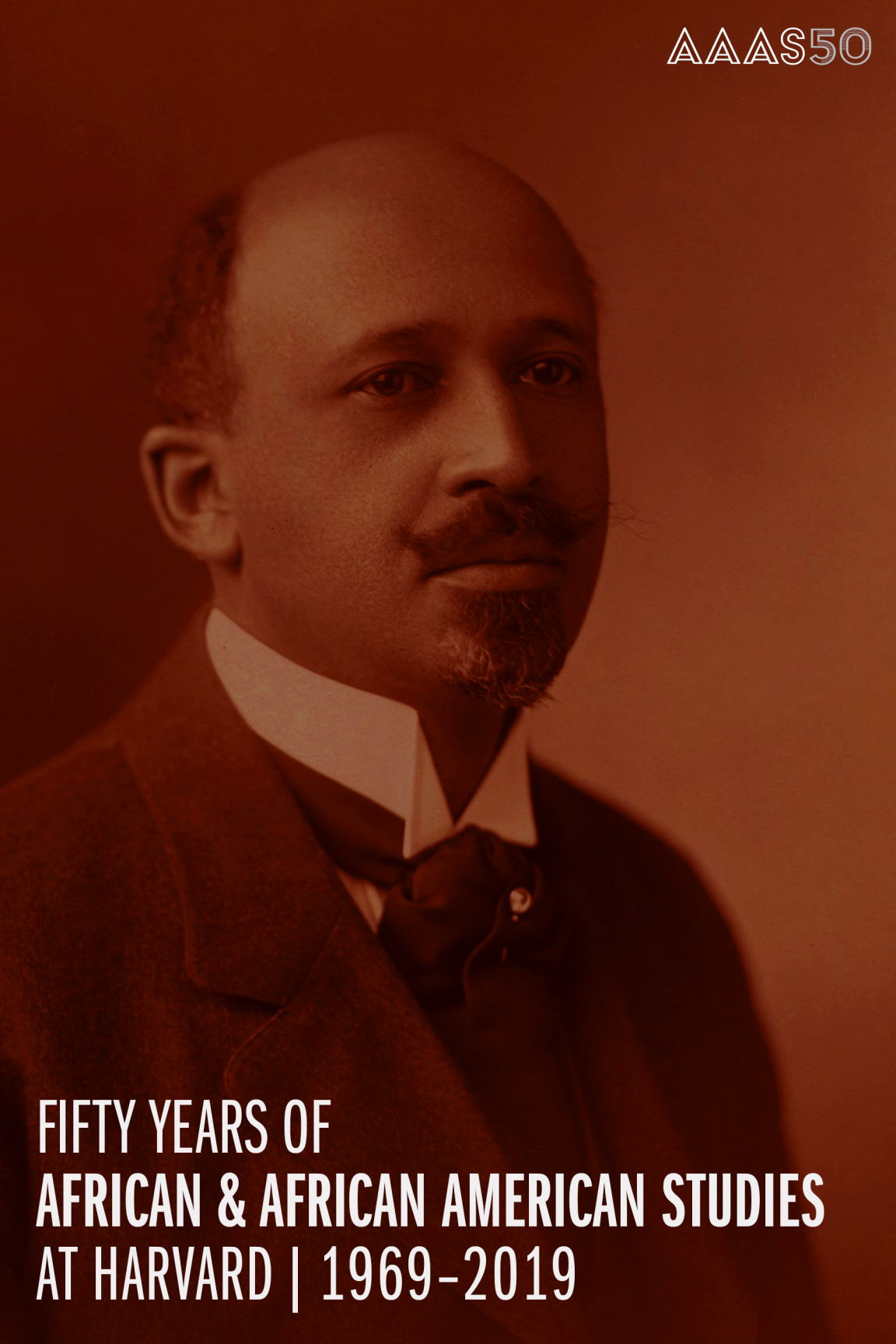

FIFTY YEARS OF
AFRICAN & AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
AT HARVARD | 1969–2019

Fifty Years of African and African American Studies at Harvard

1969–2019

Compiled, edited, and typeset by the
Class Report Office, Harvard Alumni Association

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Foreword

This book commemorates, celebrates, and reflects on fifty years of African and African American studies at Harvard University. Of course, Africa and its diaspora in the Americas have been studied at Harvard for far longer than a half century. However, 1969 represents the formal recognition of the academic field at this institution. The story of the founding and evolution of the Department of African and African American Studies is complex and fraught, and no account can be definitive or without controversy. I offer one version of that story. As administrators, former department chairs and faculty, and alumni of multiple generations add their voices in the pages that follow, a rich and riveting picture emerges, one that I hope readers will appreciate and be inspired by.

Founders and Early Days

Throughout the twentieth century, students and faculty across the country have called for formal recognition of and an institutional support for black studies within higher education, a call that rarely received a positive response. By all accounts, it was the world-shattering assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. that propelled this persistent call for "Black Studies" into a militant mass movement.

King was killed on April 4, 1968. And five days later, a service was held to honor him in Memorial Church. However, members of the Harvard-Radcliffe Association of African and Afro-American Students, known as "Afro," refused to participate. Instead, they held their own simultaneous service outside on the steps of Memorial Church.

The next day, on April 10, Afro published an ad in the *Harvard Crimson* demanding that the University:

1. Establish an endowed chair for a black professor [which was later changed to a demand for a chair in Black Studies.]
2. Offer more courses relevant to blacks at Harvard.
3. Hire more black faculty.
4. Admit more black students.

Student activists soon formed a ten-member Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students to communicate and refine the demands of the black student community. In addition to the four initial demands, the Ad Hoc Committee called for the creation of a Department of Afro-American

Studies with the power to appoint and promote its own faculty and set its own curriculum. It also called for the establishment of an African American Research Center.

Then dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Franklin L. Ford, created a nine-member faculty committee on African and Afro-American studies, chaired by Henry Rosovsky, then professor of economics. This committee included Martin L. Kilson Jr., a political scientist who specialized in African politics and was the first black faculty member to be awarded tenure at Harvard.

The committee was charged with "movement toward a possible field of undergraduate concentration, necessarily cutting across disciplinary lines but held together by the centrality of concern for African and Afro-American subject matter." The Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students nominated two members—Ernest Wilson III and Octavia Hudson—to serve as observers on the faculty-led committee.

The faculty committee issued its report (the "Rosovsky Report," as it came to be known), recommending:

1. Establishing a standing faculty committee to develop and oversee a joint concentration in the field of Afro-American studies.
2. Establishing a committee on African studies to coordinate course offerings in African studies.
3. Building a cultural center for black students.
4. Founding a center for Afro-American studies.
5. Dramatically increasing black enrollment in the graduate school.

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted in favor of accepting the Rosovsky Report recommendations, and Dean Ford appointed a search committee, which included students, to identify candidates for faculty appointments in Afro-American studies.

Now, all of the students' demands were ultimately met, and they continue to be satisfied and even greatly surpassed today. However, the road has been stony, with a number of pivotal moments in the evolution of the Department.

In the spring of 1969, the black students were deeply dissatisfied with their lack of a meaningful role in the hiring of faculty and the designing of curricula for Afro-American studies. They also reaffirmed their desire for the new unit to enjoy department status, and not mere inter-departmental committee status. They petitioned Dean Franklin for redress and received it. On April 22, 1969, the FAS faculty sided with the students and voted to establish Afro-American studies as a department and to give students a substantial role in appointing faculty for the new department, including voting rights.

Second, in September 1969, the Standing Committee on Afro-American Studies issued a new report, which came to be known as the Musgrave Report, named after the committee's chair, the eminent economist Richard Musgrave.

It announced nine new faculty appointments, including the sociologist Orlando Patterson, who today is the John Cowles Professor of Sociology at the University.

The report also announced the Department's first chair, Ewart Guinier, an influential labor organizer and lawyer, and also the father of Lani Guinier, a well-known legal scholar, political theorist, and Bennett Boskey Professor of Law Emerita—she was the first woman of color appointed to a tenured professorship at the Law School. She was also a founding member on the original Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students.

The Musgrave Report proposed the establishment of an Institute for Afro-American Research, to be named in honor of W. E. B. Du Bois. The first director of the Du Bois Institute was the distinguished scholar of African American religion and Christian ethics Preston Williams, Houghton Professor of Theology and Contemporary Change Emeritus, who was the first tenured African American member of the Divinity School faculty.

Another product of late '60s activism that we cherish at Harvard is an undergraduate organization devoted to celebrating spirituality and black creative genius. Kuumba, which means "creativity" in Swahili, is also celebrating fifty years at Harvard. Founded by Dennis Wiley and Fred Lucas, members of the first Harvard class to graduate from our Department, Kuumba is, and has always been, much more than a choir. It is a community, with its own rich history, rooted in the traditions of Africa and its diverse diaspora.

For a brief period, the Afro-American Studies Department enjoyed high course enrollments, many new concentrators, and curricular expansion. The first class of concentrators, totaling fourteen students, graduated in 1972. Some faculty and students experienced this as an exciting time for the Department, full of possibilities.

Others, however, criticized the quality of instruction, felt the academic standards of the Department were too low, believed the students were exerting too much influence on its direction, and were anxious that the Department was overly politicized and separatist. This attitude was not unique to Harvard. As Martha Biondi notes in her important history of the black studies movement, "Black studies was seen by many as an academically suspect, antiwhite, emotional intrusion into a landscape of rigor and reason."

In October 1972, with the Black Power movement facing political repression and losing energy and support, a committee to review the Department issued a new report with the following recommendations:

1. The Department should prioritize Afro-*American* studies over African studies.
2. Afro-American studies should be available to students only as a "field of joint concentration," that is, to be studied always alongside a traditional discipline.
3. Faculty in Afro-Am should be jointly appointed with another department.

4. Community engagement should be subordinated to academic study and research.
5. The right of students to vote on faculty appointments should be rescinded.
6. The Du Bois Institute should not be directed and controlled by the Department but instead should be a University-wide institute.

Subsequently, enrollments dropped, many faculty members in the Department departed, and the Department was subject to sharp public criticism, from outside and inside the University. Ultimately, Ewart Guinier, feeling a lack of support from the upper administration, resigned as chair in protest and, in 1976, was replaced by Eileen Southern, a specialist in African American music and the first black woman tenured at Harvard.

In May 1979, a visiting committee issued a report recommending that the Department be abolished and replaced with an interdisciplinary committee structure. This new inter-faculty committee would not have the power to grant tenure or choose its own curriculum. In response to the visiting committee's report, Rosovsky, then dean of FAS, chose instead to put the Department into "academic receivership" and to appoint a senior faculty committee to search for new faculty members.

In April 1980, Nathan Irving Huggins, a history professor at Columbia University, was appointed the new chair of the Department and the director of the Du Bois Institute. Huggins had a highly developed and sophisticated vision for the field, detailed in his 1985 report to the Ford Foundation on the status of Afro-American studies. His appointment stabilized the Department in the '80s, though its faculty remained extremely small.

Tragically, Huggins died of pancreatic cancer in 1989. Once again the Department, although blessed with capable leadership from the distinguished literary scholars Werner Sollors and Barbara Johnson, was experiencing low enrollments and had few concentrators. The remaining junior faculty took positions at other universities. Afro-Am was having great difficulty recruiting new faculty, particularly black scholars. And Harvard's administration seemed, to many at the time, to be unwilling to invest in the Department.

Skip and the "Dream Team"

Once again, Harvard's students stepped forward, occupying University Hall in protest. They aggressively communicated their deep concerns over the limited course offerings and the absence of black faculty. In response, President Derek Bok and FAS Dean Rosovsky authorized several faculty searches, including a search for a new chair of the Department.

With the 1991 appointment of Henry Louis Gates Jr. as chair of the Department and director of the Du Bois Institute, the Department finally managed to secure its footing and to grow.

It is no exaggeration to say that Gates played a unique and unparalleled role in building and sustaining African and African American Studies, and because of the work he has done at Harvard and in the wider public, many black studies programs around the country have benefitted.

With the strong support of Harvard President Neil Rudenstine, the first thing Gates did was recruit distinguished senior scholars in the field. Adding to his own star power, he hired Kwame Anthony Appiah, William Julius Wilson, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, and Cornel West—internationally recognized scholars. This brought immediate legitimacy to the effort and great excitement on campus. By creating a critical mass of top scholars, the Department was able to attract others to join its faculty and thereby to strengthen the depth and breadth of its curriculum.

Using his incredible marketing skills and unmatched social capital, Skip (as his friends and colleagues call him) also brought great visibility to the Department in the '90s, branding it the "Dream Team" and garnering frequent positive (indeed, celebratory) coverage in the *New York Times*, including a 1996 multipage feature article "Can Harvard's Powerhouse Alter the Course of Black Studies." Through documentary films, massive encyclopedia and multimedia projects, and countless books, Skip brought African and African American Studies outside the academy to a wide public audience—and he hasn't let up!

In addition to academic legitimacy and public visibility, Skip brought resources. He helped raise millions of dollars for the Department and for the Du Bois Institute, which through his persistent efforts and a generous donation from businessman and investor Glenn Hutchins, was ultimately expanded into the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, with some 23,000 square feet of space in the heart of Harvard Square.

There's much more I could say about Skip's role in developing black studies. But, I'll simply emphasize one last point. Though Skip's commitment to black people's welfare and freedom is not in doubt, no one would describe him as a black radical or black nationalist. And his moderate liberalism and pro-business outlook are frequently attacked by black intellectuals on the left and by militant black nationalists. When it comes to politics, I too often find myself disagreeing with him.

But one of the things I admire most about Skip is his consistent insistence on both academic freedom and a non-ideological approach to black studies. He is a vocal and tireless advocate for rigorous independent thought, freedom of expression, and open debate in the field.

The faculty in the Department are certainly not apolitical. We are obviously actively antiracist and don't tolerate discrimination in any form. But it is *not* a requirement for admission or appointment in the Department that one hold a particular political philosophy. This ethos remains strong, and I will do whatever I can to ensure that it endures.

African Studies Finds a Home

The Department traces its lineage to the work of the towering scholar, writer, editor, and activist W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois is of course one of Harvard's most distinguished alumni, earning a bachelor's degree in 1890 with a concentration in philosophy. In 1895, he was the first American of African descent to earn a Harvard PhD. His doctoral dissertation, in the field of history, was published in 1896 as *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870*.

Although Du Bois is best known for his writings on the history, art, social life, and politics of African Americans (with such classics as *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Black Reconstruction in America*), he also wrote several books on Africa and its broader diaspora, including *The Negro* and *The World and Africa*.

I highlight this to emphasize that the Department, in the spirit of Du Bois, regards its scope of research and instruction to be enormously broad and capacious, taking in all of the black world and much besides. This mission is also in keeping with the initial demands of student activists in '68 and '69. Theirs was a Pan-African and transnational vision, which we share.

In 2003, we reworked our curriculum to include two focus areas—Africa and the Americas. We changed our name from "Afro-American Studies" to "African and African American Studies." And we proceeded to make several faculty appointments to strengthen our curricular offerings in African studies.

We renewed our commitment to the study of African languages, hiring the resourceful and energetic John Mugane to direct our newly established African Language Program. This past academic year, we had more than five hundred students enrolled in courses in the program and offered eighteen languages, including not only Zulu, Yoruba, and Swahili but also Jamaican Patois, Gullah, and Haitian Creole.

The Center for African Studies—previously the Committee on African Studies—was established in 2014, largely due to an anonymous gift secured through the steadfast efforts of the bold historian Caroline Elkins. The Center is currently directed by the distinguished historian Emmanuel Akyeampong, who (working with other colleagues in African studies and donors) recently launched an office in Johannesburg.

Today's Department

I joined the faculty in 2000, and in these two decades, the Department has grown to more than forty-one regular faculty members and another five faculty affiliates. We also have four faculty who are emeriti, including William Julius Wilson and Werner Sollors from the "Dream Team" era. Although a joint appointment in a traditional discipline is no longer required, many of our faculty are jointly appointed across the University—from art history, English, and philosophy to anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

Recently, the Department has added a third research and teaching focus, Afro-Latin American Studies. This emerging field studies people of African ancestry in Latin America, with a view toward gaining a deeper understanding of the history, cultures, and politics of the region. It also investigates black identities in Latin America, and how such identities and the politics of the region are shaped by race-based stratification and the legacy of slavery. Because of the Afro-Latin American Research Institute at the Hutchins Center, directed by Alejandro de la Fuente, Harvard is now a leader in this field.

In 2001, we admitted our first class of PhD students. Our first students graduated in 2008, and all three, and several more, have now earned tenure. We have placed graduates in tenure-track faculty positions at such institutions as Yale, Boston College, Princeton, Haverford, Northwestern, Wellesley, Boston University, Columbia, UT Austin, UCLA, Brown, and UC Riverside.

Our regular faculty have chaired, or are currently chairing, other departments, including the Departments of History, Music, Government, History of Science, American Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the School of Public Health. Our members have directed major centers on campus, including the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and the Warren Center for Studies in American History.

The wide-ranging linguist Marcyliena Morgan founded and directs the Hiphop Archive & Research Institute. The renowned historian of science, Evelynn Hammonds, has served as dean of the College. My predecessor as chair, the great sociologist Lawrence Bobo, is now dean of the Social Science Division. And another of our own, the distinguished political scientist Claudine Gay, is now the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the first African American *and* the first woman to serve in this powerful role. In these ways, and others, AAAS faculty are integrated into the wider University and have made the academic study of black folk a key part of this venerable institution's mission.

Closing Word

Let me close with a word about our undergraduate students. It is a tremendous honor and profound pleasure to teach the students of Harvard College. These young people are extraordinarily bright and multi-talented, and they bring great passion and curiosity to the study of black life. Yes, there is definitely a special place in our hearts for those who choose to concentrate in the field that we love. But we aim to reach and teach as many students as Harvard admits, even if only through one course.

It was of course the militant dissent, zeal, and commitment of Harvard undergraduate students that, in the wake of King's death, won us a department to begin with, and later sustained it in moments of crisis. We should never forget that. My colleagues and I are grateful to those who pioneered this effort and we sincerely hope they are proud of what we've done with their legacy.

I want to congratulate all who made the department and its fiftieth milestone possible. It is an enormous and extraordinary accomplishment that only many, many committed individuals, working together and across generations, could have realized. Yet we are not finished and refuse to be complacent or to rest on our laurels. We look ahead, with renewed hope, support from our friends, and an even more ambitious vision, to the next fifty years.

Respectfully submitted,
Tommie Shelby
Chair, Department of African and African American Studies, 2018 to present
Caldwell Titcomb Professor of African and African American Studies and of Philosophy

A Special Congratulations

Occasionally, one has the luxury of lounging one's way through a highly lucky day. One of the luckiest—by far—in my Harvard tenure, was when I learned that Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr. would soon be arriving to chair the university's African American Studies department, and that Kwame Anthony Appiah would also be coming.

That was the summer of 1991, when I too would be just arriving to take up my work at Harvard. I lost no time in asking to meet with Skip to see if we might work together to rebuild the University's demoralized Afro-Am venture.

Skip immediately took the lead in sketching an improbable list of desired departmental future faculty appointments. As we know, the improbable—under his leadership—quickly began to be the possible, and then the likely, and then the actual. Harvard's department became radiant, studded with stars, and that was of course only the beginning.

Now, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary, the Department (and its associated distinguished parts, such as the Hutchins Center and the Center for African Studies) exerts a pervasive salutary effect on all of Harvard, and indeed nationally. At this time, I want to congratulate all the participants in this robust and vivacious venture: the fiftieth is a remarkably triumphant moment!

Neil L. Rudenstine
Twenty-sixth President of Harvard University, 1991–2001
Professor of English and American Literature and Language Emeritus

Department of African and African American Studies

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Daniel Agbiboa
Assistant Professor of African and African American Studies

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Suzanne P. Blier
Allen Whitehill Clowes Professor of Fine Arts and Professor of African and African American Studies

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W. E. B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences

Vincent Brown
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Glenda R. Carpio
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Bruno Carvalho
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John Comaroff
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Henry Louis Gates Jr.
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Greeting from the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

It is a tremendous privilege to celebrate fifty years of African and African American Studies (AAAS) at Harvard. Through its profound commitment to the multi-disciplinary study of the global African Diaspora—in all its richness, complexity, and even contradictions—the Department of AAAS has become an unequaled leader in its field, to the enormous benefit of the Harvard community and the wider world. From where we stand today, it's unthinkable to imagine our campus without the dynamic scholarship, teaching, creativity, and the formidable intellectual community that is AAAS. But we also know that wasn't always the case. And since stepping into the role of dean, I've had many opportunities to reflect on the history of African and African American Studies at Harvard, and how that history informs our present and allows us to imagine what is possible for our future.

The history of AAAS speaks directly to Harvard's own history—and, in particular, to the transformations of our student body. It's no coincidence that we are celebrating fifty years of African and African American Studies and not seventy-five or one hundred. It took a different generation of learners walking through our gates to make it possible for this hugely significant project to emerge and thrive. A student population that included new voices, new perspectives and lived experiences galvanized the meaningful changes in our teaching and research that we are celebrating today. I derive deep inspiration and instruction from this history of AAAS, and all that's at stake in continuing to evolve our academic program and widen the aperture for discovery. The founding of AAAS was a watershed moment in what remains an on-going project of building a truly inclusive scholarly community, where the intellectual life of the institution (including our curriculum) affirms the relevance, significance, and worth of diverse cultural backgrounds and histories. The progress we have made on this front reflects the indelible legacy of the Department. And the fact that we are here to celebrate its fiftieth year is, for me, motivation for the unfinished business that remains and for all that there is still to do to ensure our students have access to the knowledge and understanding that prepares them for leadership in a diverse society.

When I first arrived at Harvard, as a faculty member in the Government Department, I was immediately welcomed by colleagues in AAAS who reached out for coffee and conversation, colleagues who shared their time and ideas with me, who connected me to their students and allowed me to do the same if we thought they might benefit from a class or advising informed by a different approach. The community I found in AAAS was both intellectually

generative and personally affirming. So, after a couple years, when Evelyn Higginbotham invited me to lunch and asked if I'd like to formally join the department, I didn't hesitate. And it's been one of the most rewarding parts of my own Harvard story.

What's even more remarkable, and to my mind truly special about AAAS, is that the experience I just described isn't unique to me. AAAS is a place where the caravans meet—intellectually, socially, culturally—where openness and generosity are woven deeply into the fabric of the department, and where one always finds an enthusiastic embrace of new ideas, new approaches, and new people. AAAS is both home and crossroads, and I'm profoundly grateful for all its contributed to my life and scholarship personally, and even more for what it brings to the intellectual life of Harvard and beyond.

Claudine Gay
Edgerley Family Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Wilbur A. Cowett Professor of Government and of African and African American Studies

Reflections of the Former Department Chairs

Afro-American Studies in the 1980s: A Retrospective Glance

The Afro-American Studies Department (AAS) at Harvard emerged as the result of a report by a committee chaired by Henry Rosovsky and in response to vocal student demands. It was formally created by a faculty vote on April 22, 1969. However, only a decade later it found itself isolated, placed in receivership, and many voices advocated that it be closed down.

In 1980, the Columbia professor of history Nathan Irvin Huggins, widely known for his books *Harlem Renaissance* and *Black Odyssey,* accepted the offer of the W.E.B. Du Bois Professorship of AAS and History at Harvard. He immediately started working at giving AAS a distinguished scholarly profile. In 1982, Huggins made his first senior appointment with Glenn C. Loury who became the first black senior economist at Harvard. Former chair and renowned music scholar Eileen Southern, the first African American woman tenured in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, continued teaching music courses and working on her research. In 1983 Huggins asked me to join the AAS faculty and the English Department. With my arrival, there were then four senior faculty members in place. They were joined by assistant professors Hyatt Marshall (Anthropology, working on Franz Boas), Roderick Harrison (Sociology, with a specialty in demography), Carolivia Herron (Literature with a specialty in the epic), and David Blight (African American history).

I was asked to serve as chair in the years 1984–87 and 1988–1990 and devoted myself to strengthening AAS within and outside the University along the lines Nathan Huggins had established. We revised the concentration rationale, the requirements, the tutorials, and the reading list thoroughly and organized the offerings in the course catalogue in a more systematic fashion. Faculty members taught Core courses on such topics as "The Changing Concept of Race" and on "Ethnicity in Modern American Literature and Culture," drawing students to the Department. A new AAS course was created that permitted undergraduate majors to do research in Houghton Library, and the Afro-American library, then housed in Lamont Library, was expanded. The Kathryn Ann Huggins Prize for a senior thesis in AAS was established. Amiri Baraka, Ted Joans, Adrienne Kennedy, Albert Murray, Charles Johnson, and Paule Marshall were among the writers who gave readings in our Department; Ishmael Reed taught in AAS for a whole semester. AAS also held a three-day symposium in collaboration with Roxbury Community College on the

Legacy of the 1960s, with Angela Davis, June Jordan, H. Rap Brown, and Rita Dove among the speakers, followed by lively discussions. Meanwhile Du Bois Institute fellows included leading specialists in African American Studies from historically black colleges in the United States and from universities around the world. Chaired by Huggins, the Du Bois Institute also drew AAS undergraduates to its colloquia.

A newly established monthly seminar for AAS faculty and interested colleagues in other departments as well as the Divinity School, the Law School, and the School of Education soon included presentations by scholars like Martin Kilson and Orlando Patterson. Connections were established or re-established with all adjacent departments and programs: Anthropology, Economics, English, Ethnic Studies, Fine Arts, Government, History, History and Literature, History of American Civilization, History of Science, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Psychology, Religion, Social Studies, and Sociology. This led to more compatibility in requirements and to cross-listing and recognition of our courses in other academic units. It also inspired a few students to become joint concentrators.

Undergraduates and graduate students from other departments and programs started flocking to the Department, and its first home on 77 Dunster Street often became the setting for excited discussions about readings in the field as well as events in the world. At least three undergraduates as well as several graduate students of the 1980s later became tenured professors of African American Studies: Farah Griffin, Judith Jackson, and the late Jeffrey Ferguson, as well as Rafia Zafar. Others who took Afro-American Studies classes later became writers, like Tracy K. Smith or Colson Whitehead. Four students received magna cum laude on their senior theses, and the number of AAS-only concentrators grew from three in 1983–84 to fourteen in 1989–1990, a rather respectable figure.

In addition to teaching and pursuing ongoing research projects I became deeply interested in the history of African Americans at Harvard, where Presidents Increase Mather and Benjamin Wadsworth had been slaveholders, but where Professor of Classics Charles Beck installed a trap door in his Cambridge home to hide fugitive slaves, and where W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, John Hope Franklin and Rayford Logan, Eva Dykes and Carter Woodson, had received their doctorates. I put together a pamphlet for concentrators, potential concentrators, and their parents, with a cover of images of some of the best-known black alumni of the past; inside a letter by Frederick Douglass was reproduced from Houghton Library. Harvard history was much talked about on campus in anticipation of the University's 350th anniversary in 1986. But when I asked my research assistant Thomas Underwood to identify all the books about African Americans at Harvard, he told me that there were no general books at all about this topic, but that he was willing to find as many sources as the Archives would yield. Co-editing these sources with him and later on joined by Caldwell Titcomb, a colleague from Brandeis, we managed

to self-publish Varieties of Black Experience at Harvard, a 180-page anthology we gave to the Harvard libraries and to all participants of a symposium at the anniversary celebration itself. In a revised and expanded version, it was later published under the title *Blacks at Harvard*. Students, too, started undertaking projects about slavery and race at Harvard, from historical, sociological, and literary perspectives.

Multiple connections with other departments made for lively interactions between AAS and the University at large. Yet when in quick succession Glenn Loury decided to move his professorship to the Kennedy School and Eileen Southern announced that she would retire sooner than expected, the big topic in AAS for the latter 1980s became faculty recruitment. Visiting faculty members Julian Bond, Wilson Moses, and David Wills helped, as did faculty in adjacent departments. But it was clear that we needed more senior appointments, all the more so since promotions from within were then rare at Harvard, and rarer yet in the case of joint appointments. Then Nathan Huggins was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He died on December 5, 1989. Fortunately, Henry Rosovsky stepped in again as dean, soon set up a very active outside committee, and named Barbara Johnson its chair. That finally led to two successful new senior appointments in English and in Philosophy in 1991.

What followed is the better-known part of the history of the Department, the years when it was chaired by Henry Louis Gates Jr. With support of incoming President Neil Rudenstine many new senior offers could now be extended, among them to Cornel West and to William Julius Wilson, two scholars Huggins had already tried to recruit. It was undoubtedly helpful in this new phase of expansion that, thanks to Huggins's vision, AAS had already become a widely respected Department at Harvard with a reformed academic structure that only lacked the infusion of more faculty. As Huggins wrote in the last year of his life: "Afro-American Studies seems an established fact at Harvard. Arguments about its legitimacy as a field of study or a suitable field of concentration for undergraduates are no longer heard. Its students, in course enrollment as well as concentrators, are remarkably racially balanced." It feels good to see that the legacy of the 1980s is not forgotten and that Huggins, who started the W. E. B. Du Bois lecture series, is now honored in the Department and at the Du Bois Institute with a Nathan I. Huggins lecture series.

Werner Sollors
Henry B. and Anne M. Cabot Professor of English Emeritus
Chair, Department of Afro-American Studies, 1984–87; 1988–1990

What has the Department meant to me? I could write volumes. I suppose that I have had three major intellectual experiences shape my academic life: my undergraduate education at Yale, my graduate education at the University of Cambridge, and the last three decades as a professor and administrator in African and African American Studies here at Harvard. Each has a common but unlikely thread: though I majored in American political history at Yale, I managed to take a course almost every semester in some aspect of the fledgling field of Black Studies, starting with William McFeely's enormously popular (and often quite heated) survey lecture course in Afro-American history, in which I was enrolled in the 1969–1970 academic year, the year that culminated at Yale with a university-wide strike in mid-April to protest the persecution of the Black Panthers, generally, and, specifically, the State of Connecticut's treatment of Bobby Seale and Erika Huggins, on trial in New Haven, just a block or so from my dorm room, charged with conspiracy to kidnap and murder. Virtually every black student at Yale was in that class, including Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee and former Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke. The discussion period of that class *rocked:* at one session, members of the Panther Party actually showed up, demanding to know how the course's curriculum was "relevant" to "the Revolution" that was unfolding throughout the country. With poise and aplomb, Professor McFeely pointed to the blackboard, on which he had listed the number of black men lynched since Reconstruction. The Panthers, surprised and a bit embarrassed, backed down.

As my undergraduate education proceeded, I kept a watchful eye on the progress, or lack of it, of the Program in Afro-American Studies, born in controversy and hampered from the start with the appointment of a chair, Roy Bryce-Laporte, who—as dedicated as he was—didn't have tenure. And didn't receive tenure. His replacement was Charles T. Davis, the first African American tenured professor in the English Department, and a person with both the highest scholarly standards and blessed with the belief that our field was first and foremost an *academic* subject, the basis of a *discipline,* and not primarily an outpost for political grandstanding or ideological "purity." Davis was a scholar, and his first appointment, I believe, was the great historian, John W. Blassingame. When I returned from two years of graduate study at Cambridge, it was Davis and Blassingame who became my tutors and role models for the creation of the field of African-American Studies. Every day with them was a tutorial; the lessons they taught me about building the field, priceless. We became very close friends; not only did I admire them, I loved them, and came to love our field through them. Above all else, the lesson they taught me was that Afro-Am was an academic subject, and that we had to insist on the highest standards when making faculty appointments and when teaching our students. Even more, faculty appointments could *never* be based on a person's ideological position or politics. A faculty member's politics could have no more relevance

in Afro-Am than they might in, say, the math or physics department. What's more, ideological diversity was a positive good in any field such as ours. Mr. Davis, as we all called him, in the Yale manner, proudly pointed to hiring both Toni Morrison *and* Amiri Baraka, who by that time was in his post-black nationalist Marxist phase. No politics, to paraphrase Yeats, could be allowed to do the work of the imaginative intellect. Scholarship came in all shapes, sizes, and intellectual complexions. Never was there a lesson more important for me to have learned.

How did Cambridge fit into this tale? Well, in the form of two scholars, one a second-year undergraduate and the other a playwright destined to become the first person of African descent to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. I'm speaking, of course, of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Wole Soyinka. I've written about our relationship before, as have they; but let's just say that 1973, my first year at Cambridge, was my *annus mirabilis,* my year of wonder. For it was they—by example and explicitly—who inspired me to abandon any idea of a career in law or medicine, for which I had been raised, and dream the dream of living the life of the mind.

Cut to 1991. After spending five years at Cornell, as a professor of English with an associate relationship to their Africana Studies department, and then two more years at Duke desperately wishing, with no luck, to create a department in our field there, Barbara Johnson called. Barbara, an old friend from our shared days as faculty members at Yale, had asked to be chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies, primarily to recruit Anthony Appiah and me, as she fondly remembered. And somehow, the whole thing worked. But the success that Anthony and I enjoyed, along with our colleague Werner Sollors, who warmly welcomed us to the department, was largely responsible because of the support of the president, Neil Rudenstine, and the dean who hired us both, Henry Rosovsky. Rosovsky was my Virgil, guiding me, day by day, memo by memo, appointment by appointment, across the mine field that can be the appointment process in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard, especially in our field, back in 1991. (It certainly helped set the tone that Anthony Appiah was our very first appointment!) And President Rudenstine? Neil Rudenstine was the first president in the American academy, at any time and any place, in my opinion, who actually believed that African and African American Studies should be at the center of a truly liberal arts education. And for never yielding on that belief, he would receive a great deal of flak. But he will be remembered as the president when Harvard soon took an unrivaled leadership role in a field—whose death had long been pronounced or predicted—that was about to explode. And explode, it did, starting in Cambridge.

What are my most precious memories? Well, identifying, recruiting, and hiring the first group of academic superstars who joined us in the nineties, one by one, appointment by appointment, charming, memorable recruitment

dinners at our home, each special, each unique, in its own wonderful way, including, in chronological order, the following: Kwame Anthony Appiah, Philip Harper, J. Lorand Matory, Jamaica Kincaid, Spike Lee, Evelyn Higginbotham, The Honorable A. Leon Higginbotham, Cornel West, Suzanne Blier, William Julius Wilson, Larry Bobo, and Marcyliena Morgan. For whatever reason, the press noticed and decided that this was a story, with articles running nationally and internationally. In the early 2000s, while I was chair, we also recruited and hired Glenda Carpio, Kimberly DaCosta, Marla Frederick, Evelynn Hammonds, Ingrid Monson, Biodun Jeyifo, Susan O'Donovan, Jacob Olupona, Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, Tommie Shelby, and James Sidanius. My fondest memories are of the early years of the graduate colloquium, which each of our tenured and junior faculty members attended and avidly, passionately exchanged ideas; the merging of degree-granting programs in both African and African American Studies, culminating in PhDs in both areas; and the creation of what has become, under John Mugane, the largest and most vibrant African language program in the world. I can't help but think that the success that we had at Harvard informed the decisions of our peer institutions to revitalize, build, and expand to departmental status their own African American Studies programs, including Yale and Princeton, Columbia and Penn, and a host of other universities. Black Studies has enjoyed a renaissance of sorts since the early nineties, and thrives today, long after so many naysayers predicted its demise.

My own debt is to all of the colleagues in the department today—numbering forty-one voting members, five non-voting faculty affiliates, three lecturers, a College fellow, and two language preceptors—who embraced our belief, as Neil Rudenstine saw so clearly, that the study of the history and literature, the arts and culture, and social and political structures created by people of African descent should, properly, be at the center of a liberal arts curriculum at any truly great university—and who, in some cases, decided to leave an empire and join a republic, a great republic of letters—and, deploring political correctness and so-called "cancel culture," parks her or his ideological beliefs at the door. May that cherished, almost sacred, principle continue to define our collective commitment to the life of the mind.

Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr.
Alphonse Fletcher Jr. University Professor
Director, Hutchins Center for African & African American Research
Chair, Department of Afro-American Studies, 1991–2006

A New Dream for the Dream Team

I suppose for most academics, it would be unlikely to see their university department featured as the cover story of a popular magazine. And yet there I stood in 1999 in the magazine section of a convenience store, staring at the faces of my two colleagues Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates Jr., on the cover of the March issue of *Emerge*. A respected but short-lived periodical (1989–2000), *Emerge* dubbed itself "Black America's Newsmagazine." Having been recruited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in 1993 and committed to the goal of building with him a stellar Afro-American Studies Department (as the Department was called then), I felt a special pride upon turning to the feature article with its large collage of the senior black faculty—not only Gates and West but Kwame Anthony Appiah, William Julius Wilson, Larry Bobo, and me. Seeing that same magazine today, I cannot help but marvel at how far the Department has come since its founding in 1969 and since its coverage in *Emerge* in 1999.

In the 1990s we often called ourselves the "Dream Team," and so it came as no surprise to see the magazine's prominent use of those words. Our faculty, and especially the Department's chair, Henry Louis Gates Jr., had brought new-found respect to the field known as Black Studies—a field born of the student unrest of the late 1960s and, unfortunately, on many campuses long considered to be more political activism than academic rigor. The visual image that dominated the article's opening pages was stunning for its affirmation of highly respected scholars and their newly formed intellectual community. The collective of our headshots captured the rich interdisciplinarity of Black Studies and the promise of a bright future—a dream of a team—not only at Harvard but at universities across the nation.

The photographs of the men varied in size, but all look straight ahead and with confidence. My photograph appears a bit smaller and at the very top of the page. I seem to be looking away and at something afar off. Reflecting now on this pose, I believe the "something" was the future, indeed revealing my unique vision for the Department, even while absolutely being on the same page with my colleagues in our thinking about academic excellence. I have always been fascinated by the stories that photographs tell, so I pondered the article's visuality before reading what the author, the *Washington Post* journalist Jacqueline Trescott, had to say.

When I began to read, I paused at the title "Beyond Academics: Harvard's Dream Team has Salvaged Black Studies, but What about the Masses?" The title foretold the author's dual critique: our tremendous achievement within academia, but our shortcoming as to an impactful role within the larger black community. Both goals had been integral to the origins of the Black Studies departments that my generation of college students had brought into being in the revolution on campus in the sixties. Both goals had certainly been explicitly articulated in the demands made by Harvard's black students exactly

thirty years prior to Trescott's article. Under the long chairship of Henry Louis Gates Jr., the Department grew to greater heights in the early years of the twenty-first century. We boasted a larger faculty, a PhD program, and a new identity as the Department of African and African American Studies. Doubtless our considerably stronger Department had gone far above and beyond the mere salvaging of Black Studies, but we had yet to answer Trescott's question about community outreach.

Thus, when I became chair of the Department of African and African American Studies in fall 2006, I launched the Social Engagement Initiative and, by so doing, sought to encourage academically informed civic responsibility in the current generation of undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom wanted to help solve social problems, such as poverty, educational disparities, disease, violence, and other manifestations of inequality. During my tenure as chair from 2006–2013, I emphasized a pedagogy that combined rigorous academic study with practical experience, such that students came to understand how and why academic study and ideas are challenged, often remade, and at times refuted by the lived experiences and cultural proscriptions of communities whose traditions and values differ in significant ways from those of the larger American mainstream. Through Social Engagement courses and the Social Engagement thesis and dissertation, undergraduate and graduate students worked on a variety of projects in the United States and Africa, including filmmaking for social change, creating summer programs for low-income youth in Nigeria, Michigan, and Zimbabwe, working in a mobile health clinic in Boston, bringing fresh water to a Ghanaian village, and aiding in healthcare delivery in a village in Uganda. Harvard's unparalleled African Language Program under John Mugane played a central role in the Social Engagement Initiative. Likewise, several of the students worked with members of the School of Public Health and with the Medical School, gaining a significant foundation upon which to gain expertise.

Writing the undergraduate senior thesis and the doctoral dissertation from a socially engaged orientation encouraged social entrepreneurship through creative leadership and collaborative projects designed by the students in partnership with communities. For example, Sangu Delle's senior thesis on his efforts through Project ACWA to bring water and sanitation to Agyementi in Ghana, the first such thesis to be written, won the prestigious Thomas Hoopes Prize in 2010. The Social Engagement students in later graduating classes would also win similar prestigious prizes and fellowships, but I single out Sangu Delle because his experience prompted him to make a generous donation to Harvard for continued financial support of activity-based work in black communities. Sangu also gave a presentation on his Social Engagement activities and his continued work of this type after graduation at the Department's fiftieth anniversary celebration in February 2020.

Interestingly, the students themselves soon became the stars of the African and African American Studies Department. Their images appeared in Harvard

literature and a video, in a TED talk, in community newspapers in the United States and Africa, in an article in the *New York Times*, and one of the students was even named Volunteer of the Year a few years ago in a public event sponsored by the New England Patriots. No wonder, then, that I think of the Social Engagement students as the new dream to build upon for African and African American Studies—those students whose mastery of academic work serves to enrich their active engagement in the creation of a more just and equitable world.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham
Victor S. Thomas Professor of History and of African and African American Studies
Chair, Department of African and African American Studies, 2006–2013

During the founders' roundtable discussion at the Fiftieth Anniversary Symposium, I was especially pleased and delighted to actually hear the voices of faculty and alumni share their direct reflections of the protests and the demand for inclusion in the curriculum that occurred more than fifty years ago. Their stories help bring us all to a deeper appreciation of the times in which that initial struggle took place, the complexity of the journey, and the rightness of now taking time to celebrate the successes that have come from those pivotal moments and efforts in the late '60s.

The remarkable founding and history of the Department of African and African American Studies emphasizes the vision and courage of the students who led the fight to establish the Department, and the wisdom, skill, and ultimately the commitment of key faculty and administrative leaders. It was their efforts that brought this Department to fruition, despite fraught and very uncertain beginnings, all the way to today and its rise in attainment of what our dear friend and colleague Professor Farah Jasmine Griffin termed "lodestar status in the field." Professor Griffin provided the symposium's first keynote address, which gave a broad and insightful view of the evolution of the Department and an even more robust and higher level of analysis of where we have been, and what sort of ambitions and touchstones should now guide us in the future.

I joined the Department of African and African American Studies faculty in 1997. I remember a visit to campus in '96 when only a few months had separated the recruitment of Cornel West from that of William Julius Wilson. While sitting in the office of Skip (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), he told me that this Department was going to be different from many institutions that black folks have built and would not be just about one great man. He said that he regaled and took great joy in surrounding himself with incredibly bright people, many of whom he was sure were brighter than himself, and that together they'd all be part of building this astonishing and dynamic unit. (An occasional moment of humility from Brother Skip.)

This has really rung true in many ways. At that time, it was just Skip and Anthony Appiah, and they surrounded themselves with a stellar collection of colleagues, including my dear friend and colleague and predecessor as chair, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham; Suzanne Blier, the African art historian; Jamaica Kincaid, the brilliant writer and novelist; Cornel West; William Julius Wilson; and Werner Sollors. And a name we really ought not forget, distinguished economist John Kain, former chair of the Economics Department, who had insisted on moving part of his own FTE into Afro Am, even though he was quickly coming up on retirement at that point. When I came along, there were only ten of us in the senior ranks. And I note this to contrast with today, at a point when the Department has forty-one voting members.

During my time as chair I was fond of emphasizing two aspects of the Department and the ecology in which it functions within the University. First, that the Department really was the center of gravity for a triumvirate

of units on campus that included the Du Bois Institute, now the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, and the Center for African Studies, which has been led by many of our faculty: Kay Shelemay, Jacob Olupona, Caroline Elkins, who helped get its endowing gift, and now our distinguished historian Emmanuel Akyeampong. Secondly, by the time I became chair, the Department had already grown significantly under Skip and Evelyn's leadership, particularly in terms of its reach into Africa, and now ultimately, Afro-Latin America and the Caribbean. I think anyone who chairs this unit is at once proud, but also daunted by the breadth and depth of this Department.

We had strength in US literature with Skip, Glenda Carpio, Jamaica Kincaid, John Stauffer, Werner Sollors, and now rising star Jesse McCarthy. In history with Vincent Brown, Evelyn Higginbotham, Walter Johnson, and Elizabeth Hinton, whose recent departure for another university is a great loss to our Department and indeed all of Harvard. In art and art history with Suzanne Blier and Sarah Lewis; music with Ingrid Monson, Kay Shelemay, Vijay Iyer, and of course, Marcyliena Morgan on the cultural importance of hip hop. Our dear friend and colleague, who I sincerely hope will return to us someday soon, in religion and the church, Marla Frederick. In philosophy with Chairman Tommie Shelby and Cornel West; psychology, with James Sidanius; sociology, with Bill Wilson, myself, David Williams, and Michèle Lamont; the study of women, gender, and sexuality, with Robin Bernstein and Robert Reid-Pharr; history of science, with Evelynn Hammonds; and political science with Dean Claudine Gay, Jennifer Hochschild, and Brandon Terry. The Department added Jacob Olupona, a leading scholar of religion in Africa; Biodun Jeyifo for a number of years, and Françoise Lionnet, giving us remarkable coverage of African literature, both English and Francophone; John and Jean Comaroff and George Paul Meiu, established scholars in the new frontier of Africanist anthropology; John Mugane and the world's greatest African language program; Emmanuel Akyeampong and Caroline Elkins, Africanist historians; Ali Asani and Ousmane Kane, scholars of Islamic religion and cultures; and most recently, we've added young Daniel Agbiboa as well. Then, with the arrival of Alejandro de la Fuente, we began to build new strength in Afro-Latin America and the Caribbean, and are able to position ourselves to offer courses in the history, cultures, politics, and identities in the wider swath of the Americas and the Caribbean adding to the vigor and leadership that was already provided by Doris Sommer and Glenda Carpio, and recently augmented by Sidney Chalhoub and Bruno Carvalho.

As you look back on the expansion and growth of this unit, I am reminded of an event we held when Neil Rudenstine stepped down as president. We held a retirement dinner for him. And he was commenting in his remarks at the dinner on how he tried to explain to people what the success of African and African American Studies should be understood to be by those who weren't academics, who weren't experts in the field. And as a consumer of

much Broadway and theater in New York, he recounted a conversation he had had, where someone asked another theater goer, "what do you think of Rosemary Clooney? Should I think of this great assemblage you've brought together as being like Rosemary Clooney?" And the person says, ". . . well, Rosemary Clooney is fine if you like talent, but I tend to think of this Department as more like Ethel Merman—big, bold, unique, black, and unforgettable. In a category truly unto itself." And I thought it was a very apt characterization.

And I knew I was entering a wholly different arena, in some respects, when I went to the first event marking the Department's occupation of the Barker Center. And there was a reception held in what's now called the Raines Library. And it was the first official capacity in which I'd seen Skip interact. And a bunch of us were packed in there on a really hot early September day. And Skip comes in with Franklin Raines, who I think at that point had probably just stepped down as President Clinton's director of the Office of Management and Budget. And Skip said, "I'm delighted to be here today as the Department opens here in the Barker Center, and in particular to welcome you all to the Franklin and Wendy Raines Library, because they donated the money for this." But he then says, "This hadn't been easy. When I was at Yale I tried to write to Franklin Raines, and he didn't respond to my letters. And when I was at Duke, I called Franklin Raines many times, and he never returned my calls." And while saying this he's standing there next to this man, and he goes through this litany of ways in which he'd be insulted and snubbed by Franklin Raines. And I'm just thinking, dear god, how do we get out of this? And finally, Skip says, "So at one point, they made me chair of the visiting committee. All departments at Harvard have visiting committees." And as committee chair, Skip had come in to do an evaluation of the Department at a point when Franklin Raines was chair of the Board of Overseers for Harvard, who the visiting committees report to. And Skip came in and said, "Well, chief, it looks pretty bad. You're down to one faculty member and one undergraduate major, and that's just not a vibrant unit. But you know what? This is Harvard. And Harvard has the capacity to do something remarkable." And in that moment, I am told in that story, Skip sketched a vision of what Harvard was in a place to do if it really wanted to make a difference in this field. And Franklin Raines said, "Thanks, Professor Gates. Why don't you go out in the ante room and wait while we discuss what we're going to do here." (Now, how much of this is apocryphal and how much of this he'll actually put in his memoirs, I don't know. We'll see.) And Skip said after about an hour Raines came back out and said, "Listen, thank you so much for this brilliant, enormously clarifying report. And the only question the rest of us have really is when are you coming here to do it." And the rest, in many respects, is history.

The Department of African and African American Studies reflects and embodies a remarkable vision for teaching and research at the highest levels of scholarship, and across the full reach of the experience of those of African

descent on the continent, in the US, and across the Americas and the Caribbean. It's exciting to be in a position to feel the breadth of the curriculum that we are able to provide. It's exciting to have a faculty that produce cutting-edge scholarship on topics such as mass incarceration here in the US, and the evolution of legal regimes in Africa, the continuities and unique features and religious expression in Brazil, or Cuba, the US, Ghana, and Nigeria . . . I could go on and on in this manner.

There is a growing number of undergraduate enrollments and overall the trend has been steadily marching upward. Responsible for this trend are several very special types of experiences that I think are unique to this Department, one being Af Am 10, with a model initially established by Brother Cornel West and the excitement of the "Dream Team" era, which he's now renewed. Then, Skip and Evelyn putting forward this remarkable course. Skip and I doing it for a while, organized around great debates. And the students get an insight into something about the nature of race and racism, the troubling character of white supremacy, as an ideological form and a cultural imprint that has distorted so much of our lives in this world. But we've also had very special courses, on occasion, as when William Julius Wilson taught his remarkable course on *The Wire*. And David Simon, the producer and writer of *The Wire* and a number of the actors coming out for that. Achieving, really, worldwide news coverage of this remarkable pedagogical moment to wed serious sociological research on the modern urban African American experience within the class instruction, and major cultural production in this remarkable television series. And I think, more recently, of Jamaica Kincaid and Marcy Morgan offering a course on black love and the difference it makes.

Even with so many wonderful attributes and accomplishments, the Department every now and again faces challenges. We survived the tough era, as you all know. Sometimes people retire. Sometimes they are stolen away, though we expect them back. Regardless, at the end of the day, I think we are all animated by a sense of great purpose. That there really is a long and daunting struggle to unmake white supremacy and racism as features of our culture and ideas and worldviews. That we have a commitment to elevating the place of those of African descent to a deep recognition of the full humanity and the profound contributions to the advance of civilization.

Today's Department reflects the experience of the alums who've come through this Department and its courses to examine the questions surrounding our development, and I think success, of the PhD program and the young scholars that we have now produced who are out in the world becoming leading figures in their own right. As we move forward, we should consider afresh and anew our connection to communities, and to questions of activism in the future.

I was deeply honored to spend a period of five years as chair of this Department. Now, as a member of the university administration, I know that

the enormous pride and the depth of commitment to the ongoing success of this Department that we all feel, is also felt within Harvard's University Hall and Massachusetts Hall.

Lawrence D. Bobo
W. E. B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences
Dean of the Division of Social Sciences
Harvard College Professor
Chair, Department of African and African American Studies, 2013–2018

Reflections of the Faculty

Let me share a few remarks on the study of Africa at Harvard. Tommie Shelby gave an excellent overview at the Fiftieth Anniversary Symposium of the student protests in 1969 that led to the demand for African and African American Studies at Harvard University. The 1960s was the context of the Civil Rights struggles with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr in 1968 and the decade in which several African countries became independent. These two processes reinforced each other, as African countries such as Ghana, Guinea, and Tanzania became extensions of the American Civil Right Struggle. W. E. B. Du Bois, our intellectual ancestor, did assume Ghanaian citizenship and died in Accra on August 27, 1963, where he is buried with a center named after him. Stokely Carmichael, the civil rights activist, adopted the name Kwame Ture after his two mentors, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea, and lived in Guinea for a while. Nineteen sixty-eight was a year of student protests worldwide, including in Africa.

Tommie Shelby, Skip Gates, and former Dean Henry Rosovsky spoke at the symposium about Harvard's decision not to create a Department of African and Afro-American Studies in 1969, but to create separately a Department of Afro-American Studies and a Committee on African Studies. Intriguingly, the first hire in the new Department of Afro-American Studies in 1969 was an Africanist, Professor Ephraim Isaac, who taught among other subjects the Concept and History of Slavery, Ancient African Civilizations, and Ethiopian History. There were other Harvard faculty with an interest in Africa. The political scientist Martin Kilson, who received his PhD from Harvard in 1959, became Harvard College's first tenured African American professor in 1969. Kilson was a scholar of African politics, conducted extensive research in Sierra Leone, and wrote a book on *Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone* (1966). He and his wife, Marion, lived in Ghana under Nkrumah's government together with several other African Americans, including St. Clair Drake, David Levering Lewis, and Maya Angelou. The Nigerian historian Kenneth O. Dike was recruited to Harvard in the early '70s and became the first Mellon Professor of African History in 1973, and he chaired the Committee on African Studies. Dike would return to Nigeria in 1979.

A new phase in the development of African and African American Studies began with the hire of Henry Louis Gates Jr. His first hire was Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Ghanaian philosopher. The recruitment of Lorand Matory as an assistant professor in Afro-Am and anthropology underscored the Africa

interest in what was still then the Department of Afro-American Studies. It is instructive how the fields of African and African American Studies seem to be propelled by crises. An important one was the disagreement between Harvard President Larry Summers and Brother Cornel West in 2001. Brother Cornel left for Princeton in the same year as Anthony Appiah. Brother Skip threatened to follow his two close friends to Princeton. Harvard was in turmoil. Watching these developments from the safety of sabbatical in Accra, I received a formal letter from Larry Summers. In absentia I had been appointed chair of the Committee on African Studies. On my return FAS Dean William Kirby and Provost Steven Hyman asked for a five-year vision of where I would like to take African Studies. I proposed three things: an inter-disciplinary, inter-school research agenda called the Africa Initiative; an African Language Program (ALP), and for an undergraduate degree in African Studies to replace the Certificate in African Studies granted by the Committee on African Studies. The President, the Provost, and the FAS Dean recommended that the Committee on African Studies and the Department of Afro-American Studies dialogue over the possibility of a Department of African and African American Studies. That the ALP and the undergraduate degree could be located in the new department and we would be given five senior FTEs to strengthen the study of Africa. I invited Skip to a meeting of the standing committee on African Studies for us to make the case for a Department of African and African American Studies. The standing committee voted in favor of this with the understanding that all tenured professors in FAS would automatically become joint professors in the renamed Department. Skip and I made the case before our FAS colleagues in the Faculty Meeting Room, and there was a unanimous vote in favor of the new department.

We went on a recruitment drive. Those were exciting days. John Mugane was our first recruit to design and lead the African Language Program. It has since grown to become the largest African Language Program in the world, having taught some five thousand students since 2003 in almost thirty African languages. Then came Abiola Irele, Jacob Olupona, for a brief period Kofi Agawu, and then Biodun Jeyifo. We could now offer both bachelors and PhD degrees in African Studies. Irele directed the first doctoral dissertation by Laura Murphy, and her successful job placement convinced us that we were on the right path. Sangu Delle wrote the first undergraduate thesis within the new framework of social engagement. When it won the University-wide Hoopes Prize, we were certain that the sky was the limit for African Studies. More PhDs and ABs have been produced since then in African studies with an excellent record on the job market for our graduate students. In 2012 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff joined the Department of African and African American Studies and became the conveners of our very high-profile African Studies Workshop. Through an anonymous gift in 2014, the Committee on

African Studies became the Center for African Studies, and I describe the Center for African Studies, the Department of African and African American Studies, and the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research as three legs of a stool.

Emmanuel K. Akyeampong
Ellen Gurney Professor of History and of African and African American Studies
Oppenheimer Faculty Director of the Center for African Studies

Transcending the Boundaries of a Discipline: Teaching African Religions

The African and African American Studies Department at Harvard has assumed the position as the premier center for the study of religions in Africa, thanks to visionary leadership within the Department, which foresaw the centrality and importance of the study of African religion today. This program began in earnest in 2006, when I joined the Department after leaving my former position as a professor at UC Davis.

At this time, I also wondered why there was suddenly such a deep interest in African religions, particularly given that many Africans on the continent have mostly converted to Islam and Christianity. Why was African religion or African spirituality spreading so rapidly in the African Diaspora, particularly in Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, Haiti, and the United States while it declined greatly in Africa? What were the scholarly implications of this renewed interest in indigenous religions as a diasporic phenomenon?

From a broader lens, it would be incorrect for us to assume that our work in African religions is limited to research and teaching of these traditions. As a professor of African religion, I quickly realized that my professional calling includes providing public enlightenment, writing legal briefings for lawyers defending asylum seekers in the USA and Canada, particularly those who claim that they are runaways from violence caused by fundamentalist Christian and Islamic terrorist groups across the continent, or even those fleeing traditional secret rituals. I recall once having to give a deposition to a New York high court on a case called "The Bushmeat Case," which involved a West African trader bringing in bushmeat to the United States, under the claim that it was intended for ritual use.

Outside the classroom and research-focused organizations, I am involved in responding to inquiries about African traditions, their practices, and their significance in the world today. As I write this, institutions like the BBC, *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* and individuals on personal spiritual journeys continue to reach out to me inquiring about these traditions and their perceived enigmatic qualities. These questions range anywhere from: "Where can we consult Ifa divination?" to "I am sick and tired of Western Christianity, and I want to go back to the religions of my ancestors!" "Professor, can you help me connect with a priest, either in Africa or here in the United States?"

Upon receiving such correspondences, I would politely respond to them with a recommendation to reach out to a trusted and reputable leader of the particular African tradition in question in the United States or Africa, then delete the email considering the matter resolved. After a while, I realized that I should instead be archiving these emails, studying the pattern, and beginning to ask significant questions that would unravel this dilemma that I found myself in. Though I am often faced in these instances with how ill-equipped

I am to provide advice to these seekers not so much as a practitioner but as a professor of African religion, I understand the yearning informing most of these questions. I am glad to have been able to and continue to make connections to places and people with answers to these questions.

For the Africans living on the continent, we can describe African indigenous religions as the proverbial cornerstone rejected by early African nation-builders, and that Africans in the Diaspora have reclaimed in their search for authentic black spirituality in the Americas. This resurrected surge of interest in Afrodiasporic religious performance has happened because Africans have abandoned and are still abandoning ancestral religions, including their knowledge systems and metaphysical beliefs tied to these traditions. Instead, they have converted to Africanized forms of Islam and Christianity that are growing increasingly intolerant of indigenous religion and each other. It may be true, then, perhaps as many have claimed, that Africans may have to seek out the Americas to experience their ancestral traditions anew since those in the Diaspora have succeeded in preserving them for future generations.

How do such contradictions enable us as scholars to theorize the significance and importance of Africans' identities in the context of these new changes and the dilemmas they cause? Therefore, it is remarkable to have witnessed and mentored several PhD candidates who focused on African religion during their time at Harvard, now teaching at prestigious institutions like UPenn, Emory, and Boston College. Their successes and the upward trajectory of matriculation into our courses lead me to believe that the field's future is very bright. Kudos to our colleagues and students who promote the study of African religions and African American spirituality popular at Harvard.

Jacob Olupona
Professor of African and African American Studies
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Professor of African Religious Traditions
Harvard Divinity School

So much has transpired during the first fifty years of the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard and so much has been accomplished. How fortunate I consider myself to have been part of this extraordinary Department for more than twenty years, first as a member of the AAS Graduate Faculty, and then in 2006, when African Studies became an official part of our Department's name and mission, as a full faculty member in AAAS. It has been the greatest privilege to join with a remarkable group of colleagues and students who have worked together to change Harvard as well as the wider world beyond our University's gates. The Department of African and African American Studies has also served as the stimulating home for my own research and writing on musicians of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian-American Diaspora, providing a stimulating environment that encouraged me to explore the entry of a venerable African tradition as a new chapter in African American life.

I would like to devote the rest of my short contribution to commemorate an individual who left an indelible mark on our Harvard department as well as the wider world of African and African American musical scholarship. Eileen Jackson Southern was the first African American female professor to receive tenure at Harvard. Attaining that great milestone was just one of many accomplishments during her distinguished career.

Professor Southern retired from Harvard in 1987 and left this world in 2002. Here I acknowledge with gratitude her leadership as an early chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies from 1975 to 1979, as well as her position as an inspirational role model for so many who have come after her. A distinguished authority on African American music and its history, Eileen Southern paved the way for the cohort of music scholars who are today active faculty members of AAAS. No doubt Eileen Southern would be gratified at the remarkable growth of the department that she helped to build, and to which she continues to serve as a source of inspiration.

I hope that the occasion of the fiftieth-anniversary of the Department of African and African American Studies inspires each of us, in the spirit of the anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing," to both recall the hard lessons from the past and to reaffirm our shared determination to shape a bright and meaningful future.

Kay Kaufman Shelemay
G. Gordon Watts Professor of Music
Professor of African and African American Studies

One of the most exhilarating things about being in the Department of African and African American Studies is working alongside scholars like Henry Louis Gates Jr., whose books inspired me as an undergraduate and allowed me to imagine a place for myself in the academy.

I will never forget arriving to teach my first class as a new professor, AAAS 100X "Into the Fire: The Black Intellectual, 1968–2018." The class met on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons in Emerson Hall. On the first day, I went over in the morning to get a feel for the room, examine the seating arrangements, and practice standing at the lectern. As I was rushing up the front steps of the building, I quite literally ran into Cornel West and we embraced. I explained that I was there to find my new classroom for the semester. Brother West helped me find my way and we stood awhile in the empty classroom and talked as he reminisced about his own early experiences studying philosophy with Stanley Cavell back in the seventies. That moment stands out to me, among many others, as an example of the casual warmth and palpable sense of intellectual culture and heritage that are so characteristic of our community. Whether it's mentoring a new generation of Mellon Mays fellows in the presence of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham or chatting with Jamaica Kincaid about Anne Spencer and the metaphors of gardening and ecology in black poetry, every day in AAAS is a blessing and a gift that keeps on giving.

Jesse McCarthy
Assistant Professor of English and of African and African American Studies

Beneath whatever intermittent displays of bravado I felt compelled to perform at the time, my initial response to Harvard College was bewilderment. I was the first person from my Baltimore-area public high school to attend an Ivy League university, and I did not find my way to Cambridge by any grand design planned by my hard-working parents or me. Admission was the fortunate outcome of a bet with my uncle. He was willing to wager sixty dollars (then, nearly the price of a pair of Air Force Ones) that America's oldest and arguably most prestigious college would admit me. A bulging admissions envelope, sixty dollars, and an avalanche of local well-wishes later, I reluctantly decamped from Baltimore to see if I could turn admittance into graduation.

Growing up in Baltimore amidst the black nationalist revival of the 1990s, I was long preoccupied with racial justice and African American history questions, and even wrote my admissions essay on Malcolm X. Yet my autodidactic approach to black history seemed to have no vocational outlet *I* could envision. Far worse, any anxiety about future career plans or the first days of college—Who will sit with me in the dining hall? How will I get along with my roommates?—were rapidly eclipsed by events beyond the gates. Roughly two weeks after arriving on campus, my Canaday Hall roommates and I watched our small, blurry television in horror as a commercial airliner, filled with passengers, crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. Stunned by the news of the single most deadly terrorist attack to occur on American soil, the next day, we began classes in a daze.

It is difficult to convey the fear and confusion of that moment or how 9/11 seemed to challenge the paths many of us planned for our lives. For me, the beginnings of clarity struck in October, when in a quirk of scheduling, the Harvard Black Men's Forum (BMF) hosted successive intimate meetings with Cornel West and Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr. in the Adams House Upper Common Room. I was seventeen years old then, and in a time before their ubiquity on cable news or public broadcasting, I knew next to nothing about either of them, except that others were prone to speak of them in reverential tones. The experience in person, however, was nothing short of spellbinding. I was simply blown away by their erudition and quality of mind, the incisiveness of their analyses, and the self-evident joy they took in their vocations. A sense of profound purpose seemed to crackle energetically behind every pronouncement.

Curious to know more, I went shortly after that to see West address an overflowing audience at the Kennedy School on the meaning of 9/11. In that moment of great anxiety, he drew an incisive connection between the experience of peoples of African descent in the New World and this subjection of the U.S. to terror. "Never before," he argued, "have Americans of *all* classes, colors, regions, religions, genders, and sexual orientations felt unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hated."⋆

⋆Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 20.

Given this, West argued that the African American experience was an indispensable site of inquiry for those who want to understand the workings of power, the forging of identity, and the most profound social contradictions within the modern world. Therefore, the project of African American Studies is a genuinely critical archive of reflection for those who want to chart a path out of our contemporary crises toward a more just, egalitarian, humane future without succumbing to cynicism and pessimism.

Even then, I found West's call a compelling vision for African American Studies and a kind of vocational calling for myself. I wanted to be a professor of Black Studies. My parents, however, were less than convinced. Thinking I would head off to Cambridge to become a wealthy lawyer or run for office, they were not especially enthused of my new plan to concentrate in African American Studies. My father was particularly perplexed. Laughing, he said, "You been black eighteen years, why do you need to go to Harvard to learn about *that*?"

I worried myself. The department I entered as a concentrator in my sophomore year looked quite different than the one that had inspired me to join a year before. In a much-publicized crisis, then-president Larry Summers insulted and feuded with the department's star professors, causing West and Kwame Anthony Appiah to take their talents to Princeton, New Jersey, followed shortly after that by Larry Bobo and Marcy Morgan leaving for Stanford. Rumors swirled that even Gates might leave the department where he helped build the vaunted "Dream Team" that cemented the field's stature in the academy.

Thankfully, not only did Skip stay the course, but he and Evelyn Higginbotham led the department through the storm to retain and recruit a stellar set of talents. I studied with scholars like Michael Dawson, Kim DaCosta, Ingrid Monson, Emmanuel Akyeampong, Marcy Morgan, Glenda Carpio, and my thesis advisor, Tommie Shelby, who more than anyone shaped my future trajectory and taught me the love of philosophy. I learned the discipline of scholarship and *un*learned a lot of what I thought I knew about the world around me and the values which might orient me in it. Debate and dialogue with my fellow undergraduate concentrators, and now lifelong friends also propelled this transformation. With people like David-Andrew "D.A." Wallach, Jason Norman, and Enoch Woodhouse, I began conversations that continue today as they've gone on to address racial justice problems in art, business, and philanthropy.

Like many students, I participated in activist efforts on campus (e.g., the PetroChina divestment campaign, anti-sexual violence organizing, HIV/AIDS pandemic awareness, and diversity initiatives during the Summers administration) and service work off-campus (e.g., the W. E. B. Du Bois Society, Mission Hill Summer Program). However, the tensions and conflicts within these spaces led me to uncomfortable places of self-inventory and social criticism. The tools of African American Studies, especially African American

philosophy, became essential to sorting out the character of my commitments and trying to discern what politics best reflected the values of equality, fairness, dignity, and sacrifice I'd come to hold dear. They also equipped me with the intellectual tools to make sense of my experiences and, quite frankly, defend myself. While friends of mine seemed to get lost in large concentrations or use action as an excuse for evading self-reflection, I felt enveloped in generous mentorship and intensive conversation concerning political action and solidarity, the nature of "race" and the legacy of slavery, and the complex political economy of racial and spatial inequality.

Nurturing my interest in an academic career and trying to model different ways of pursuing that goal, the AAAS community encouraged my independent study and let me join precociously in Du Bois Institute lectures, dinners, and departmental events. In a fortuitous turn, I am part of that same faculty, having returned to Harvard as an assistant professor after studying at Oxford and Yale, and receiving a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard's Center for History and Economics.

It still feels, at times, surreal to teach as a faculty member in the department, which has played such an enormous role in shaping the trajectory of my life. My office, which once belonged to Cornel West and Jamaica Kincaid, now has a picture of my uncle who started this journey hanging on the wall. Every year, I teach Social Studies 10b, the famous social theory lecture course I would have been too nervous about enrolling in as a sophomore, and the courses on black political thought I once studied obsessively for with Michael Dawson. My father, who has long since come around on my concentration choice, even sat in once on the latter. Growing up in Jim Crow Baltimore's poverty-stricken Cherry Hill housing projects, he never attended college or finished high school. The first time he set foot in a college classroom was to watch his son lecture in Sever Hall 102.

Despite these joyous moments, I never lose sight that my hiring at Harvard coincided with yet another wave of national tragedy and profound crisis for the American experiment. I began teaching shortly after the death of Michael Brown, the uprisings in Ferguson, and the explosion of the Black Lives Matter movement. In a time where questions of political morality and judgment are of enormous personal and societal consequence, I tried mightily, alongside colleagues like Elizabeth Hinton and Sarah Lewis, to replicate the devoted teaching and mentorship I received in the wake of 9/11. I endeavor to make our field welcoming to curious and conscientious students from all backgrounds while pushing even the highest-performing students to more ruthlessly subject their familiar assumptions and commitments to counterargument and self-scrutiny. As an advisor to the BMF and the Black Students' Association (BSA), I try to lovingly advise and support black students like myself trying to navigate the College's opportunities, campus life challenges, and personal strivings. Above all, I try to keep track of the "truly disadvantaged," as my colleague and mentor William Julius Wilson would put it, in Baltimore that first inspired my obsession with race and injustice.

My professional "North Star," as it were, is the pathbreaking tradition of top-flight scholarship and the culture of collaboration and public-facing communication forged by my senior colleagues in the department. It seems inevitable that one will fall short of those lofty achievements. Still, the history of African and African American Studies at Harvard is, to paraphrase James Baldwin, in large part about demanding nothing less than the impossible. I treasure the experience of playing a small role in the impossible story of this Department and look forward to co-authoring the chapters of its next fifty years.

Brandon Terry
Assistant Professor of African and African American Studies and Social Studies

Reflections of the Alumni

Susan Aldine. *Occupation*: Teacher. *Degrees*: AB '88; MA, Teachers College, Columbia '94. *Email*: suealdine@yahoo.com.

I concentrated in Afro-American Studies in 1984, when historian Nathan Huggins was the head of the Department, Roderick Harrison taught sociology, and Carolivia Herron taught literature. I was the only student from my Class that year who chose this concentration. I thrived in this space, where I could talk easily with my professors and learn from them.

To be frank, I knew close to nothing about black history when I came to Harvard. I grew up in a rural town in Northern California and education in the '70s was pretty lax about all objectives. I chose Afro-American Studies because it was relevant to the real world and the coursework was interesting to me. (I had difficulty poring time into learning about the Norman conquest of England but found I could easily spend hours each day learning about the black experience in America.)

In Roderick Harrison's sociology course, we collected real data on public services in the poorest sections of Boston, awakening me to the disparities between social classes in America. In history, instead of spending one lecture on the Civil Rights Movement, I spent an entire semester on it and made it the topic of my senior thesis.

I went on to become a teacher, focused on equity in our public schools. I joined my local NAACP branch and through it volunteered as a tutor for struggling students in my local public schools. With curriculum work, I have always challenged my colleagues to expand on the traditional textbook narratives of American history.

While at Harvard I also was employed as a work-study student at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute. I was an assistant to many of the fellows who came through. The culture of the Afro-American Studies Department and the Institute were welcoming and inclusive, and the opportunity for me to learn was immense.

In short, concentrating in Afro-American Studies opened my eyes to a diverse world where social justice mattered. As a white student, I was not particularly focused on my own or others' race, but rather on the knowledge I felt I needed to develop. I believe education and learning come from access to conversations. The Afro-American Studies Department gave me access to conversations I never would have found in my home environment, where I had lived comfortably in my world of people like me.

I always felt the contradiction at Harvard of being in a place of high social status while studying themes of people outside such privilege. It is why I chose to teach.

Choosing Afro-American Studies at Harvard put me on a course that humbled me, kept me aligned with my core values of equality and justice. I am comfortable entering public dialogue around race and justice knowing that I will expose my own weaknesses or privileges, that I can listen to other perspectives and even hear criticism around my own assumptions, and also that I will provide resources that enable others to grow more comfortable entering the conversation.

My hope for the Department of African and African American Studies is that it regularly touches the ground to stay connected to real people and their lives outside the ivory tower. Help your colleagues and students grow humble within Harvard's prestigious walls, and prioritize basic human dignity and rights. Use the tremendous wealth that flows to the Department in ways that create a more just and peaceful community.

Alexis Maria Alexander. *Occupation*: Analyst. City of Detroit. *Degrees*: AB '09; MCD, Univ. of Detroit Mercy '19. *Email*: alexis.alexander@post.harvard.edu.

The spring of my sophomore year found me at a crossroads. After countless conversations with faculty, peers, and family, and investing hours to absorb and spit back out the academic content needed to demonstrate my aptitude for medical school, it was clear that a new path was warranted. As I reviewed options to meet core requirements, I found myself drawn to shop two courses in the Department of African and African American Studies. Freshman year I had a positive experience learning Swahili with Dr. John Mugane, so I was curious to learn more within the Department.

I can still recall sitting down in a packed room in Harvard Hall, and hearing Drs. Evelyn Higginbotham and Skip Gates provide one of the most engaging introductions to the content of a course since I set foot on campus. The energy they offered on day one was maintained throughout the spring, whether they were engaging my fellow students in political discourse and the politics of respectability or inspiring the content discussed in section.

Dr. Werner Sollors's course on interracial literature provided a different perspective to the Department. As my eyes were opened to the impact that authors of African descent had on literature over the last few centuries, I was presented with the first opportunity to author fresh content with my peers for academic credit. In thinking back, the very lab that I had envisioned as a place where I would labor and research with peers was transformed into a space where my creativity was not limited to the accuracy with which my pipette dispensed an accurate amount of liquid.

For the first time as an undergrad, I found myself enjoying all aspects of my academic experience: attending classes and engaging in lectures and sections; diving into the content of assigned reading; attempting to connect content

to the experiences of my community; and authoring written assignments. Responding to written prompts required me not only to demonstrate that I read and understood course content, but that I could apply historical perspective to solving problems in the world today.

My success that spring set in motion a new path forward. I changed my concentration the fall of my junior year and increased my course load to make up for the required courses I needed. I was fortunate to have joined the Department as more scholars offered content focused on the intersections of race, class, and health. Despite having stepped away from the path that I initially started down to make an impact on the health and well-being of the African American community, the classroom provided me space to explore the many factors that impact the life outcomes of people of African descent in the US and throughout the Diaspora.

As I settled on a topic for my senior thesis, I drew on both my experience in the classroom and the time I spent seeing firsthand how the social determinants of health could be creatively addressed in the medical setting with my weekly visits to staff the women's resource center at the Boston Medical Center. Having been encouraged to reach out to talk with scholars who explored areas of interest within the AAAS Department, I didn't feel out of place reaching out to leaders at neighboring universities to discuss the experiences that inspired their publication of texts used to introduce students to the impact of policies on people's lives. When my thesis advisory team suggested that I connect with the Center for Geographic Analysis to develop maps to understand the reality of quality and affordable food access for predominately black and low-income neighborhoods in Boston, I was introduced to a passion for mapping and data analysis that I still have today.

Over the course of the next fifty years, it is my hope that the AAAS Department will continue to support Harvard students to thrive. As new faculty join and students with unique interests and perspectives connect for coursework, the Department must continue to support students to engage with academic content on their own terms, such that they gain the knowledge and perspective needed to make a positive impact on the communities they connect with outside of the campus.

At the Department's fiftieth celebration in February 2020, I caught glimmers of this while attending the final panel discussion on scholar-activism and community engagement. When the discussion opened up, hearing the questions and reflections from current students on the ways they are engaging the community left me hoping the Department didn't allow the conversation to stop there. As the AAAS Department grows, it is critical that student voice, which helped to demonstrate the demand for its creation, continues to shape content in the decades ahead.

ZAHEER ALI. *Occupation*: Historian; Educator. *Degrees*: AB '94; MA, history, Columbia '03; MPhil, history, ibid. '07). *Email*: mail@zaheerali.com.

In November 1990, a small group of Afro-American Studies concentrators and Black Student Association members occupied University Hall for twenty-three hours. They refused to leave until the University committed to ending its administrative neglect of the languishing Department, demanding increased funding and faculty appointments. In solidarity with our peers inside, I joined an even-larger group of students circling the building outside, and we marched, chanted, and eventually camped out overnight. I was a first-year student just months into my undergraduate studies, and this was my initiation into student activism and Afro-Am at Harvard.

The following spring of 1991, the University announced the hiring of Henry Louis Gates Jr. to much fanfare. Having spent my high school years reading everything I could get my hands on by the likes of Malcolm X and Afrocentric scholars like John Henrik Clarke, Cheikh Anta Diop, Ivan Van Sertima, and Molefi Asante, I was less familiar with Dr. Gates. So that summer, in anticipation of my first semester as an Afro-Am concentrator, I went to my local library and checked out a copy of his groundbreaking *The Signifying Monkey*. Much of it went over my head at the time, but that did nothing to dampen my excitement for the fall semester.

I remember the first day of our sophomore tutorial—it was our first class as concentrators, and Dr. Gates's first class at Harvard. Most of us in the seminar room at 1430 Mass. Ave. had protested that November night the year before, and we were committed to seeing the fruit of our labor. In walked Dr. Gates, and with a reading assignment that contested some of the Afrocentric ideas to which some of us were partial, he made clear out the gate that he was there to challenge our thinking. I thought to myself, we protested for this?! In the words of Malcolm X, we had been misled! We had been had! We had been took! From that day forward we came to class ready to throw down, and I think we debated in every session. But to Dr. Gates's credit, he was never dogmatic. He never demanded that we adopt his views, only that we be rigorous with ours. That semester turned out to be one of the most invigorating and exhilarating intellectual experiences in my time at Harvard.

The entire cohort of Afro-Am faculty shared that same dedication to the lives of our minds, a commitment that transcended the formalities of the classroom. Anthony Appiah solicited student input in shaping the program; in response to student interest, Phillip Brian Harper taught a brilliant class that patiently and critically unpacked the politics of Black Nationalism; Catherine Clinton gave me my first academic job as a student researcher, sending me into the archives and library stacks; and both she and Dr. Gates signed on to advise my research projects. Afro-Am was home, not just intellectually, but socially, culturally, politically, and, yes, even economically.

My concentration in Afro-American Studies was pivotal to my undergraduate experience at Harvard, and it remains foundational to my life and work today. In a role reversal that is history's wicked sense of humor, I now find myself as an educator often facing students very similar to the ones Dr. Gates encountered in that sophomore tutorial. His pedagogical approach, and that of my many faculty mentors, are more than fond memories. Our contentious but collegial, provocative but generative exchanges are a model of intellectual discourse that is not only effective in the classroom, but essential to the personal and public conversations about race that can transform our society into a more just one.

Afro-Am has come a long way since that chilly night in November thirty years ago. I am proud to have played a small part in the Department's revival, and I am honored to be among its alums. May the histories of struggle that propelled our activism, and all who have sustained the Department throughout the past fifty years, continue to take it to even greater heights.

CHIMAOBI OBILO AMUTAH. *Occupation*: Data Visualization Expert. New Jersey Department of Education. *Degrees*: AB '07; MA, Univ. of Mississippi '10; EdD, Rutgers, The State Univ. of New Jersey '17. *Email*: amutah@gmail.com.

My time as a concentrator in African and African American Studies was deeply enriching and came about through a sequence of first-year events that I mostly did not plan on but proved formative and beneficial. I recall initially arriving at Harvard with the intent of concentrating in English and American literature and language and becoming an entertainment attorney; I was far more Puff Daddy than Huey P. Newton. However, during the spring semester of my first year I took Af Am 10, the intro class to the Department, then taught by Professors Evelynn Hammonds and Michael Dawson. Not only was the class a mini-FBT (Freshman Black Table) meeting given the demographics of the students assembled, but the content proved far more enlightening, enraging, and enticing than I ever anticipated. Subsequently, I was hooked.

Over the course of the next three years, I gained much from the Department. I took a course on Marxist theories of racism, taught by Professor Shelby, and explored the sensical connections between class-based struggles and struggles for racial equity. I fumbled through beginning and intermediate Igbo courses overseen by Professor Mugane, and still am routinely laughed at by my cousins back home in Nigeria when I attempt to speak Igbo to them. I developed an independent study on the history of black education domestically with a graduate student, Sheldon Bond, that foreshadowed my lifelong commitment to the arena. I remember Professor Gates returning from sabbatical in fall 2004 and being starstruck upon seeing him in the flesh, a man whose autobiography helped influence my matriculation to Harvard the year prior. He spoke to me and I mumbled incoherently as my articulation skills escaped me in the

moment, as a nineteen-year-old faced with one of the titans of my field. These memories and experiences are invaluable and indelible.

At the end of my time in the Department I wrote a senior thesis under the guidance of Professor Olupona, as well as Mia Bagneris. I explored violence as a means of political redress, an especially pertinent topic in the post-George Floyd world, where the obviously limited potency of "civil" disobedience is made plain daily. I looked abroad at what was happening at the time in the Niger Delta, where oil barons worked in concert with local, state, and federal politicians in Nigeria to pillage black gold from under the feet of people who were—and are still—living in subsistence poverty on less than one dollar per day. A decade later, as I was completing my doctoral dissertation at Rutgers, I realized that my preparation for such research was second to none. I had normalized the rigor and expectations of the African and African American Studies Department and Harvard, and thus felt ready for any professional or academic task presented to me.

Since my time in AAAS I have gone on to attempt to live out the aims of the Reverend Peter J. Gomes Prize that I was awarded by the Department upon my graduation in 2007. I taught in traditional public and public charter schools in the Mississippi Delta, the vast and overwhelmingly black region of northwest Mississippi that covers seven thousand square miles made up of hundreds of majority-black towns and cities. I have followed that with almost a decade spent in education policy back in my home state of New Jersey, working in school improvement by supporting school and district leaders in their pursuit of educational justice, from our large urban centers to our small coastal towns. In all of this, my foundation in African and African American Studies and dedication to being a "race man" moving the needle towards a more just and equitable society have been steadfast.

Over the next fifty years, my hope is that the Department further embraces the call to support and advocate for "the least of these." Research and teaching are critical, but the noncerebral work, the emotional and physical work of moving towards a more racially equitable society, is of major importance as well, and occurs through consistent engagement and presence with the people. I hope to see the Department partner with groups and individuals at the forefront of this not-at-all nascent movement to make black lives matter. The resources of the Department's students, staff, faculty, and alumni are sufficiently vast enough to make major inroads in this realm if we so choose.

Charrise Barron. *Occupation*: Assistant Professor of Africana Studies and Music. Brown University. *Degrees*: AB '98; MDiv, Yale '10; AM, Harvard '13; PhD, ibid. '17. *Email*: charrise@post.harvard.edu.

The Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University holds a special place in my academic heart. The AAAS graduate

program is where I prepared for my current work as assistant professor of Africana Studies and Music at Brown University. But my connection to the AAAS Department began years earlier, when I was an undergraduate at Harvard College concentrating in computer science. In my senior year, I branched out of computer science to take two Afro-American Studies independent research courses on gospel music, supervised by Professor Evelyn Higginbotham. At the time, I did not know that I would return to the Department over a decade later to pursue a PhD in African and African American Studies.

When I returned, however, Professor Higginbotham told me that she knew when I was an undergraduate that computer science was not the end of the story for me. It turns out that she was right; computer science was just the beginning of my professional and academic careers. The AAAS Department was the perfect place for me to resume my study of gospel music. The Department's signature interdisciplinary PhD program made space for my research at the intersection of race, music, and religion.

I often marvel at how much I enjoyed my time in the AAAS graduate program. The kindness of the staff seemed practically infinite. The faculty challenged and encouraged me. My classmates' work in and outside the classroom inspired me, and their comradery fueled me in my own academic adventures.

And I had some great adventures! From conducting research in Ghana, to serving as head teaching fellow for Professors Lawrence Bobo and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "Introduction to African American Studies" course, there were so many memorable moments. I did not just learn a lot during my years in the Department, but I felt as if the faculty were rooting for my success. Because I was spoiled for choice, I had a dissertation committee of five rockstar women scholars: Marla Frederick (chair), Robin Bernstein, Evelyn Higginbotham, Ingrid Monson, and Kay Shelemay. (Three or four people on a dissertation committee was the norm at the time.) Beyond my committee, there were no less than a half dozen other faculty members in the Department who significantly invested in my success and indelibly shaped my understanding of what it means to be a supportive faculty member. Years after successfully defending my dissertation, I still feel the love!

As an alumna of the AAAS Department, I am thankful to be part of the Department's history, and I have great hopes for the Department's future. I hope that AAAS will continue to be a place where all students can learn about Africa and the African Diaspora, as well as a place where students of African descent can learn, grow, and feel connected to the University. I hope that AAAS will find and fund more opportunities to support students and faculty in their innovative and world-changing research and activism. And, no matter what, I hope and trust that AAAS will always be a place that I can call home.

DONNA GAYLE BROWN. *Occupation*: Producer. The Guillaume Group. *Degrees*: AB '73. *Email*: donna.brownguillaume@gmail.com.

As you can see from the Class I'm in, I was in the Department a long, long time ago. Ours was only the second Class that was able to select Afro-American Studies as a major, and at the time I felt it was a political statement to do so. The Department was new, and it had a family-like feeling to it, with Professor Guinier as the father figure.

Some of my college friends are still my closest friends, and a couple of them majored in Afro-American Studies too. I also have recently seen Professor Ephraim Isaac, and it's wonderful to catch up with him and revisit the old days.

Since leaving school, most of my work has been in media. I have worked as a producer of news and also for several years on a newsmagazine show, for CBS and the local Los Angeles channel, KCBS (it was KNXT when I worked there). I also worked on a number of documentaries for PBS and HBO. I co-created and executive produced an animated series for children, *Happily Ever After: Fairytales for Every Child*, for HBO as well, and it's still on the air. We retell the classic fairytales, with people of color playing the parts. Not only are the characters drawn as different ethnicities, but the writers, musicians, and actors doing the voices are people of color as well.

My documentary work has focused largely on the African American experience. My projects have focused on: MLK Jr., black actors in Hollywood, the Slave Narrative Collection at the Library of Congress, John Lewis, and, my most recent project, the story of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The knowledge and foundation I got from being in the Afro-American Studies Department has kept me interested in telling our stories whenever I can. I am very grateful to have been part of the Department.

EDDIE ANDRE BRUCE-JONES. *Occupation*: Deputy Dean; Head of Department. Birkbeck School of Law, University of London. *Degrees*: AB '02; MA, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin '05; JD, Columbia '09. LLM, King's College London '09; DPhil, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin '13. *Email*: ebruce@post.harvard.edu.

I remember filling out my application to Harvard, intent on studying chemistry. But I was at the edge of a political awakening, and so when I found myself in Intro to African American Studies (Af Am 10), watching Cornell West teach, in the expressive way that he does, about Baldwin, Lorde, and Dostoyevsky, Ida B. Wells and the pace and scale of American lynchings, and the contemporary political struggles facing people of color, I knew I had found a space to grow, intellectually and politically. The class, like all the courses I would go on to take in the Department, brought to life some of the lessons that I had learned growing up but had not yet catalogued, processed, and

embedded in my vocabulary and sensibilities. It enriched my life and affirmed me as a thinker.

Now, nearly twenty years later, I am the deputy dean of the School of Law at Birkbeck College, University of London. I have a tenured faculty position and remain committed to investigating questions of social justice, equality, and human rights that sparked my interest as an undergraduate in the AAAS Department.

My time in the Department is still quite clear in my mind, even if after nearly twenty years I, like most of my peers, have changed in fundamental ways and am now struggling to remember basic details of university life. I think my memories of the Department are so clear because of the sense of intellectual community that lived in the Barker Center and bound us, as students and professors, to a common project. Each day brought a new approach, a new provocation, or an inspiration of some sort.

I will be forever indebted to the mentorship and care shown by faculty in the Department, who made positive impacts in the course of my educational development. Professor Appiah, my academic adviser, urged me to pursue a fellowship to Germany, which resulted in me spending the better part of my twenties in Berlin, examining racism, police brutality, and health policy in prisons. Professor Sollors, together with PhD student Linda Prince, led us in the close reading of twentieth-century African American literature, and I discovered poetry for what felt like the first time. Professors Gates, West, and Higginbotham offered a masterclass session on senior theses, which felt like a luxury and made a big impact on my regard for my own intellectual work. And, of course, visitors in the Department, like Anne Bailey, Naomi Pabst, and Keith Wailoo, offered critical perspectives on reparations, black feminism, and genetics, respectively, that were cutting edge and became central aspects of the knowledge that I seek and value today.

I would not be the person I am today without having spent time in the Department. I certainly would not see the world the way I do. I am grateful for the care with which the Department received its students, and I hope to return for a visit in the near future. I hope that the Department continues to inspire and uplift budding scholars, and that the professors continue to play an active role in the intellectual lives of the Department's most junior members. I also hope that the Department is able to sustain a long memory—to continue to bring its graduates and affiliates into the fold and to maintain its broad sense of community over the distance and generations that we span.

LEWIS EUGENE BYRD. *Occupation*: President. Lancs Industries. *Degrees*: AB '80; MBA '84. *Email*: lbyrd@lancsindustries.com.

I was an African American Studies concentrator in 1978–79, my junior year, and my first year at Harvard. I came to Harvard as a transfer student

from Boston College and to BC from the predominately black neighborhood of West Oak Lane in Philadelphia. Coming to BC, and into the suburbs of Chestnut Hill and Newton, was culture shock for me. This was Boston in 1976, when conflict over busing was just beginning to decline.

As I struggled to make sense of the race, class, and economic disparities, I took a course my sophomore year on African American religion, taught by BC Professor Dibinga wa Said, who received his master's in divinity, master's in theology, and doctorate in theology from Harvard. Professor Said passed away in Roslindale, Massachusetts, in August 2020. As I navigated these issues personally and in my coursework, I decided to pursue African American Studies as my major course of study, but since BC did not offer it as a major, Professor Said suggested that I apply to Harvard as a transfer student.

When I entered the Department, there were fewer than ten concentrators. Eileen Southern, whose main area of study was music, was the department chair, and the Department itself seemed to be under assault. Was African American Studies a legitimate focus of academic study? Should it be its own independent department? These questions seem silly today, but as with many things black, and with some things new, those were the questions. But my professors and the Department taught me about myself, my history, the country, and the world—how to think critically, challenge previous learnings, defend our words. I finished with a degree in economics and minor in Afro-American Studies.

After I graduated in 1980 I worked in finance for a few years, came back to Harvard to get an MBA, moved to California, and became a partner in a private equity fund focused on providing equity financing exclusively to African American entrepreneurs, where I worked for almost twenty years. I now run a business that provides radiation-shielding products to the nuclear power and health care industries.

Sometimes you get exposed to and learn things that seem so clear, but your everyday life and the world around you doesn't acknowledge them—they don't fit. Many of the things I learned in the Department in the late seventies didn't fit the common narrative of the times. Afro-Am in the 1970s was prescient for today's reality, just like Du Bois before it. What a wonderful time it must be to be a concentrator today. While many others (read white) questioned the validity of the Department and this course of study in the '60s and '70s, no one questions it today.

I have followed the growth of the Department and am proud of its success. I continue my study of our history in this country, from the recently released and insightful 1619 Project to books such as *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi, which details the role Cotton Mather played in developing and promoting foundational racist ideas in the seventeenth century. Cotton Mather is, of course, the son of Increase Mather, whom Mather House, my dorm at Harvard, is named after.

I am grateful for what I learned and the academic discipline I gained during my time in the Department. My hope is that the prominence of the field and Department will continue to grow, and that it will be seen as the academic footing for BLM and the continuing struggle for equality in this country and for people of color around the world. Du Bois certainly got it right—the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the color line. Unfortunately, he and others were too optimistic that it might be resolved in one century, but it's wonderful the African and African American Studies Department at Harvard continues to lead in that research and study.

Terence Carter. *Occupation*: Co-President. Westbrook Studios. *Degrees*: AB '01. *Email*: terence_carter@post.harvard.edu.

I was a part of AAAS's Class of '01. When I first came to Harvard, I had no idea what I wanted to study. But as we all know, Harvard requires you to choose a concentration freshman year. So I chose one that encompassed one of the most interdisciplinary curriculums of any department. AAAS incorporated history, art, literature, culture, and sociology into one profound study of the human experience. But far more important to me than just the diversity of subject matter was the ability to connect to my roots as a black man. To learn from the likes of Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr. and Cornel West was to learn from the literal greatest black minds and academic leaders—dare I say superheroes—of the day.

The actual program provided not just knowledge but an outlook on life—an outlook first informed for me by W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of double-consciousness, which I learned of in Af Am 10, and one that continued to evolve as I read *Invisible Man*, *Native Son*, and so many other great pieces of literature in the AAAS curriculum, all of which taught me how to critically see the world, in all of its imperfection and all of its great potential.

As I progressed into the world of entertainment, and began working in talent representation, film, and, eventually, television, I always saw the industry through the lens created during my years in AAAS. I set myself on a course to improve the representation of African American talent in front of and behind the camera. With that goal in mind, I was fortunate enough to be a part of developing and programming shows like Fox's hit show *Empire*, which is arguably the most successful black show in TV history. I was able to recast the iconic Jack Bauer with a black lead in the *24* reboot. And despite DC Comics not prominently featuring black characters in the Gotham universe, I could encourage the creation of original characters like Fish Mooney in *Gotham*. Currently, in 2020, I am partnered with Will Smith and together we are focused on empowering a diversity of artists to tell stories that connect with a global audience.

I am honored to have been a part of the AAAS experience during my time at Harvard, and I thank the professors and administration for all of their support and encouragement in college and beyond.

JAMES EDWARD CARTY III. *Occupation*: Attorney. James E. Carty III PC. *Degrees*: AB '82; JD '87. *Email*: counsel@cartylaw.com.

I have received more out of my Harvard education and out of life because of my studies in the African American Studies Department. The Department provided me with the intellectual space and nourishment to develop a better understanding of myself and the world in which I live.

When I reflect on my experience in the African American Studies Department, I am reminded of the following question a well-meaning family friend asked me in my sophomore year, when I was deciding to major in African American Studies: "What can you do with a degree in African American Studies?" My nineteen-year-old self did not have the answer. Rather I had another question: "Who would I be without a degree in African American Studies?" I concluded that I would not be the person I wanted to be. So, I decided to major in government and African American Studies, and wrote my thesis on American democracy and the denial of African American voting rights. Unfortunately, almost forty years later, my thesis topic is still timely.

I have fond memories of our professors and fellow majors. I remember us as a small, intrepid band traveling through a turbulent time. None of us will ever forget Professor Josephine Wright, who taught with a historical sense of purpose and dedication that inspired the best in all of us. I hope I live up to her expectations as one of the many "human repositories" of knowledge for our community that she was on a mission to create. She truly instilled a sense of mission and purpose in us as human repositories.

I also enjoyed my time working in the African American Studies Reading Room in Lamont Library with my roommate and fellow African American Studies major, Kenneth Walker. We listened to the experiences of our fellow majors in the classes ahead of us, and tried to impart some of that wisdom to any of the students who found their way into the African American Studies Reading Room.

I am proud to have been a part of the history of the African American Studies Department. I remember in the late 1970s when the Department's existence was being debated. Some argued that the Department was unnecessary and should be abolished.

They were wrong. This is evidenced by my personal experience, and America's and the world's attempts to understand and come to terms with the Black Lives Matter Movement.

My aspiration for the Department now, and in the future, is that the value of a degree in African and African American Studies will be so widely

understood and accepted that no aspiring nineteen-year-old scholar will be asked the question, "What can you do with a degree in African American Studies?" But instead will be asked, "Are you going to use your degree in African American Studies to be an attorney, judge, actor, film director, minister, corporate executive, professor, economist, mayor of a major American city, or something else?"

Chambi Seithy Chachage. *Occupation*: Postdoctoral Research Associate and Lecturer. *Degrees*: AM and PhD '18. *Email*: chachage@princeton.edu.

Joining the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University in 2011 was a childhood dream come true. As a teenager growing up in Tanzania, I was inspired by two of our neighbors and family friends who had made it to Harvard: Frank Minja and the late Philippe Wamba. I was therefore happy when I arrived at AAAS to see the legacy of Philippe living on through his photo on the wall of the Department and a departmental grant named after him for African Studies concentrators. His book, *Kinship*, came to life as I started reliving his footsteps in Harvard Square.

My first semester was the most exciting, as I tried to make the most of it by taking classes that would open my eyes wider. It was memorable to discuss African religions as the sun set during Professor Jacob Olupona's class that took place late in the evenings. Due to the centrality of Africa's triple heritage of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs), I find myself coming back to the insights of that class when I am trying, through my writings, to make sense of what has been happening in Africa. This ranges from the ways religion has been invoked, from dealing with COVID-19, a pandemic that has menaced the world in 2020, to the ways it is invoked to deal with political authoritarianism in some parts of the African continent and elsewhere.

The opportunity to discuss with faculty their work in progress in our AAAS foundational classes was as enlightening as it was exhilarating. Seeing Marla Frederick's *Colored Television* and John Mugane's *The Story of Swahili* become books out of the manuscripts they shared with us was illuminating and inspiring. So were the moments in which I witnessed my colleagues produce and defend brilliant dissertations, such as Linda Chaver's "Violent Disruptions" and Carolyn Roberts's "To Heal and to Harm." When my time came in 2018, it was upon their shoulders that I drew my courage and persevered.

AAAS also introduced me to the basics of teaching at the university level, an experience I cherish as I pursue a career as an educator. It was through its thesis advising initiative for graduate students that I advised three undergraduate students on their junior independent research projects, all of which yielded profound findings on the issues of the language of teaching in Rwanda (Nephat Maritim), water provision in Zanzibar (Breanna Elliott), and youth startups in Tanzania (Rahim Mawji), respectively. One student used his findings

and the networks with entrepreneurs that I initiated for him to co-publish a book featuring a foreword from the President of Tanzania, Dr. John Magufuli, on people-centered industrialization. It was so touching to see how excited and grateful he was when the book came out.

It was also at Harvard that I met like-minded colleagues who were eager to reshape the field of African Studies. To that end we boldly attempted to propose a curriculum that would center the core themes, orientations, and methods on the study of Africa. My hope is that one day it will see the light of day.

The AAAS Department will always have a special place in my heart and mind. I still follow it nostalgically on social media and visit it in person once in a while. It is encouraging to observe how it continues to recruit brilliant scholars, such as Daniel Agbiboa, to recenter Africa in African Studies, as it builds bridges with African American Studies. As someone who is heavily invested in African Studies, I am convinced that it will have a bright future. Surely those who were courageous enough to ensure that AS and AAS are merged into AAAS will be as vindicated fifty years down the line as they are now.

SULEE J. CLAY. *Occupation*: Partner. McKennon Shelton & Henn LLP. *Degrees*: AB '92; JD '97. *Email*: sulee.clay@gmail.com.

I loved being an Afro-Am major and am so proud of all that the Department has become since I graduated in 1992. I attended the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Department recently, and my mind reeled when I heard the Department had over forty voting professors. When I was a junior, the Department had two(!) half-time professors, both white and one not even born in the US. As great as Professors Barbara Johnson and Werner Sollors were—and they deserve all the credit for piloting the Department through very dark times after the loss of Professor Nathan Huggins—we knew that simply was not right.

So we packed up our sandwiches and headed to University Hall to demand the College invest in Afro-Am. We refused to leave until morning, and a group of our sympathizers sat outside all night. Although the cops came and took our pictures that night, it didn't feel like a big act at the time. When we emerged, a couple of articles were written but we weren't sure if change would come. Not long afterwards, however, the College suddenly (I'm sure some would say seemingly suddenly) hired Professors Gates, West, and Appiah and that changed everything. Professor Gates was still a few years from showing what a true magician he is, but the Department got a new home in Harvard Square and we felt something good happening.

Then we graduated. Unfortunately, we didn't get to take West's survey of African American history. We didn't get to learn from these great professors who

have been added to the Department over the years. What we did get, though, is a very small place in the history of this great and necessary Department. Here's to another fifty years of relevance, growth, and agitation!

HARREL E. CONNER JR. *Occupation*: Attorney. *Degrees*: AB '02; JD, Columbia '05. *Email*: hconner@post.harvard.edu.

When US presidential candidate Joe Biden stated, "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't black," Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron responded to him, stating, "Mr. Vice President, look at me: I am black. We are not all the same, sir. I am not in chains, my mind is my own, and you can't tell me how to vote because of the color of my skin."

I am sure many felt that I should be standing with Cameron in defiance of both Biden's quip and a later misguided comment that implied that blacks think in a monolithic manner. Yet, as a black man, what I felt most in that moment was that Daniel Cameron was one of the most enslaved black men that I had ever seen.

My parents grew up picking cotton in the Mississippi Delta. They grew up with colored entrances to stores, overt racism, and police brutality in response to their peaceful protest against the injustice. It did not matter that the history of my family in this land dated back to the year 1619 (before America was even a country). It did not matter that members of my family had fought, and often died, in every war that this country has ever fought.

Despite the herculean efforts put forth by my father's generation, I grew up with the same insecurity about America. To me, the police did not protect and serve. Rather, their only function was to show up after a bad situation had occurred and somehow make it worse.

Today is my fortieth birthday. I overcame childhood poverty to graduate from Harvard College and Columbia Law School. Yet, on what should be a landmark day in my life, spent celebrating personal achievements and reflecting on how much better the world has become from the day I was born, the American dream is a national nightmare for people who look like me.

I live in the midst of a pandemic that is ravishing my people at a disproportionate rate because of governmental impotence and systemic racism that my country's president and his millions of supporters deny in a political campaign not dissimilar to the segregationist "law and order" campaign of George Wallace in 1968. Even as a Harvard-educated man in 2020, I live in fear that each time I leave my home could be my last, not with my life taken by criminals, but at the very hands of that fanciful "law and order" that so many unscathed by its ugliness are desperate to perpetuate.

My father had only a ninth-grade education, but wielded a wisdom of life. He often shared a sorrowful premonition: that in many ways, the challenge

of my life would be more difficult than his because (1) the racism that we encountered would not be overt; and (2) we would have to come up against enemies from within our very race.

First, we would have to contend with people who were racist on a subconscious level, some of whom would even genuinely present as allies in the fight for equality. These would be the people who hired less qualified whites because "they better fit into the culture." These would be the people who served as "godfathers" to advance someone's career because "they saw themselves in that person," never noticing they failed to see themselves in those with darker skin, functionally excluding people of color for reasons that have nothing to do with capability.

Secondly, my father warned that my generation would come up against enemies from within our own race who convinced themselves that their exceptionalism was obtainable by all who made the effort that they believed themselves to have made. Such people would fail to realize that those seeking to maintain a discriminatory status quo often seek a "black protégé," who they push to high levels of success and then hold up as a standard for what is achievable by the "good black." They serve not only to undermine their own race's struggle for equality (through imagery, actions, and lack of actions), but they give the person who pushes them a sense of absolution for their own role in atrocities against dark people.

Cameron, the black Kentucky attorney general, owes everything he has to the support of Mitch McConnell, a white right-wing senator who denies that systematic racism even exists. I watched Cameron boldly state that he was "not in chains" and that "[his] mind is my own." Yet, he is one person in the state who could bring criminal charges against the police officers who murdered Breonna Taylor, an innocent black woman, in her own home. Is he really free?

African American Studies is so important because the world has not reached a state where race does not matter. If we do not study who we are and the struggle that we have thus far undertaken, we are bound to forget who we are and become our own worst enemy. Without the introspection provided by the scholarly study of our history and culture, we can fall into a fictitious sense of where we are and find ourselves not even realizing that we are once again in bondage.

G. Alisha Davis. *Occupation*: Journalist. ABC News. *Degrees*: AB '95 ('96). *Email*: alishadavis3000@gmail.com.

Sangu Julius Delle. *Occupation*: Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. Africa Health Holdings. *Degrees*: AB '10; MBA '16; JD '17; MSt, international human rights law, Univ. of Oxford '19. *Email*: sjdelle@gmail.com.

My undergraduate academic experience at Harvard was an interdisciplinary, problem-solving-centered education, in which I did not acquire knowledge in the abstract, but learned with synthesis and practical application at the forefront. This originated from one of the most memorable classes I have ever taken: Sven Beckert's "History of American Capitalism." The course examined the major trajectories of the development of American capitalism. We started from the structure of Native American economies to the position of the United States' economy in the world economy. The interdisciplinary approach that Professor Beckert took in teaching this class was refreshing. In some lectures, he analyzed capitalism from an ecological perspective. In others, he employed an economics or anthropological lens.

I took two additional courses that changed my life. One was the introduction to AAAS co-taught by Skip Gates and Evelyn Higginbotham. In this course, we examined canonical texts of the African American intellectual tradition and explored a wide range of scholars, including Du Bois, Baldwin, Walker, Douglass, Morrison, Malcolm X, Wilson, and others. I had the opportunity to explore key texts and issues in African American Studies from a range of disciplinary perspectives with various faculty and guest speakers giving lectures. The second course was the introduction to African languages taught by John Mugane. In this amazing course, I learned about how sub-Saharan Africans use language not just as a means of communicating with one another, but as a medium to organize and transmit indigenous knowledge from one generation to another. Thus, language serves as a lens to understanding how social, political, and economic institutions and processes develop.

Inspired by this multidisciplinary approach to learning, I switched my major from economics to African and African American Studies, where I could integrate my love for history, economics, literature, and even science, to focus on the development of the continent I so deeply love. I had a conversation with Evelyn Higginbotham, then chair of the Department, and she sold me on the newly launched Social Engagement Initiative. This initiative, of which I am proudly the first guinea pig, truly shaped my academic experience. Social Engagement weds academic study with practical experience, allowing students to explore and reflect upon on-the-ground applications of their intellectual work. By stepping outside the ivory tower, we are able to understand how and why academic study, ideas, and even technological discoveries are challenged by the lived experiences and cultural prescriptions of communities very different from our own. In my case, I spearheaded a water and sanitation development project in a community called Agyemanti, working with a team of professors from economics, anthropology, public health, and engineering. I became increasingly knowledgeable of the interlocking factors of poverty, technological costs, governance, culture, and global redistributive justice. In fact, this project became the basis for my "alternative senior thesis," which was

the capstone experience of Social Engagement, and included a documentary of my project and a policy paper making the case for investing in water and sanitation as a means of reducing poverty and improving health care outcomes. Emmanuel Akyeampong was my thesis adviser, and I was proud when we won the Hoopes Prize for the thesis!

Social Engagement within African Studies gave me the richest academic experience I could ever imagine, helped a community get access to clean water and sanitation, and provided a fulfilling opportunity to practically apply my education. Out of this project, I birthed Cleanacwa, a nonprofit that has worked to bring clean water to 160 communities in Ghana, impacting over 200,000 rural poor. After Harvard College, the multidisciplinary training I received in AAAS empowered me to excel at Harvard Law School, Harvard Business School, and the University of Oxford.

More importantly, AAAS has given me an incredible family of mentors and guardians, and I am still in very close touch with all of them. From Skip, Mugane, and Evelyn to Emmanuel, Tommie, Brandon, and so many others, the staff and faculty at AAAS have impacted my life in immeasurable ways!

Aaron Anthony Estis. *Occupation*: Management Consultant. *Degrees*: AB '80. *Email*: aaron.estis@gmail.com.

The Afro-American Studies Department, as it was called in 1976, intrigued me from the start. Having close relatives that participated in the protests of the sixties and who helped establish the Black Studies Department at Ohio State University, I was aware of the struggle for black liberation and the role universities played in it. I initially concentrated in economics but came to know Peter Hardie, whose January 1977 *Crimson* article "On the Brink: Afro-American Studies at Harvard" sounded the alarm that the University was considering demoting or eliminating the Department. This threat aroused a small contingent of new activists, including myself, to concentrate in Afro-American Studies. Others in the Class of 1980 included Ricardo Guthrie, Roy Smith, Sharon Forand, and Anthony Brutus (son of the South African activist Dennis Brutus). Changing my concentration prompted me to greater political awareness and set the course for my next three years of college.

My first year at Harvard saw the emergence of the Soweto student uprising in South Africa and the domestic movement to force universities to divest from companies doing business in South Africa. As a sophomore in my first Afro-American Studies history class, I met veteran activist, and now doctor, Mark Smith, who was present for the occupation of University Hall in 1969. He had interrupted his studies to organize textile workers in North Carolina and had recently returned to complete his degree in the one Harvard department created amidst the campus unrest of the late '60s. An Afro-American Studies

major graduating with the Class of '79, Mark was among the many inspiring and gifted personalities I met through my affiliation with the Department.

Energized by the activism of the time, my interest in the need for political change, and the desire for the Afro-American Studies Department to thrive (I now had a vested interest), I began playing a leading role in the effort to ensure it stayed a department. Along with other concentrators, members of the Black Student Association, and what we today call allies, we organized several demonstrations supporting the Department, encouraged members of the entering classes to concentrate in Afro-American Studies, held press conferences, published a pamphlet "Unfair Harvard," pressed the University for tenured positions in the Department, including Ephraim Isaac, supported strengthening the Du Bois Institute, and generally brought more attention to the cause of, as Ewart Guinier put it, "teaching the Afro-American experience from the perspective of those who lived it." I think it is fair to say our efforts were successful. The University seriously considered making the Department a committee in 1976 but reversed course in the wake of renewed interest in the subject matter, the increased number of concentrators, and political pressure. It was a low point for the Department, but it emerged stronger.

I had a strong connection to the Department over my last three years at Harvard. I worked at the Department and in its reading room in Lamont, and cultivated relationships with the chairs, Ewart Guinier and Eileen Southern, and various professors, including Thomas Holt, Selwyn Cudjoe, and Josephine Wright, to name a few. The Department became my second home on campus.

African and African American Studies at Harvard can point the future for a new America—one devoid of the legacy of slavery and white supremacy. It offers a perspective too often unexamined in nearly every field of study, but with its inclusion, every field of study is enhanced and our future as an inclusive society is brightened. Progress is needed in many areas to bring about a truly inclusive society. Among the critical areas is intellectual leadership. Harvard's African and African American Studies Department is poised to play that role for many years to come.

ROGER ANTHONY FAIRFAX JR. *Occupation*: Patricia Roberts Harris Research Professor of Law. George Washington University. *Degrees*: AB '94; MA, Univ. of London '95; JD, Harvard '98. *Email*: roger_fairfax@post.harvard.edu.

I have fond memories of my time as an AAAS and government joint concentrator. From participating in the student protests for more AAAS faculty and resources during my first year at the College (1990–91), to learning alongside my brilliant Class of '94 classmates in the AAAS sophomore tutorial with Skip Gates, to exploring the expanding upper-level AAAS curriculum, including courses with K. Anthony Appiah and Werner Sollors, I had such a rich experience in the Department. My senior honors thesis for AAAS and

government explored the role of race in the establishment of D.C. home rule and the development of the D.C. statehood movement.

The commitment to scholarly rigor I developed as an AAAS joint concentrator served me well in that endeavor and beyond. I was able to use the grounding in research methods to illuminate the jurisprudential legacy of Charles Hamilton Houston LLB '22, SJD '23 in my master's thesis while completing a Knox Fellowship at the University of London the year after graduating from the College. I then returned to Harvard for law school and was blessed to continue my scholarly path, which began as an undergraduate in AAAS and eventually led me to join the legal academy and write and teach in the areas of criminal law and policy. Much of my recent scholarship focuses on mechanisms of accountability for unjustified law enforcement killings of African Americans.

One of my last trips before the public health crisis took hold was up to Cambridge, at the end of February 2020, to attend the AAAS fiftieth anniversary event. I was overcome with pride and gratitude as I sat in Memorial Church and witnessed Dean Gay and Chair Shelby give inspirational remarks about the current state of AAAS, and Professor Gates moderate a panel discussion with those courageous students, faculty, and administrators from the late '60s and early '70s upon whose shoulders my early-1990s AAAS contemporaries and I stood.

About a year prior to the fiftieth anniversary event, in February 2019, I spoke on a panel entitled "Four Hundred Years of Perseverance," held at the National Press Club and sponsored by the Association of Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). I participated at the invitation of ASALH President Evelyn Higginbotham, AAAS faculty member and former chair. As I shared my research and perspective on the role of race in the legal process during the four-hundred-plus-year journey of African Americans, I could not help but recall the impact and influence my time in AAAS has had on my own journey. I remain grateful for all that the Harvard Department of African and African American Studies has done, and for what it will yet do.

Karma Franklin Frierson. *Occupation*: Assistant Professor. Washington University in St Louis. *Degrees*: AB '09. *Email*: karma.frierson@post.harvard.edu.

When I was a young child attending my all-black elementary school in South Carolina, my grandmother gave a presentation to my grade in the cafeteria. We all sat more or less attentively on our swivel stools as she showed us a stalk of cotton and demanded we remember that black history did not begin and end with Dr. King. Her conviction, and lesson, has stayed with me through the years. It stayed with me as I transitioned to a highly segregated public school where Black History Month was marked by a school assembly

that only a fraction could attend, and it stayed with me as I was tracked into advanced classes and into predominantly white classrooms. It would also stay with me through my time at Harvard and beyond.

I did not know what my time at Harvard would be like when I arrived on campus the year the levees broke. But I did know I would concentrate in African and African American Studies. My sister, Savannah Frierson '05, had eased my way, as she had done my entire life, and spoke glowingly of her time in the Department. One of my first memories of the Department was her graduation party in the Thompson Room of the Barker Center. There, I fell into conversation with a proud father of a graduating senior. What started as small talk turned into a connection, as I learned that he knew my mother from their time at Duke in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when she and their peers were in their own fight for a Black Studies program. Because of their generation, nationwide we students of African and African American Studies would be able reap the benefits. And reap I did as a joint concentrator in AAAS and social anthropology. I learned so much in four years in the Department and grew more inquisitive as I learned from my professors and peers. That curiosity has served me well in the intervening years.

As I write this entry, I am beginning my first year on the tenure track as a professor in African and African American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. The Department, which was a program until 2017, came into existence largely due to the activism of students contemporary to my mother's generation. Writing in the Black Manifesto of 1968, WashU students demanded a Black Studies program because they felt it was "not only necessary for [their] education, but for [their] very survival." Over fifty years later, this statement continues to resonate and will continue to resonate.

To this I add a piece of wisdom given to me by AAAS's Professor Tommie Shelby, who was director of undergraduate studies during my time in the Department. In a candid moment during one of our advising meetings, he told me that one ought to concentrate in the field for their personal edification. Truly, my time in AAAS was an edifying moment in my life. I hope to continue the legacy of the Department, of my mother's activism, and of my grandmother's conviction as I take a position of authority in the classroom, still learning, surviving, and pursuing my personal edification.

Savannah J. Frierson. *Occupation*: SJF Books LLC. *Degrees*: AB '05. *Email*: frierson@post.harvard.edu.

I had many unknowns about what my Harvard experience would look like when I was first accepted, but two things weren't: joining the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College and being an (at the time) African American Studies concentrator. Coming from South Carolina and being raised in a black house and in black community, I knew I would need that as I moved away from

home for the first time. Having an entire course of study dedicated to studying what blackness means historically, contemporarily, and even futuristically was exciting.

My very first class after September 11, 2001, was AfAm 10, taught by Cornel West. I'll never forget him saying something to the effect of, "Now the entire country knows how it feels to be black." It was such a provocative statement; I literally heard and felt the air leave the Lowell Lecture Hall when he said it. But he was so unapologetic about it, so "I-said-what-I-said" about it that I couldn't help but wonder how this course, and others in the Department, would challenge what I thought I knew about blackness and being black myself.

I decided to be a joint concentrator in English and African and African American Studies so I could write a creative thesis upon graduating. I knew even before entering Harvard that I wanted to be an author, and I thought melding the two concentrations would be a great way to prepare me for the career I wanted to pursue. Unfortunately, my experience in the English department, on the whole, was less than ideal. I had some fantastic professors, and I truly enjoyed my time in the creative writing classes, but the program coordinator who'd been so welcoming, kind, and encouraging to me left the department for another, and I had to navigate my final two years with someone who was not as welcoming, kind, or encouraging. In fact, it got so bad I went to then-AAAS undergraduate coordinator, the wonderful Terri Oliver, who talked me down from tears of rage—so we, along with my resident tutor, could salvage all the work I'd already put into my studies, safeguard my future efforts, and restore the dignity folks were trying to snatch away from me based on little more than the color of my skin.

The African and African American Studies Department truly became an oasis to me on campus. I would often go into the Department library and just sit and read, or I'd pop in to say hello to several professors, particularly Werner Sollors, whose classes on interracial literature set the course for what I write about currently in my career. In AAAS, I created my own course where I hunted down works by and about African American Southern Black women before the 1950s—and, upon realizing one book chosen for the syllabus was actually written by a white woman, decided to use that text as a comparative marker of how black women are perceived through literature from the outside versus the lived experiences.

And then I was ready to synthesize all I learned in the writing of my creative thesis with Jamaica Kincaid, a novella that would feature black women, interracial relationships, and intergenerational trauma, especially inherited trauma. And as I agonized over that project—so much so I started writing an entirely different one—Ms. Kincaid told me to calm down and that she had every confidence the initial project I was working on was the right one. At the

end of the academic year, it earned the Dorothy Hicks Lee Prize for the most outstanding thesis relating to African American literature.

I am so grateful for my time and experience as a student of the African and African American Studies Department. I appreciate all my professors, namely Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Susan O'Donovan, Glenda Carpio, Tommie Shelby, Ingrid Monson, Werner Sollors, and Cornel West, as well as Allyson Fields, who worked with me on my independent study, and Jamaica Kincaid, my thesis adviser. AAAS was nothing but encouraging, sometimes having more faith in me than I had in myself. My experience in this Department taught me resiliency, adaptability, and confidence.

And though I didn't realize it as a first-year, I was following a path my mother had blazed over thirty years earlier in her fight to establish a Black Studies program at Duke. I'm proud my sister, Karma Frierson '09, and I continue that legacy. She's now a professor in African and African American Studies, and I work at the College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in Charleston, South Carolina. I still write my romances, too; one was even part of a *USA Today* best-selling box set.

So deepest and sincerest congratulations, AAAS. May there be at least fifty more!

Amma Yamoaa Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin. *Occupation*: Scholartist; Lead Artist, AT BUFFALO: A New Musical. *Degrees*: AB '01. MA, New York Univ. '03; PhD, ibid. '09. *Email*: ammayomama@post.harvard.edu.

I remember the moment I decided to tell my parents that I was not going to concentrate in biochemical sciences with a pre-med emphasis, but that I would rather study Afro-American Studies. I was nervous, not because I didn't think they'd be supportive. No. I was nervous because I couldn't figure out how I could paint the full inspirational picture of why "I went all the way to Harvard just to study black folks." How could I find the words to explain that being able to study Af Am in the late '90s/early '00s meant that I was able to study with the premier thinkers, scholars, and public intellectuals of our time? I wanted my parents to feel the exhilaration of sitting in the front row of Af Am 10 with Dr. Cornel West lecturing on the themes of "what it means to be black, American, and human"; of unpacking seminar readings alongside Werner Sollors, Patricia Sullivan, and peers; of sharing my study abroad research from Ghana with my adviser, Anthony Appiah; of handling precious archival material with Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Emmanuel Akyeampong; and of assisting visiting Du Bois Institute fellow Joanne M. Braxton on her new play about the transatlantic slave trade experience in which a main character bore my name. I can't recall what I told my parents, but my life's work has been speaking and bearing the good fruit of the seeds that were planted and nourished during my time as an Af Am concentrator.

Af Am gave me a way of understanding the stories and possibilities of my own life, and it gave me a protected space to grow as a scholartist. The freedom I found in an interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary/transdisciplinary concentration like Af Am helped me articulate my lifelong quest to: (1) use the stage and screen to tell untold stories from history; and (2) understand how performance/media impacts the ways in which members of the African Diaspora come to see and understand each other. I could research my experience as a first-generation Ghanaian born in Tuskegee, Alabama, to immigrant parents in the 1970s who navigated colorism and anti-Africanness. I could build off of my love of dramatizing archival material and field research through a senior-year final project that was a play instead of a manuscript. I could soundboard ideas with mentors who helped me find my footing after graduation with advice that were lifelines to my life's purpose: "You should go to grad school, Sister Amma."; "Do you know the work of Anna Deavere Smith?"; "Remember: Steven Spielberg did not start with *Schindler's List*. He started with *Duel*. Go hone your craft."; "You can do anything!". And I could laugh with my professors in office hours, enthusiastically greet them while passing each other on the sidewalk, and even console and cry with them during memorial services for lost loved ones. Af Am showed me the very best of what an academic community looks and feels like.

My hope is that every AAAS concentrator feels what I felt during my years at Harvard. I hope that every professor remains encouraged in the spectacular work that they do—seen and unseen. I hope that everyone continues to make AAAS a home away from home for all. And, I hope AAAS reaches out to its alumni pool to come back, collaborate, and share the gifts/talents we discovered and honed because of our concentration.

Gaga Gondwe. *Occupation*: Visiting Assistant Professor of Tax Law. New York University School of Law. *Degrees*: AB '13. *Email*: nyamagaga.gondwe@gmail.com.

As a student, I felt very lost trying to navigate the different course offerings and concentration choices, until I took Af Am 10 my freshman spring. That class, taught at the time by Professors Higginbotham and Gates, offered my first glimpse into a life of academic study that takes the lives and works of black people as a serious, central focus. When I took Professor Morgan's "Race, Class, and Education" course (which used the HBO show *The Wire* as a framing tool), I saw for the first time in my learning experience how powerful narrative engagement with black experiences can be as a tool to describe the depth and breadth of conflicts that permeate the black community.

I was a joint concentrator in Af Am and linguistics because I wanted to do a deeper study of how language about race and racialized language forms impact the development of solutions to race-related social and economic conflicts.

Unfortunately, I learned that outside of the Af Am Department it was difficult to find mentors who could guide my learning on that subject. I managed to create a research seminar with Professor Morgan exploring how language informed development in former British colonies in Africa, but I found myself searching for still more ways to engage with the concept.

In furtherance of this project, during my junior fall I studied in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. As one of the centers of Brazil's black cultural identity, Bahia created an awesome opportunity for me to experience how language informs cultural thought while also formally learning about Afro-Brazilian life and society in university courses. In my four years as a Harvard student, I took classes in French, Portuguese, and Chichewa (which was offered through the African Language Program), and I was able to take coursework in the Af Am Department that reinforced my understanding of colonial, post-colonial, and Diaspora developments with relation to people whose primary languages those were.

My experience as an Af Am concentrator culminated with my senior thesis, which analyzed how black language and culture have been denigrated in both American and Brazilian societies, except when those artifacts of black life are reimagined in white bodies. My thesis focused on the rise of Carmen Miranda, a white Brazilian performer, who popularized imagery common to black *baiana* identity while erasing its black origin. I explored how she rose on the global stage by performing an art form, samba music and dance, that was otherwise looked down on because of its origination in black Brazilian culture. Ultimately, Miranda's ability to erase the black origins of the symbols of her popularity was central to her rise in fame. This thesis was important to me because I had the freedom within the Af Am Department to incorporate the themes I had learned as an Af Am concentrator related to language, identity, history, society, and diaspora. I'm grateful to the Department for affording me that level of freedom just as I began to find my voice.

Since I graduated, I have taught high school math, gone to law school, clerked for a federal judge, and worked as an associate at a law firm in D.C. Seven years after graduating from college, I'm on a new path that I'm very excited about. Right now, I am a visiting assistant professor of tax law at NYU Law, which gives me the opportunity to write, teach, and edit submissions to the *Tax Law Review*. I discovered in law school that tax policy offers a lot of opportunity to think and write about pathways to black liberation in America. Ironically, while I was in law school, I actively resisted the idea of writing about race because I constantly heard messages that critical race theory is regarded as less rigorous in the legal academy. But the effort to resist writing about race was deleterious to my creativity as a scholar. Ultimately, I am at my best and most authentic when I let myself be free to study black life and imagine black liberation.

My experience as an Af Am concentrator in college set me on the path to both engage in rigorous, exciting scholarship and develop the inner strength to trust my own voice when I feel like an outsider in my field. I am grateful for the Af Am Department's first fifty years and look forward to what the next fifty will bring.

ANNE-MAREA "TANGEE" GRIFFIN. *Occupation*: Senior Director, Global Cause Partnerships, Diaspora and Multi-Cultural Partnerships. UNICEF USA. *Degrees*: AB '82; MA, history, Northwestern Univ. '85; DBA, Univ. of Bath '16. *Email*: amg.tangee@gmail.com.

It has been almost forty years since I graduated with a bachelor's in Afro-American Studies from Harvard and it seems like an impossible task to summarize my life since then—but I will try.

My life has encapsulated so much of what I thought about, wrote about, researched, and experienced while an undergraduate. Oddly enough, despite the fact that my mother was a professor of Afro-American Studies, and that we lived and breathed the importance of Black Studies, which was to literally "prepare us for the coming revolution"; that we wore red, black, and green for key events and African garb for special occasions in elementary school—despite all of this, as a first-year student, I doubted myself and whether I should major in Afro-American Studies. Back then, Harvard did not make it easy to decide to major in Afro-Am. I remember well the boycotts and protests in support of the Department. Finally, though, I decided to take the plunge and it ultimately set the stage for so much in my life.

I wrote my senior thesis about Marcus Garvey and the importance of the Diaspora and the inner strength and confidence that comes from understanding self, history, and purpose, in order to transform the world. My master's thesis continued with the themes of international movements, when I did a comparative study of the US Civil Rights Movement and the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement.

I traveled to Kenya right after college, taught at a rural high school there, and ended up pursuing a life in international development with a focus on bolstering the capacity of young people, their leadership abilities, and the higher education institutions that support them. I did most of this in Africa, after a stint in Washington, D.C., with TransAfrica, an African American foreign policy advocacy group and some time on Capitol Hill with the House Subcommittee on Africa—both jobs that would change my life and orientation about the importance of raising awareness about social change. It was during these early days that I had, on a number of occasions, the chance to meet Nelson Mandela, and actually participate and lead activities that would be my own version of contributing to "the revolution," as my late mother would say. I am so proud of those days and those partnerships.

The lion's share of my career since graduation as an Afro-Am major was spent in Africa, where, for twenty years, I lived and worked in seven countries (Senegal, Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) in a career with major international foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, and the MasterCard Foundation. I also founded and ran an organization, the Association for the Advancement of Higher Education and Development (AHEAD Ltd.), based in East Africa, where I coordinated African-led research and ran a graduate-level scholarship program for community activists. My skills were in grantmaking, program management, and policy analysis, all undergirded with a belief in the critical role that young people must play in transforming the world around them.

All of these travels and roles, these reflections, insights, and curiosities stemmed from my decision to major in Afro-American Studies forty years ago. My wish is that the Department continue in the tradition of strengthening the resolve of a long stream of students who will challenge how our society is structured and will push for change.

Back in the day I was cynical and probably could never have imagined anything quite like the Black Lives Matter Movement that is now gripping the nation. I am so moved, so revived with hope at what is happening around me today, now that I am a fresh transplant back to the US after living in Africa for so long, back to a "home" that is almost unrecognizable. But teeming with change.

KRISTINE E. GUILLAUME. *Occupation:* Graduate Student, University of Oxford. *Degrees:* AB, history and literature and African American studies, '20; MSt, English and American studies, Univ. of Oxford '21. *Email:* guillaume.kristine@gmail.com

The first African American Studies course I took at Harvard was Professor Glenda Carpio's twentieth-century African American literature course in the spring of my first year. At the time, I hadn't considered concentrating in AAAS. I was the only first-year student in the class, and it was the perfect way to introduce me to the study of African American literature. I remember listening to Professor Carpio's lectures and being completely blown away by her knowledge of the Harlem Renaissance and black humor. In that class, I discovered James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* and James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time,* among so many other incredible texts. The course drove me to explore more courses in literature across my college career and pursue my interests in exploring American race relations. I declared a concentration in history and literature, later adding African American Studies as a joint concentration, and enjoyed taking an interdisciplinary approach to my research interests. In particular, over the course of my college career, I became interested in studying mass incarceration

through prison literature and was lucky enough to take several classes with Professor Elizabeth Hinton, who eventually advised my undergraduate thesis with Dr. Thomas Dichter in hist and lit. For my thesis, I researched the prison life-writings of Angela Y. Davis and George Jackson, making use of the newly opened collection of Davis's papers at the Schlesinger Library. I can't say enough what a blessing it was to learn from Professor Hinton in the classroom and in our advising meetings—it's really clear when a professor energizes and inspires so many students on campus, and I felt that in all my courses with her. The semester I took her class "Mass Incarceration in Historical Perspective" was one of the most invigorating terms I had during my undergraduate career.

I am so grateful for the seminars and lectures I took with AAAS professors over the course of my four years, from Professor Vincent Brown's survey course on the history of the slave trade to the Civil War to Professor Jamaica Kincaid's autobiography and memoir seminar. I took Professor Carpio's "Gender and Representation" English class in my sophomore year, and its syllabus still stands as the most difficult one I have tackled in my life. In my junior year, I took Professor Jonathan Walton and Professor Brandon Terry's class on Martin Luther King Jr. and was so enraptured by both of their lectures, which pushed me to think about the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power era in new and expansive ways. The following semester, I took Professor Jesse McCarthy's English seminar "James/Baldwin," which put Henry James and James Baldwin's texts in conversation; my work in the class inspired the idea for my current master's dissertation. But one of my favorite experiences in the Department was in my final semester—the fraught semester of spring 2020—in an independent study with two incredible graduate students and Professor Terry on Black Political Thought. That reading group really prepared me for graduate school in ways that I cannot thank Professor Terry enough for. It gave me the opportunity to dive deeply into the works of thinkers that I hadn't explored enough in previous years and discuss them with three amazing people every other week. More so, it gave me greater confidence speaking in the classroom that I've brought with me to my current studies. Our last in-person seminar was actually the last class I took on campus before leaving amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and I'm really grateful to have that be my last academic discussion physically at Harvard. I wouldn't be where I am now without my professors, and I wouldn't be pursuing further graduate study in the field without them.

Beyond that, I'm so thankful for the support of AAAS throughout my undergraduate years. It was so heartening to get emails and messages from so many professors in the Department when I became president of the *Harvard Crimson* in my junior year. To have that kind of community behind you, that kind of warmth, that knowledge that faculty care about what you're doing on

campus—the kinds of service you do, the kinds of work you want to explore—means a lot. I can't think of a better home to have had in my four years.

AVARITA LAUREL HANSON. *Occupation*: Attorney; Consultant. *Degrees*: AB '75. JD, Univ. of Pennsylvania '78. *Email*: avarita@aol.com.

I was fortunate to be an early concentrator in AAS from 1971 to 1975, guided by Professors Ewart Guinier, Ephraim Isaac, Pierre-Michel Fontaine, and others, that led to my graduating with an AB degree magna cum laude with highest honors.

I had the opportunity to study African history, culture, and life throughout the Diaspora. My research on the Rastafarians of Kingston, Jamaica, led me around the world to learn and share information in a time when there were no definitive books on the subject, and the opportunity to explore my ancestral roots.

My professors were all supportive and taught me excellent research and writing skills that served me well at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and throughout my now more than forty-year career in Texas and Georgia in law, academia, government, and advocacy. I've spent much time writing about the lives of women and black lawyers, leaving a legacy of my own that started with my premier education at Harvard, for which I am ever grateful.

ANGELA DARLEAN LEBLANC-ERNEST. *Occupation*: Founding Director. The OCS Project LLC. *Degrees*: AB '92. *Email*: angela.leblanc.ernest@gmail.com.

Today I learned that the African American Studies Department was founded the same month and year I was born. Who could have known that nineteen years later I would start my journey in the African American Studies Department during the fall of my sophomore year? I entered the courses intending to take one literature and one history course. Unbeknownst to me, the African American Studies Department would soon become my home and the foundation of all my subsequent intellectual pursuits.

I decided to major in African American Studies during the period when the Department was not supported by the University as it should have been. We had to press, demonstrate, and raise awareness on campus to be seen and heard. Although my cohort was small, our commitment to the Department, and the discipline, was unwavering. While it was frustrating to have to balance coursework, work-study, and protesting, I was learning in real-time that intellectual theory and practice work hand-in-hand and that my passion was worth the fight.

I had one life-altering course in the African American Studies Department. The late Julian Bond guest taught a course on the Civil Rights Movement. Although I'm from the southern US, Louisiana specifically, prior to Bond's course I never learned about him or the Student Non-Violent Coordinating

Committee. My high school history classes were devoid of protest and student activist narratives. However, during that Civil Rights Movement course, Bond introduced me to oral history and first-person narratives. He invited movement leaders themselves to speak to us. We used Howell Raines's *My Soul is Rested* (1977), and we watched Henry Hampton's *Eyes on the Prize* series. Prior to Julian Bond's course, I was an English major because I loved historical literature. By the end, I had become an African American Studies major with an interest in history. Oral history was my new medium. Julian Bond also exposed us to Black Power narratives, and it was during his class that I met the Black Panther Party, a group I have been studying and publishing about since 1989.

Although the Department was not what it is today, I was fortunate to have instructors who were committed to the discipline and who became as passionate about my research on women in the Black Panther Party as I was. They nurtured my inquisitiveness and graciously shared their time and intellect during and outside of office hours. My education truly took a village. Graduate students like Cynthia Blair and the late Jeff Ferguson took a hands-on approach and genuine interest. Professor Catherine Clinton did not hesitate to help guide my work and even made me aware of financial support available for thesis research. As significant was the Department's openness to my non-Harvard senior thesis adviser, the late Professor Gerald Gill, who taught at Tufts University. With all their intellectual and emotional support, I ended up with a prize-winning thesis and publications in the works before I graduated.

While the institutional support for African American Studies was not what it should have been, the staff, faculty, and my cohort made it what we needed it to be—supportive and inviting. We bonded in ways that likely did not happen in other departments and programs, and for that, I am grateful. I was not fortunate enough to experience the newly rebuilt African American Studies Department ushered in by Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. His first year there was my last year. However, he made certain that my departure was a smooth one and advocated on my behalf.

I left Harvard and journeyed to graduate school. My research remains grounded in oral history and the meticulous research skills I learned under my Harvard instructors, and I remain committed to reclaiming African American history. Just as I needed support from people in a variety of disciplines and institutions, as an independent scholar, archivist, and filmmaker, I remain committed to helping others who are unable to find what they need where they hoped it would be or should be. I continue contributing scholarship that inspires those who come after me to step outside their boundaries and pursue their passions. In these difficult times, I strive to maintain the combination of theory and practice to which Julian Bond exposed me. The oral tradition is central to the African and African American experience and I am forever

grateful that I learned the many ways it could be used to both document and inspire.

My hope for the African American Studies Department over the next fifty years is that it attracts passionate students committed to the discipline and the many ways in which African American life is interwoven in the fabric of the world. I also hope the Department is a catalyst for inspiring people to bridge cultural and intellectual divides.

MYLES V. LYNK. *Occupation*: Professor Emeritus, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University; Senior Assistant Disciplinary Counsel, District of Columbia Office of Disciplinary Counsel. *Degrees*: AB '70; JD '76. *Email*: myles.lynk@asu.edu.

Congratulations to the Department of African and African American Studies on its fiftieth anniversary! This is a wonderful achievement. Because the Department was born out of student protests, not as an internal initiative of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, one of its most important tasks from the beginning was to establish its academic credibility within the Harvard community. That it has done so is an exhilarating affirmation of its success in defining a niche for itself within the University's academic environment through the creative talent, inspired scholarship, and hard work, over the past fifty years, of its leadership, faculty, and students. Those of us who were there at the creation, and those of you who are at Harvard today, should be very proud!

Efforts to increase the number of black faculty and course offerings on African and African American themes in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences began in 1968, when the Association of African and African American Students called for the appointment of more black faculty, courses, and students. This was followed by the creation of the Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students to work toward these goals, and FAS Dean Franklin Ford appointed a faculty committee on African and African American Studies. By the end of the year the Ad Hoc Student Committee was calling for the creation of a Department of Afro-American Studies, and in January 1969 the faculty committee issued the "Rosovsky Report," named after its chair, Professor Henry Rosovsky. The report called for a significant expansion in the number of courses in African and African American Studies, a new organizational structure to elevate and manage the new emphasis in this area, the building of a student center for black students, and an increase in the number of black undergraduate and graduate students. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences accepted the report's recommendations. The Rosovsky Report was a truly seminal document and laid the foundation for much of what was to follow. What it did not recommend was the creation of a new Department.

The spring 1969 Harvard student strike rekindled the debate over the creation of a department. I ended up as one of the principal speakers at the

big student rally in Memorial Stadium and afterwards was appointed to serve on the Faculty-Student Committee to Establish the Afro-American Studies Department. Establishing the Department was one of the eight demands that were granted by the University.

The formal name of the committee was subsequently changed from the Faculty-Student Committee to Establish the Afro-American Studies Department to the Standing Committee on Afro-American Studies. Its membership was as follows: Professor Richard A. Musgrave (economics and law), chair ; Professor Harold Amos (bacteriology and immunology); Kathryn Bowser '72; Leslie F. "Skip" Griffin Jr. '70; Loretta G. Hodge '72; Clarence James '72; Professor John F. Kain (economics); Myles V. Lynk '70; Professor Juan Marichal (Romance languages); Professor Talcott Parsons (social relations); Mark Smith '72; Professor Zeph Stewart (classics); and Professor Charles A. Whitney (astronomy).

Professor John Kain and I were primarily responsible for the initial work to establish the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research.

The late Professor Richard Musgrave deserves much credit for the incredible job he did as chair of the committee to midwife the birth of the Department. The committee's report, the Musgrave Report, was prepared over the summer of 1969 and delivered in September 1969 to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which approved its recommendations. It announced nine new faculty appointments and seven new courses in African and African American Studies for the fall 1969 term. It proposed the creation of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research and proposed the appointment of Dr. Ewart Guinier as chair of the Department.

The Musgrave Report was another seminal document in the creation of the Department. In 1970 significant changes were made to the Department's name, concept, and direction. Hence, the birthdate of the Department is taken to be 1970, not 1969—but without this successful effort in 1969, there would have been nothing to reorganize in 1970. And the Musgrave Report was produced in the face of skepticism, from both faculty and some students, who doubted, for different reasons, that the Department would succeed. That Professor Musgrave was able to keep the disparate factions on the committee working together, and then get the faculty to approve of the creation of the Department, was a truly remarkable feat. I remember the debates and disagreements on the committee, the frustrations, the anxiety, and the hopes we each had for the future. Professor Musgrave is best remembered for the eminent economist that he was, but his contribution to the creation of the Department was very real and should not be forgotten.

In closing, let me say how proud I am to have played a small role in the initial birth of the Department, and how proud I am to see that the Department of African and African American Studies has grown and thrived since then,

through the remarkable work of its many wonderful faculty and students. Happy fiftieth anniversary, AAAS!

KELLIE MARTINE MAGNUS. *Occupation*: Country Lead, Jamaica. Fight for Peace. *Degrees*: AB '92. *Email*: kelliemagnus@gmail.com.

Growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, the smart-ass, smarty-pants child of solidly middle-class parents, I had one concern when I applied to Harvard: to get the best education possible. Each of them one generation out of poverty, my parents believed education was the answer to everything. I'd gone to the best high school on the island; the best college was the next logical step.

But Cambridge and I did not meet cute. I arrived in September 1988, thirteen months before Charles Stuart shot his pregnant wife dead and claimed a black man had done it. Thirteen months before white fury blanketed the city. Thirteen months before Boston PD scoured the city's black neighborhoods. The Stuart murders had only exacerbated existing tensions. The day my family left me in Cambridge, Hurricane Gilbert ravaged Jamaica; I did not know they were leaving me to battle a hurricane of my own.

I spent my freshman year weathering racial storms. There was no orientation to prepare me for the anger of white Bostonians or the confusing expectations of some of my black classmates. The first time someone called me a nigger, I looked around to see where the nigger was. I didn't know why most white people ignored me when I said, "good morning," and most black people nodded their heads at me. There seemed to be an endless list of situations where I had to struggle to be seen and an equally endless list of things I was supposed to know. I was completely confused about American race relations, so I did what I always do when a subject confounds me: I looked for a book.

Right when Stuart was inventing his black murderer, I started delving into African American fiction. I was looking for answers, but, in Werner Sollors's African American literature class, I found love instead. I fell madly for Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Paule Marshall. I studied African American history as well, but the literature is what compelled me to commit to Afro-Am (as it was then called) as my major.

Before I moved to the US, I had written my race on a form only once: the application to take my SAT. Having grown up in a country that is 95-percent black, I had not experienced race as the central defining factor of my identity. I had only ever thought of myself as Jamaican, reflecting my own privilege of living in a middle-class bubble, insulated from the classism and the subtler, yet substantial, racism that constricted opportunities for many Jamaicans. In those pre-internet days there was often talk among West Indians about African Americans' failure to take advantage of all the opportunities in the US. The African American Studies Department is where I learned a new narrative. It gave me the context to what I had heard at home and the counterarguments to

what I saw in Cambridge during the Stuart case and its hangover. It gave me a way to process what was happening to and around me. For every "compliment" from a professor on how well I spoke English, for every slur I heard on my way home, I found the antidote losing myself in Langston Hughes's poems or Alice Walker's novels. Microaggressions. Macro-affirmations.

Around the time Stuart was identifying Willie Bennett as his wife's murderer, I was explaining to my parents why I needed, as they put it, "a degree in being black." Articulating that need, and what I would do with such a degree, was my first major act of self-definition. The hum of pride and defiance stuck with me every time I submitted my résumé for a job or explained my degree choice to a recruiter. After Sollors's class, there were weekly trips to Widener, where I discovered shelf after shelf of African American and Caribbean literature, including Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, the masterwork by a Jamaican leader in the Harlem Renaissance, who I was furious I had not been taught in my years of studying West Indian literature at home. I took Orlando Patterson's sociology class; a film class with Spike Lee; a civil rights class with Julian Bond; a playwriting class with Adrienne Kennedy—the lines blurred between what I was studying and who I was becoming. Each class affirmed and refined me. Each class challenged me to rethink my own history and the way it had been taught to me. Each class made me question Jamaica's race relations and the stultifying classism that belies our rosy motto, "Out of Many, One People."

Majoring in African American Studies did not, could not alter my unshakeable identity as a Jamaican. It did, however, cement for me my identity as black. Box checked unequivocally. I grew up in the African American Studies Department. What I got from the Department was a lot more than the best education possible; it was the opportunity to become the best version of myself—coming to terms with the complexities of history and preparing me for the complexities of the future.

MEGAN ANAIS MATHEWS. *Degrees*: AB '96. *Email*: mamathews28@gmail.com.

Getting into Harvard is a very weird thing. It's a little like getting into Hogwarts. When you tell people that's where you're going, they look at you differently. If you don't know anyone who's been to Harvard, all your information about it is from media of some kind—movies, books, news headlines of someone getting elected or arrested for money laundering. Knowing that I was going to be a part of that—me, the child of peace activists from Venice, California—my emotional rollercoaster swerved from thrilled to terrified, daily.

In the midst of that, one event during my senior year of high school would drive my academic choices in college. The year 1992: in the courtroom of a white judge (a judge who looked like me), a jury of mostly white people (who

looked like me) acquitted four LAPD officers (who also looked like me) of the beating of Rodney King. Despite. Video. Evidence. This was the most flagrant display of systemic racism my teenage mind had ever witnessed. The system was clearly not impartial. This was not how justice was supposed to work.

I got to Harvard knowing something big was missing from my understanding of American democracy. I found my way to an AAAS 10 class and experienced a paradigm shift that was nearly instantaneous. It became a core belief so efficiently and unequivocally that it felt obvious five minutes later: African American history *is* American history; they cannot be separated. Until the whitewashed myth of America is corrected, democracy will forever be an incomplete experiment. My worldview was changed, and my concentration set.

I had many other lightning bolts shot at me over the next three years, by the most dynamic and rockstar professors on campus and classmates who made me smarter by association. Clutching hot coffee and buttery pastries from C'est Bon, we would cram ourselves through the narrow entryway to the College House offices and seminar rooms, where filing cabinets and bookshelves lined the hallways, the Department bursting at the seams waiting for its new home in the Barker Center. Those years ('92–'96), the question that so often was the undercurrent of our class discussions, and the one we knew we'd have to answer ourselves when we were in the real world, was, "To make true change in America, do you work *in*side or *out*side the system?" (Participating in a discussion group where Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornel West explored this very question is one of my most treasured academic experiences.)

Inside or outside? It's not a question I've been able to answer yet. Like many in my generation, I've had several careers, but my life's work has been co-founding a nonprofit theater company in Colorado called Local Theater Company. We founded Local with the intention of discovering and developing the next great American play, acknowledging that the American canon only stays relevant if it reflects the lives of all Americans. Dominant American theater can't continue to be by and about only white people; and it is white theatermakers who must put in the work to reset the "white" default, "the assumption" that every role, on and off stage, is white unless otherwise specified.

Local Theater Company begins its tenth season this fall, an anniversary that naturally prompts self-reflection. But the events of 2020—the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd—have heightened that impulse. Looking back on our last nine seasons, there have definitely been successes. But part of being an ally is recognizing where and when you've fallen short. And listening without being defensive when you're called out for continuing to reinforce systems of white supremacy, as The Ground We Stand On collective did in its indictment, "Dear White American Theater, We See You."

When I started college, I didn't have words in my vocabulary like "ally," "white privilege," or "anti-racist." Those words would come later. But being

in the AAAS Department in the '90s did teach me things I've carried into everything I've tried to do since: listen, show up, do the work, listen, stand with, stand next to, listen, educate white people, change unsafe spaces into safe ones, stop talking, listen.

Ayodeji Brian Ogunnaike. *Occupation*: Assistant Professor, Bowdoin College. *Degrees*: AB '10; AM '15; PhD '19. *Email*: ayodeji07@gmail.com.

Coming to Harvard as an undergrad, I planned to concentrate in French, but AAAS completely upended my plans and the trajectory of my life. I quickly realized that I had formed my best relationships with faculty in AAAS and was more engaged by the courses in the Department than any other, so I switched concentrations. In particular Professors Olupona, Mugane, Matory, and Irele took a strong personal interest in me and helped me to shape my academic interests in African Studies, study the Yoruba language, and begin exploring the discipline of Africana religions. I also had excellent TAs, including Carla Martin and Chérie Rivers, who ensured that my best academic experiences at Harvard took place in AAAS. The interdisciplinary approach offered by the Department was also crucial in my scholarly formation and has served me very well in my scholarship and on the job market.

AAAS faculty also helped me secure a post-grad Gardner Traveling Fellowship, both in terms of writing strong letters of recommendation and in identifying that I would like to spend that time as the apprentice of a traditional priest in Nigeria, studying Ifa divination and Yoruba mythology. This has been one of the single most important and defining experiences of my life and simply never would have been possible without AAAS. Apart from the personal growth that came out of the fellowship, I also gained lifelong relationships with religious figures in Nigeria and the knowledge that I wanted to pursue a PhD in African religions.

In large part because of the expertise of top-tier experts like Professors Olupona, Kane, Mugane, and Akyeampong, I knew Harvard was the only place I wanted to go for my PhD. The ability to work in close proximity to the most highly regarded figures in their respective fields was remarkable, and it was an honor to be included in several of their academic projects and programs over the years. Working on their book projects, coordinating meetings with the vice president and governors from Nigeria, establishing a digital library of oral sources of knowledge, and teaching a study-abroad course in Senegal were just a few of the exceptional opportunities the faculty from AAAS offered me. The world-renowned African Language Program, the Social Engagement Initiative, and the financial resources for student research through the Department and the Center for African Studies were all unique and important parts of the Department and my experience in it. From a curricular standpoint, I also appreciated the way AAAS faculty advocated for and facilitated my use of an

African language for my language exams, and I benefitted from the flexibility to take a range of courses outside the Department and at the Divinity School that further served my interests. Although it was at times difficult meeting the demands of both the PhD programs in religion and AAAS, that was also a rewarding experience that positioned me well to operate within both fields following my general exams.

On a more personal note, AAAS quite literally became my family and my home. My brother also studied in the Department, as did his current wife, and many of my best friends to this day also received an AB or advanced degree in AAAS or at least took several classes in the Department. Also, many of the professors mentioned above treated me like their own son—a rare gift for a black African male in academia to receive once, let alone from multiple top-tier academics. Few places in the US have felt like home to me, but AAAS is one of them because of the faculty and staff and the way they approach the field. Having African academics serve as personal and professional role models of the highest order had a deep impact on my life and my indeed entire family as they have become lifelong friends of my parents and siblings as well. It is no exaggeration to say that AAAS has been one of the greatest forces in shaping my personal and professional life, and it is with a great deal of humility and gratitude that I congratulate it on fifty years of success and look forward to another fifty years of it serving the field and students like me.

Oludamini Ogunnaike. *Occupation*: Assistant Professor of African Religious Thought. University of Virginia. *Degrees*: AB '07; PhD '15. *Email*: oludamini@gmail.com.

Without a doubt, Harvard's AAAS Department had the most profound intellectual and professional influence on my career. Like many immigrant children, I was a pre-med student en route to a career in medicine or research, when a few electives in African Studies changed the course of my life. I was captivated by classes that introduced me not only to new histories of Africa and the Diaspora (that I had not yet encountered in my schooling) but also to new, critical perspectives on the history, philosophy, religion, and sciences with which I was familiar.

It was here that I learned to grapple with issues of race, racism, gender, history, colonialism, indigeneity, and notions of "blackness" and "Africanness" with the kind of intellectual sophistication that was previously reserved for my math and physics classes.

I decided to double major in cognitive neuroscience and African Studies, and the more time I spent in the AAAS Department—taking classes with Professors Olupona, Mugane, Shelby, and Matory, attending events and having conversations with graduate students and Professors Jeyifo, Gates, Higginbotham, and the late Professor Irele—the more I knew I had found my

intellectual home and my professional calling. I wanted to devote my career to studying and writing about the intellectual traditions of the African continent.

After graduating, I spent a year in Mali on a traveling fellowship, and while there I only applied to one PhD program: Harvard's AAAS. I couldn't imagine pursuing graduate training in African religions anywhere else or with anyone other than Professor Olupona.

While in graduate school, I fell in love with another member of the AAAS Department, Ms. Naseemah Mohamed '12, and we were married in 2014, a few months before I defended my dissertation.

The AAAS Department is where I received my intellectual formation, and the classes, conversations, and numerous lectures, symposia, and conferences in which I participated profoundly shaped my professional trajectory. Whenever I return to the second floor of the Barker Center, I feel a sense of coming home.

Since graduating, I have realized just how exceptional the environment of Harvard's AAAS Department was and is. Because I knew nothing else, I didn't realize how unique and rare it was to have so much institutional support and space for African and African American Studies, and the profound difference it made to the culture of the campus and the intellectual climate of the classroom.

In the future, I hope the AAAS Department continues to break down disciplinary boundaries, reimagine what the academy could and should be, and, most importantly, continue to inspire students and the broader public to a love, understanding, and appreciation of the importance and relevance of the peoples, perspectives, histories, and products of Africa and the African Diaspora.

Sonja Okun. *Occupation*: Principal, Root Cause. *Degrees*: AB '93; MBA '02. *Email*: sonja@sonjaokun.com.

I am eternally grateful for my experience in (what was then) Harvard's African American Studies Department. I was a transfer student, and arrived at Harvard, and the AA Studies Department in 1991, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s first year there. I remember sitting with Kwame Anthony Appiah and talking through the courses I was interested in and being excited to join the small but growing Department. I was one of two white students in my pretty small class (which included Tracy Smith, who became our national poet laureate).

At the time, there was a push from many students in our Class for the Department to strengthen its social science offerings. So while I predated William Julius Wilson's arrival, I drank up my humanities classes, history and literature specifically. I landed an opportunity to work for Henry Louis Gates Jr. during the summer of 1992, helping to finalize a series of essay collections he was editing.

I've worked to advance racial justice in my capacity and privilege as a white woman pretty much since then (minus a few more years of traveling). My

awareness of racism and racial injustice predated my time at Harvard, in large part because of growing up in Cambridge and its public schools. But what cracked my mind open permanently was learning true American history. For nearly thirty years I've been repeating the mantra "history" in most of the spaces I occupy. Ensuring all Americans learn our real history in and of itself won't end racism or injustice. But I believe it would have, could have, and can play a big part. Once seen and learned, I could never unsee or know how intentionally, forcefully, persistently our legacy of dehumanization plays out all the time, in just about every space and moment it can.

I spent twenty-plus years working with and for young people involved in the juvenile and criminal (in)justice systems in New York City. I fell into a job opportunity (due to racial and educational privilege) at an alternative-to-incarceration agency that brought me into that world and allowed me to build an educational program for young people with felony charges facing incarceration.

I'm a teacher at heart. As I approach fifty, I can still say with assurance that there is no better feeling than bearing witness to a student—particularly one who has been dismissed, ignored, discounted, and denied the opportunity—having a learning epiphany, one that you can see transforming into power. I never had the patience or disposition necessary for working in systems, so I've always worked and taught in more flexible environments. As any teacher should, I learned more from my students than they did from me. I remember being told vehemently by another young(er) white woman working in the field that "no [kid] wants to read Frederick Douglass anymore. We need to move on." I loved *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. I take him with me in every setting I enter. He led us to Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy, and liberatory education.

Flash-forward some years and I used my Harvard MBA to found exalt, a nonprofit that spun out the educational program I'd developed years ago into its own entity. I knew when I founded exalt that I was leveraging my racial and educational privilege. I knew I had to build something with the autonomy and independence necessary to maintain its integrity, that could get passed on eventually, to be run by a person of color. I knew this because I had studied real American history. Knew that all the systems and programs "we" ever created to "help" people were always designed, built, and run by white people, promulgating the same power structure over and over. Never by the people who knew what they needed. And on and on. I stepped down from exalt five-plus years ago, and its current leader is one of the only Latina executive directors in the justice space, or really, the nonprofit sector as a whole.

I've been in lots of forums in which leaders and doers spoke about what we needed to do to change the injustice system. Inevitably and appropriately, usually people suggested policy ideas. I would talk about the importance of teaching accurate history. I'd get dismissive looks by white colleagues.

At exalt, students learn from and with teachers of color. We cannot cram American history into a six-week, out-of-school-time course, but we for sure connect every single day's class to the larger thread of ensuring students are learning why they are there (in a program they only got to because they were enmeshed in the injustice system).

It is powerful to feel this new movement for justice well up all around. And with it, an attention to our real history that to me feels unprecedented.

Jazmine Kiara Phillips-Acie. *Degrees*: AB '18; JD '23. *Email*: jazminephillipsacie@gmail.com.

The Department of African and African American Studies indelibly shaped not only my experience at Harvard College, but also my perspective and life trajectory. A 2018 alumna and joint concentrator in social studies and African and African American Studies, I was introduced to the Department during Visitas, as I audited Professors Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Lawrence Bobo's famed "Introduction to African American Studies." It was also the first course in the Department I enrolled in, my freshman spring. The personal significance of experiencing critical analysis and discourse of the history of my people for the first time in my life was immeasurable. Professors Gates and Bobo's warm introduction to the Department felt like entering a Parisian salon that engaged with the subject matter I had always longed to, filling an intellectual void in my life.

My thesis adviser Professor Elizabeth Hinton's course, "Mass Incarceration in Historical Perspective," drew me to the cause of criminal justice reform. The course inspired me to focus my undergraduate studies on analyzing issues of race and law, declaring a focus field entitled "Inequality in the American Justice System." Professor Hinton's course provided a historical framework for viewing the emergence of mass incarceration as a continual narrative of the enslavement and subjugation of African Americans embedded in the law. Yet, as I learned in another department offering, "Histories of Racial Capitalism," mass incarceration was not simply the product of legislation, but a multibillion-dollar industry. The carceral state is a product of racial capitalism, an extension of antagonistic social relations into the economy. The institution of policing in the United States operates as a force that propagates and maintains the carceral state and all of its inequities. As I learned in Professor Laurence Ralph's course "Policing and Militarization Today," policing has become increasingly militarized as a product of policy. The criminalization of both the use and sale of drugs, disproportionate policing of communities of color, and inequality along racial lines at every stage of the criminal justice system, as identified in my various courses in the Department, perpetuate racial oppression for economic, political, and social gain. The interdisciplinary nature of the Department allowed me to explore through different lenses the construction and operation of the criminal justice system and the various impacts on African Americans.

With the support of Professor Hinton, I investigated racial disparities in placement and performance in Massachusetts drug courts for my senior honors thesis research. Leveraging the interdisciplinary toolkit I developed in this Department, I was able to identify potential causal factors for the disparities. A culmination of my studies at the intersection of race, law, politics, economics, social dynamics, and history, and I was honored to receive the Kathryn Ann Huggins Prize from the Department for my thesis.

I am currently pursuing my juris doctorate at Harvard Law School. Professor Evelyn Higginbotham's course "African American Lives in the Law" provided a plethora of examples of African American attorneys who pursued justice and equality for African Americans, a tradition I hope to continue in my future. Professor Cornel West's return to Harvard was a literal answer to my prayers, and a highlight of my undergraduate experience. Professor Cornel West's course "American Democracy," primarily investigated the contemporary impact of the democratic institution and political economy on African Americans. His course made me a more informed citizen and inspired my aspiration to become directly involved in government and politics in the future.

My academic studies and research in the African American Studies Department will continue to influence my perspective and experiences as a law student and attorney. The Department not only impacted my career aspirations, but also forever broadened my horizons. I studied abroad with Professors John and Jean Comaroff in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa, learning about colonialism and modernization in southern Africa. Professor Sarah Lewis educated me on African American cultural production in "What is Black Art?" giving me a greater knowledge and appreciation of African American artists and their artistic work. Her course inspired my own African American art history course that I taught to Chinese high school students in Shanghai as a seminar leader for the Harvard Summit for Young Leaders in China.

I am eternally grateful to all of the amazing faculty of the Harvard African and African American Studies Department. I am hopeful that students for years to come get to enjoy the opportunities for learning and growth provided by this outstanding Department. I anticipate students from every discipline—from the humanities and social sciences to the natural and physical sciences to engineering and computer science—will continue to benefit from the Department, studying and researching African and African American history, culture, and life. Concentrating in African and African American Studies truly changed my life.

SHANNON JOYCE PRINCE. *Occupation*: Attorney. *Degrees*: AM '14; PhD '18. *Email*: shannonjprince@outlook.com.

In Islam, there is a title "*Hafiz*" that is bestowed upon those who learn the Koran by heart. In Harvard University's Department of African and African

American Studies, I earned the title of "Doctor," and yet, if there were a secular analogue to the Islamic rank, it would more accurately describe the being I became through a process that was not as much education as it was enchantment. The knowledge I gained, though not theological, is holy. There is a world now where my heart used to be, a world in which Frederick Douglass and Charles Chesnutt, Lucille Clifton and Ananse, Jadine and Son all live together, the ancestors and the protagonists, the poets and the fugitives, the imagined and the remembered, in eternal discourse with each other.

As a doctoral student, I thrilled at the opportunity to learn from my legends. To be in their presence awed me as much as the prospect of time travel. Professor William Julius Wilson transformed from a name on the spines of books on library shelves to a man I wished "good morning" when we passed in the hallway. I discovered Professor Doris Sommer to be an academic assoluta, teaching with a gleeful virtuosity. I remember Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. cradling *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in one hand, gesturing like a conductor with the other, analyzing the moment in the text when the narrator cuckolds standard English for the seductions of the African American vernacular, and then lifting his gaze from the page to his pupils to declare softly, "I'm showing you how a literary scholar reads a text." He was a magician revealing his tricks.

Our Department is the most special in all of Harvard, for our faculty is a sphere of gracious genius. From its number, I ended up with a trifecta of titans as my dissertation committee, Professors Sommer, Gates, and Carpio. Together, they helped me realize my dissertation, "Green is the New Black: Reading the Black Experience Ecocritically." But more than that, in coaching me as I discovered the green in black, my professors placed a prism in my hand that revealed the rainbow of the African and African American experience and bestowed upon me a lens through which to examine it critically.

I was a joint degree student, earning my doctorate—and master's in English—at Harvard while also pursuing my law degree at Yale; after completing my PhD, I became not a professor but a lawyer. As an attorney, my studies shape how I advocate and for whom I do it. Furthermore, while I don't teach those in universities about black literature, history, and social issues, as a writer and speaker, I have the privilege of teaching those beyond them.

When I dream of what the Department might be like when it is one hundred years old, I imagine the transatlantic currents having stirred up a new wave of interdisciplinary engagement. Griots are guest artists, teaching on their craft. African orature is studied alongside African and African American literature, and scholars are innovating ways to preserve these works and disseminate them to future generations. In partnership with the Law School and African communities, students and professors protect African and diasporic ecological knowledge against biopiracy; a similar partnership with the Medical School puts Western and African medicine and its practitioners

in greater discourse with each other. Meanwhile, a San medicine person is in residence at the Department, the Medical School, and the Divinity School. In sum, new colors of the rainbow of blackness are being rigorously examined through new lenses.

And I can't wait to gaze through them!

MALCOLM RICHARD RIVERS. *Occupation*: Pathways Program Coordinator. District of Columbia Public Schools. *Degrees*: AB '09; MEd, George Mason Univ. '11. *Email*: mrivers@post.harvard.edu.

Painful moments can shape your worldview. Harvard College's African and African American Studies Department helped me transform such a moment from tragedy to triumph during my undergraduate career.

I remember the Facebook message: "Are you okay?" Perplexed, I later discovered someone had murdered my friends in the basement next door. Devastated isn't the right word. There isn't a right word. The best I can describe my feeling was "blank."

Nothing mattered. Grades? Parties? Meh. Mortality operated on different levels than Harvard's daily minutiae. I stumbled through a tremendously unsuccessful freshman spring until the year's merciful conclusion. What felt like eons later, I returned.

The world was different. I was on academic probation; my parents were confused and frustrated; I struggled with self-image and emotional turbulence. I'd lost seven friends and family that year; I was hurting. But the world kept turning and I got up.

I began my trek back toward wholeness. I put one foot in front of the other, not healed enough for big-picture thinking. Goals became narrower, clearer: "Go to class today. Work out tonight." I knew small victories could produce enough momentum to escape this academic freefall.

Life got better. My approach matured; GPA improved; perspective grew brighter. Struggle introduced the powers of discipline and incremental progress. I didn't do it alone. Faith in God, help from family, and thousands of small steps brought me through.

And the Af Am Department.

AAAS provided tools and opportunities to strengthen myself and make an impact. Professors and teaching fellows' encouragement improved my outlook and outcomes. The AAAS Department's guidance particularly influenced my thesis on youth violence: a sensitive topic for me.

My thesis confronted the specters of loss haunting my Harvard years. Examining solutions to the devastation helped reframe my pain as part of larger, though assailable, issues. Feelings of confusion and impotence diminished as I threw myself into the work. I would exorcise my ghosts, and the dynamics that produced them, so no one else would experience what I had. But it wasn't easy.

Long nights and busy days abounded. Thesis advisers challenged me at every step. Issues among childhood friends threatened to derail my work. The work and support from the Department grew my resilience and set me up for success. The trek paid off. My grades, by senior year, looked night-and-day different. Thesis reviewers returned with magna responses. I'd made it through the valley to the mountaintop. I transitioned into Teach For America to continue confronting problems plaguing places like where my friends had died.

I've never forgotten the lessons I learned through AAAS, and I'll forever be grateful. I hope the Department continues to provide young people inspiration and tools to chisel better worlds out of their imaginations' raw materials. I aspire to witness AAAS advance further into connecting research and study to purpose and justice. I pray that fifty years from now I'll be able to look with pride at the impact AAAS has made, not just on academia but on those most in need, and smile at my tiny role in a colossal legacy.

Nancy Irving Saarman. *Degrees*: AB '73 ('74); MA, Columbia '76. *Email*: saarmannan@gmail.com.

I am proud to be in the first graduating Class in African American history (former Afro-American history) at Harvard College (although I took a semester off and actually got my degree in 1974). Professor Guinier was the founding chair, and the years 1969 through 1971 were filled with strikes on campus and protests: Black Power, divesting from South Africa, anti-Vietnam War, affirmative action—the list goes on. What a turbulent, dynamic, and powerful time to be an African American student on campus! Nineteen sixty-nine was the entry point for a dramatic increase in the number of brown students on campus.

Kawaun Terrence Sankar. *Occupation*: Attorney. *Degrees*: AB '00. *Email*: ks20877@gmail.com.

Looking back at my time at Harvard, the African and African American Studies Department was so much more than just a department that housed my major. The professors and staff were important supporters of our success and the Department a unique, affirming, intellectual, and emotional space for students—all of which made negotiating the challenging times of college life that much more meaningful, fun, and stimulating.

Thembi Lillia Scott. *Degrees*: PhD studies, 2001–03. *Email*: tscott@alumni.harvard.edu.

Upon graduating from the University of Maryland in the springtime of 2001, I was awash with hope and excitement about the upcoming possibilities that would soon be affecting my academic career and professional future. I was so elated to have received acceptance letters from four out of the five

universities that I had applied to for admission: Yale University, Department of African American Studies; New York University, Department of History; Cornell University, Department of History; and, of course, Harvard University, Department of African and African American Studies (where I eventually enrolled in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in the fall term of 2001).

As a 4-Her in the University of Maryland Extension since I was seven and a half years old, I could barely believe how much my collective experiences (in 4-H and beyond) had brought me to the cusp of this new adventure into the academic universe. I still remember the first time I visited a college (in 1989) with the 4-H Club at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, and watched undergraduate students from the former all-women's training college model their fashion inventions for the Business Administration and Management Program.

After that, there was no end to my 4-H adventures! By the time I had graduated from high school in Howard County in 1996, I had enjoyed (thanks to 4-H) the pleasure of having served as a tour guide at the Howard County Fair, as a camp counselor at Howard County 4-H Camp at the Western Maryland 4-H Educational Center in Garrett County, as a delegate from the State of Maryland at National 4-H Congress in 1993, and as an "I Dare You" leadership award winner in 1996 (thereafter representing Maryland as an American Youth Foundation (AYF) participant at the National Leadership Conference at Camp Miniwanca in Shelby, Michigan, in August of that same year). Finally, by May of 2001, I was proud to show my family before, during, and after walking the stage at graduation that I had accepted admission to a premier PhD graduate education program in the Ivy League.

Now, I am entering a new phase in my academic journey. I have been offered an opportunity to apply to NCCU in the Department of History! There are several important reasons why I have chosen to accept this important opportunity. First of all, I will gain technical expertise in some of the leading digital technologies actively controlling information science and history as used in our American libraries, archives, museums, and government agencies. Secondly, I should learn firsthand of the leading trends in history and library science as they are currently applying to my field of specialty in history and historical research. Thirdly, I plan to gain knowledge and wisdom from the leadership experience of enrolling in such a valued program within the HBCUs as I develop professional skills in history, academic presentation, library and legal research, thesis writing and defense, and service skills in information science. Following the completion of a second bachelor's degree at NCCU, I would like to enroll at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, to take advantage of its MLIS program. While I have been out of school since leaving graduate study at Harvard, I hope that now there may be an opportunity for me to begin again an academic and career interest that will always be my first choice!

JACOB SLICHTER. *Degrees*: AB '84. *Email*: jslichter@aol.com.

Shortly after I began my concentration in Afro-American Studies in the early 1980s, a committee appointed by the Board of Overseers came through to speak with concentrators. The committee's questions suggested a certain skepticism about the Department's status as a stand-alone entity, perhaps its existence in any form. So, though I was shy and had kept quiet for most of the meeting, at a certain point I couldn't hold back: "I'm a junior, and this Department is the first place at Harvard I've received any kind of meaningful attention from my professors!" The words came out with more heat than I expected, and the look in their eyes told me they knew I was telling the truth.

And I was. I remember all of the extra time Professor Huggins gave us during our tutorial, stopping to give us advice about how to prepare for essay questions on exams, even if we didn't know what those questions might be. I remember his thorough comments on our essays and how he constantly pushed us to become better writers, holding up high standards while encouraging us along the way. I remember one-on-one tutorials with Professor Hyatt, extensive access to Professor Sollors, and taking multiple classes with Professor Williams, all of whom went out of their way to help me. The Department's headquarters, a house on Dunster Street, was a reliable place of welcome on a campus that, for me, often felt cold and distant.

As a white student, I regularly encountered questions about my choice of concentration. Whatever awkwardness I felt, however, was offset by the fact that the subject matter felt far more important than any alternative. (I had considered majoring in economics, then music, and then spent my sophomore year as an English major.) My focus as a concentrator eventually gravitated to the conversation among black writers of the mid-century about the public role of the black writer. The debates between Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, and so many others addressed, among other things, the interaction of art and politics, questions with which I wrangled as an aspiring songwriter. More importantly, reading these writers (as well as the white writers who barged into the conversation) brought me into sharper awareness of my privilege, my whiteness, and my racism. The work was not only intellectual but personal, moral, political, and, for me, even spiritual.

For this life-changing experience, I am grateful to all of the professors and members of the departmental staff who gave all of us concentrators such attention. I'm grateful for all of the concentrators in Afro-Am, before, during, and after my time in the Department. Most of all, I'm grateful to the black students whose protests and extensive organizing brought the Department into existence. The Department's fiftieth anniversary is a testament to the power of their imagination and sacrifice.

JUSTIN PETER STEIL. *Occupation*: Associate Professor of Law and Urban Planning. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. *Degrees*: AB '00; MSc, London School of Economics '04; JD, Columbia '10; PhD, ibid. '15. *Email*: steil@mit.edu.

The Department of African and African American Studies was the heart of my college experience. The friends whom I met in the Department, the teachers and peers who motivated me, and the lessons that I learned in the Department's classrooms and hallways changed me deeply in the four short years I was there and continue to make up a profound part of who I am today. The Department helped me better understand the dynamics of white supremacy, the struggle for black liberation, and the halting progress toward a just, multiracial democracy in the United States. In the process, the experiences I had in the Department enabled me to better understand who I am and my place in the world.

Being a part of the Department in the late 1990s was energizing, challenging, and formative. And it was also fun thinking about ethics and cosmopolitanism with K. Anthony Appiah, learning from Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham about the black women's club movement, diving into Wole Soyinka and August Wilson with Biodun Jeyifo, discussing Amiri Baraka with Adrienne Kennedy, listening to Cornel West's lectures about "jazz-like freedom fighters," and so many more experiences that were simultaneously thought-provoking and joyful. These teachers and mentors inspired me then and continue to inspire me now, in their clear thinking, their courage, and their dedication to their students, and to provide models that I continue to look back on today and try to emulate as a professor myself. Many of the friendships I made and strengthened with my classmates in the Department continue to sustain me today, twenty years later.

It is hard to imagine who I would be today or what my college experience would have been without the Department of African and African American Studies as a supportive and challenging community as I grew and as a deep well of knowledge from which to nourish myself then and now. I am eternally grateful to the courageous students and faculty who formed the Department fifty years ago, and to all of those who have given so much to it, and to all of us who have passed through it since then. I hope that the Department can continue to create a space of learning, growth, and joy for students from all over the nation and the world, and I hope that it can help inspire new generations of leaders to advance the struggles for just, multiracial democracies of which we so often dreamed.

HARVARD WILLIAM STEPHENS JR. *Occupation*: Pastor. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. *Degrees*: AB '73 ('78). *Email*: revdrhs@hotmail.com.

I came to Harvard in the fall of 1969. African American Studies was a fledgling department led by Dr. Ewart Guinier. I chose Black Studies as my area of concentration for many reasons, but of greatest significance to me was the inspiring presence of black scholars who comprised the beautifully eclectic faculty. These women and men were mostly visiting professors engaged in seminal work to frame the discourse that would ultimately prove the legitimacy of this historic endeavor. I am especially grateful for Dr. Geneva Smitherman and her colleagues, who courageously insisted that the study of our linguistic traditions was profoundly important. These pioneers still encourage me to celebrate how the power of black voices always includes the authority of our inflection and cultural élan. We also experienced the emerging synthesis of historical themes that clarified the claims of empowerment movements that were changing the political and cultural landscape of the world. Our community of teachers, researchers, and students were all aware that a call to activism resounded in our common endeavors, and there were many ways to contribute to the rising tide of black consciousness and social aspirations. We gave the world, in our own way, a beautiful affirmation that black lives mattered.

This Department made the African Diaspora bigger and bolder and, at the same time, more intimate and interconnected. We became dreamers with a shared mission, and we helped the University begin to see that its own history and academic imprimatur were inextricably tied to the scholarship emerging as African American Studies. The seeds we have sown have taken root in marvelous ways. The stature and acclaim that the Department of African and African American Studies receives today must always be linked to the narratives of the early days, fraught with risk and yet superbly endowed with a destiny that could not be denied.

KENNETH E. WALKER. *Occupation*: Attorney. *Degrees*: AB '82; JD '87. *Email*: kw@walkerchambers.com.

Afro-American Studies was the most meaningful part of my Harvard experience. It was my intellectual refuge from the emerging white backlash against affirmative action, school busing, and the other achievements of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s.

During my undergraduate years (1978 to 1982), the Afro-American Studies Department (which is what it was called then) was under relentless attack. The administration wanted to downgrade it from an independent department to a "discipline" within the history department, which was a nice liberal way of saying that Afro-American Studies was of dubious intellectual value. At that time, conservative ideology consumed intellectual thought. Reaganomics dominated politics and economics. Claims of reverse racism trumped all evidence of systemic racism. Black Power was equated with black racism. The United States was still propping up the apartheid regime in South Africa. So,

at this bastion of liberalism, I found myself leading protests to protect the Department from being dismantled while at the same time leading protests to demand Harvard's divestment from South Africa.

Racism was not an abstraction for me. Although I had grown up in Memphis, I experienced more direct personal racism at Harvard, in Cambridge, and in Boston than I had ever experienced in the South, and trust me there was no lack of racism in Memphis. So, I thank God for the Afro-American Studies Department.

It was a relief for me to walk into the Department and feel like I belonged. Being surrounded and nurtured by the African American faculty and staff gave me the strength to stay focused intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. I worked in the Afro-American Studies Reading Room in Lamont Library. Surrounded by books written by and about Africans and African Americans, I studied and engaged in stimulating conversations with like-minded students and teachers.

In contrast, I never had that feeling of warmth in the economics department, where I pursued a joint major. As with the rest of Harvard, in the economics department, I had to justify my existence. The prevailing assumption was that we did not belong. But for affirmative action, we never would have been admitted. So, we had to be "twice as good" just to be taken seriously.

This harsh contrast prepared me for life outside Harvard—first in corporate America and later in the legal profession. We had been discouraged from majoring in Afro-American Studies. We were told that we would never get a good job with that on our résumés. Nevertheless, I pursued my intellectual passion, and I graduated magna cum laude with a joint degree in Afro-American Studies and economics.

After college, I worked for a Fortune 500 corporation in the strategic planning department developing econometric models. In 1984, I was admitted to Harvard Law School. After graduating from law school, I worked for two national law firms. Subsequently, I joined an African American-owned law firm in Dallas. A few years later, I started my own law firm. I have spent the past twenty-four years as a partner in Walker & Chambers, which primarily serves African American businesses, nonprofits, churches, families, and individuals in Dallas and Houston.

The African American Studies Department gave me the intellectual toolkit necessary to navigate through and around the barriers that systemic racism threw in my path in college, law school, corporate America, and the legal profession. With that skill set, I have helped African American clients, colleagues, students, friends, and family members do the same.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share my story, and I thank Professor Tommie Shelby and all the people who have worked so hard putting together the AAAS50 Red Book. This is a very important part of our legacy, and it must be preserved.

I hope that the Department teaches all of us that the world is a better place because of Africans and African Americans. We have endured some of the most

awful abuses in human history and used our experiences to make the world better—in law, politics, economics, science, and culture. African American Studies, with its multidisciplinary approach, is the best of liberal arts education.

During my undergraduate years, Stokely Carmichael gave a lecture at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. This was long after his demand for Black Power seemingly had gone unheeded. He made the point that we should never stop organizing in the struggle for social justice and human rights. Let's do that by organizing to put maximum pressure on Harvard to fully fund the Department of African and African American Studies, which should be one of Harvard's most important areas of education and scholarship. The world will be a much better place if more human beings understand the breadth and depth of the African and African American experience.

ROSSI L. WALTER. *Occupation*: Agent. World Financial Group. *Degrees*: AB '88. *Email*: rossiwalter86@gmail.com.

"It's one thing to grow up black in America. It's another thing entirely to understand what that means within the context of American, and world, history." This is the response I have given over the years when people ask me why I studied Afro-Am in college. And it's true.

Truthfully, I backed into the concentration having spent the better part of a year learning about African art while on hiatus at the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) in 1985. While meeting with my adviser, John Marquand, to determine my concentration upon returning to school in the fall of 1985, I related my learning experience at the DMA, to which he replied, "What about Afro-American Studies?" The rest, as they say, is history.

Admittedly, I strained in retrospect to see a connection at the time—African is distinct from Afro-American. However, his recommendation turned out to be quite prescient in that my senior project became "The Influence of African Art on Afro-American Artists," about which almost nothing had been written at the time.

Afro-Am, as it was affectionately known, was probably the best choice I could have made, despite the perennial popularity of economics and political science because of the centrality focus on black history, music, religion, and culture. It was the first time in my life where being black and studying all things black American were central to our *raison d'être*. "Black" meant something, and it was important.

The chair of the Department was Professor Werner Sollors, a German. At first I thought it odd that a white guy would be leading the Afro-Am Department, but that puzzlement was short-lived. It became clear to me very quickly that Professor Sollors was not only passionate about literature but understood it in ways that few did, and suddenly his skin color faded into meaninglessness. I can still hear his voice ringing with enthusiasm and excitement, which filtered through to fuel my own interest in the literature.

In addition to Professor Sollors, I was blessed to study under Professor Orlando Patterson in the Sociology Department, as well as Professors Nathan Huggins and Carolivia Herron, both of whom encouraged me in my studies in ways that resonate with me today. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

Like many graduates, I imagine, I wonder how my life would be different had I chosen a different concentration, but that wonderment lasts only a short time. I would study Afro-Am all over again, only this time with a deeper appreciation for the important roles and places that African Americans have occupied—and continue to occupy—upon the stage of history. Thank you for helping me to see and understand myself, and people like and unlike me, more clearly in our universal quest for meaning in this phenomenon we call human existence.

SALIM WASHINGTON. *Occupation*: Professor. *Degrees*: AB '93; PhD '01. *Email*: salimwashington.tenor@gmail.com.

My studies and interactions with students and faculty in the African American Studies Department were not only enriching, but life changing. In particular, being taught by distinguished professors, such as Professors Gates and West, encouraged me to pursue the life of the mind in a more serious manner.

I am a musician who became interested in the scholarly representation, as well as the popular representation, of jazz. My pursuit of jazz led me to initially take a leave of absence from Harvard in the '70s, but the Department, as built by Professor Gates, proved much more inviting to me as a musician and student of African American culture.

SUSAN DAVIS WHERLEY. *Occupation*: Physician. *Degrees*: AB '10; MPS, Pennsylvania State Univ. '13; MD, Wright State Univ. '17. *Email*: susan.wherley@gmail.com.

I was brought to African Studies by my interest in health. I wanted to dedicate my time to solving wicked problems in the world of global health, to work toward eradicating malaria and preventing polio and stopping the spread of HIV. I was a child eager to get to work, but to solve a problem, you must first understand it. AAAS gave me a four-year introduction to a continent, to the stories, art, culture, and history that have shaped the billion-plus people who live there and the Diaspora that has spread across the globe. AAAS taught me ancient languages and modern ones, with all the Mugane-isms I could jot in the margins of my notebooks. AAAS taught me to dismantle tropes and to think critically about reductionist narratives. AAAS taught me justice and reckoning, joy and reconciliation.

But a four-year introduction could never be anything more than an invitation. AAAS launched a decade of learning and listening and spiraling into panic when I realized how little one can ever truly know. Eventually AAAS led me to medicine, though not in the ways I expected. Once upon a time,

I imagined myself an infectious disease specialist, dressing in *Hot Zone*-esque space suits to combat Ebola. Instead, I have spent the past four years learning obstetrics and gynecology and unlearning centuries of medical hegemony.

Occasionally I get to speak Swahili with a patient from Tanzania or French with a patient from Burkina Faso, which always brings fond memories of my time at Harvard. But every day I care for black women and deliver black babies. Every day I remind myself that black mothers are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white mothers, regardless of education, income, or other socioeconomic factors. Every day I struggle to prevent preterm delivery, knowing that black infants are twice as likely to die by their first birthday than white infants. Every day I experience the joy of new life and the unfathomable sorrow of unexpected loss. And every day I recommit myself to the work of dismantling systemic racism in my hospital and my community.

While I was at Harvard, I often felt that my place was to sit back and to listen, to soak up the expertise and experiences of others like a sponge. Since leaving the bubble, however, I have realized that AAAS was preparing me to fight: to advocate for, to amplify, to defend, and to cherish blackness in Cleveland and the rest of the nation. My medical training is not over, and I hope that my upcoming fellowship will bring opportunities to return to East Africa—to repair obstetric fistulas and care for those affected by gender-based violence. But in the interim, I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to learn and to continue to fight.

Kimberly Denise Williams. *Occupation*: Manager, Government and Community Affairs. *Degrees*: AB '07; MSc, London School of Economics '08. *Email*: kimberly.d.williams@post.harvard.edu.

As I packed my things before starting college, I picked out a few books from my parents' house that I thought I may need or just want to read. One was a book by a well-known professor who had taught at Harvard. I was certain that I would read that book in a Harvard class or would need to reference it in conversation. I never did. However, there's another book that I grabbed on my first trip back home that I read all eight semesters of my college experience, starting with African and African American Studies 10. It was by a well-known historian, sociologist, everything-ist, who attended Harvard more than a century before me. Since that first read, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* and the lessons I learned as a student in the Department have shaped parts of my life that extended far beyond my four years of college.

My interest in the study of black people, particularly in the Americas, drew me to the AAAS Department, while my love of history led me to the history department. I pursued a joint concentration and at times felt like I was being pulled in two different directions, even though in theory the fields were complementary. I struggled in my independent courses to combine my

varied interests into something that made sense and would earn the respect of my peers, teaching fellows, and professors. My success and genius felt like the Black John in the beginning of "Of the Coming of John," in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "When John comes." I was always waiting for the lightbulb to go off, the brilliance to appear, the greatness to return. When it did, it felt fleeting. It shouldn't have come as a shock that I couldn't successfully write a full research paper on classroom segregation using '90s sitcom episodes supplied by a fledgling Netflix as a primary source.

However, I stayed and tarried through my coursework. For that I was rewarded with an interdisciplinary education to go along with this interdisciplinary book and my collegiate obsession with the concept of historical memory. I learned about the Civil War and the Black Arts Movement, ethnography and social histories, and pieced together my interests into something that prepared me to navigate life outside of a classroom. I supplemented my classes with a mix of extracurriculars—including a few that bolstered my understanding of my coursework, like doing theater with BlackC.A.S.T. or writing for publications that were keen to discuss issues related to race. For complete academic fulfillment, I picked back up my television obsession in grad school with a master of science that allowed me to forge a connection between my two undergraduate departments with my insistence on using contemporary media to understand the world. And with all my knowledge gained via an education I wouldn't trade for the world, I returned to Brooklyn, New York.

Like both Johns in the story, I returned to the community that raised me. Only one John provided a model on how to be of value to my community, and that's the one I would hope to emulate in some ways. No one was waiting for "when Kimberly comes," and that's been a relief. I have been able to jump right into where I fit, and where I am free.

It's unsurprising that it's been the information I learned in the African and African American Studies Department that has informed my personal work. I have pursued my own writing and commentary, which is always imbued with black diasporic cultural references and often seeks to share information on the black experience. In my church community, I remain an active participant in the black history committee, which allows me to work with others on a variety of programming, from a history course sharing the story of blacks in America targeted towards black Caribbean immigrants to moderated book discussions and theatrical productions. In 2012 we brought a homegrown production to our community stage, cheekily titled *The Revolution Was Televised, Too Bad We Were All Online.* We reached across artistic disciplines and combined poetry, sociological texts, rap lyrics, songs, and dance to create that show. We shared the story "Of the Coming of John." We have continued to share our stories and we are not leaving or waiting for when John comes.

Ernest James Wilson III. *Occupation*: Professor. University of Southern California. *Degrees*: AB '70; MA, Univ. of California, Berkeley '73; PhD, ibid. '78. *Email*: ernestw@usc.edu.

African and African American Studies: 2020 to 2060

Twenty years ago Skip Gates asked me to write an essay for the thirtieth anniversary celebration of the Afro-American Studies Department. I had a particular perspective, since I helped draft the original proposal to create it. So I looked back at what we struggled for in 1969, and I looked forward to what 2030 might bring. Here are some further reflections on the three future trends I highlighted back in 2000.

I asked then: How would the Department and other Black Studies programs respond to America's multicultural future; to the role of Black Studies in the rapid rise of a global, digital, and networked knowledge society; and what I called "Creating a New Tradition"? I wrote that "the principal challenge for 2030 is to create a tradition. What will make our Department . . . special, imbued with a consistent specialness" to make us unique . . . " I noted that thirty years into its life, Black Studies at the University was big, rich, talented, and visible, just like most other entities at Harvard. Perhaps we are unique because of our breadth. Combining African Studies and African American Studies yields depth and breadth to both fields, and as a true student of Professor Martin Kilson, I have published in both. But other schools combine those two. Is there something else that we strive to be, that makes us more than big and rich? Is that the tradition we are creating? And perhaps that's quite enough. But what, if anything, makes African and African American Studies at Harvard genuinely notable? I think of the way the Kennedy School of Government, for example, carved itself a unique niche in its field and on campus. Of course, self-definition is a continuing task. Dr. Du Bois's evolving self-definition is evident across his own three autobiographies. I think we owe it to ourselves, and the field, to make a go of it. Seriously wrestling with the question of our unique identity would be, as I wrote twenty years ago, "a good legacy to leave our children's children's children in 2060." So let's get started; That's only forty years away.

But here we are, today, in this strange year, 2020. None of us expected three epochal catastrophes would coincide in this year to rip to shreds our most closely held hopes and expectations. Neither academic nor corporate futurists anticipated that the US economy would experience its greatest decline since the Great Depression; that 2020 would see the largest civil demonstration in the history of the nation, with twenty million Americans in the street; nor that a global health pandemic would run riot through our society, killing hundreds of thousands, especially striking people of color. All on the doorsteps of a hugely contentious presidential election that most see as an inflection point for the future of democracy and race relations in America.

Once again, how will the Department in specific, and Black Studies more broadly, stand up and contribute our own particular critical thinking, and especially our actions, to keep fighting for so much we have struggled for as strangers in this strange land? We need to get started, to shape our future so this land can become the land we know it can be, and must be, for all Americans.

JOHN HARRIS WOODY. *Occupation*: Vice President, Talent and Culture, Boom Supersonic. *Degrees*: AB '03. *Email*: johnhwoody24@gmail.com.

My times as an Afro-American Studies concentrator were incredible. To this day, I remember each of Cornel West's lectures, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s meditations on the signifying monkey, Jamaica Kincaid's insights on Thomas Jefferson, and the incredible canon of literature I was exposed to throughout my time as an undergrad. It raised my consciousness in immeasurable ways about issues of race and class not just in the United States but globally. And as someone who grew up in the South, it opened my eyes to the visceral truths that made Zinn's statement that history is written by the winners so resonant.

I was often asked during that time period why I chose to concentrate in Afro-American Studies and the answer was always easy for me. There wasn't a moment in which the classes weren't interesting to me, the readings weren't inspiring and eye-opening, the professors weren't impressive, and the learnings weren't obviously applicable to the life I wanted to live and the sensibilities I wanted to have throughout life as a human being.

What's been most fascinating is how often the lessons have since been applicable. They first became applicable during the time period I dedicated to nonprofit endeavors both in the US and in West Africa. To see young African American children who'd grown up in poverty connect their love for their favorite hip hop artists' cadences to the lyrical and inspiring messages of MLK Jr. and Malcom X's speeches, and see how the heritage and culture they loved had been influenced, was priceless. I loved every minute of designing those curriculums and the rich learnings I could draw upon. Even as a professional working in financial services for years, to be able to pull from strategies in *Radio Free Dixie* to business communication strategies and to think about how to inspire young professionals to fight for what they believed in and wanted from their corporate culture was incredibly helpful. The overall sensibilities of sacrifice for the greater good, for driving to goals "by any means necessary" aren't just clichés to pass along—they hold a deep and inspiring place for me, and a powerful origin.

Of late, it's been even more relevant. As an HR leader operating in the face of a new age of social unrest and increased consciousness around issues of race and police brutality, I feel equipped in a different way relative to others to understand, empathize, and ideate within my own company strategies for diversity, inclusion, and social awareness. Recent events have saddened me and,

frankly, what has saddened me as well has been the realization that so many are only now admitting to themselves that these issues have long been present. I'm thankful for what (hopefully) feels like a sea change in consciousness amongst so many, and thankful that I can be a resource to those who are only starting their journey in that dimension.

Simply put, I'm proud to have been a part of the Af Am Department at Harvard, especially during the early 2000s, which were such a special time in the Department's history, and I am thankful every day for the experiences and learnings that have shaped my thinking since.

ZACHARY WORTMAN. *Occupation*: Chief of Staff. North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. *Degrees*: AB '14. *Email*: zackwortman@gmail.com.

KATHERINE ZACARIAN. *Occupation:* Technologist, The Earth Species Project. *Degrees:* AB '04. *Email:* katie.zacarian@post.harvard.edu.

Arriving at Harvard as a young student-athlete, I felt like flotsam in a giant sea. On the field, I knew the potential of teammates pushing and supporting each other. I saw the power of coaches cultivating new mindsets for us to achieve new levels. I thrived, yet in the classroom, I hadn't yet found my intellectual journey.

My original concentration at Harvard (Gov) had stemmed from a fascination that has gripped me my entire life: how do we design products, systems, and whole societies that are better for everyone who inhabits them? Everything clicked one day when I trudged through the winter slush to Harvard Hall to shop Professor Jennifer Hochschild's course, "Race, Ethnicity, and Politics in the United States."

Professor Hochschild's discussion of political structures and racial inequality struck an immediate chord. In the vast tapestry of American history, she deftly and comprehensively outlined the thread of indelible systemic racism woven throughout. When I left her class that day, spring had begun (at least metaphorically). Professor Hochschild's class set in motion a course of concentration that would come to affect the rest of my life and career: by literal spring, I had committed full-time to African and African American Studies.

That first year as a concentrator was like falling in love. I remember the sense of rapture induced by Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood: Or, The Hidden Self*, explored with Professor Glenda Carpio. Professor Marcyliena Morgan's interdisciplinary perspective of hiphop music revealed new depths of color and unknown shapes in the beloved art form of my youth. Professor J. Lorand Matory introduced me to the complexities and considerations of cultural relativism, something that would later take on great practical relevance throughout my career.

I also remember a grand, ellipsoid-shaped table of fine-grained wood around which our entire class could sit and see each other. The table was a center for dialogue and exploration—considerations and counter-considerations all with a shared goal. To encourage each other to think more fully. Without the support I found around that table, in all of my Af Am courses, and atop the stairs in the Barker Center, it's unlikely that I would have felt the confidence to engage in the many experiences that would come to define my academic experience at Harvard.

One discussion, in particular, stands out. With Professor Tommie Shelby, we explored the ethics of racial justice and cultural authenticity. Around that massive table, likely hewn from a tree that lived during a very different historical moment, now accommodated all of us, literally an equal plane as we wrestled collectively through the lived experience and philosophical considerations of such important topics. Passion and sense of community led me to African and African American Studies; these powerful discussions honed that passion into purpose and (importantly) gave it an authentic voice.

In the intervening years, my course notes from those classes have become a vital reference tool in decision-making. The training I received as an Af Am concentrator gave me the frameworks necessary to approach complex issues, which throughout my career at startups, has been often.

In particular, I remember drawing from Professor Kimberly DaCosta's "Changing Concepts of Blackness" and Professor Matory's "The Other African Americans" during some of the early days designing products at Facebook, a platform for people to express identity on a newly global internet. Today, I am a partner at a technology nonprofit where we use novel artificial intelligence approaches to decode animal communication and language. Our purpose is to drive culture change and mobilize political action to shift human beings' extractive relationship with our co-species on Earth. Perilous and unsustainable environmental policies and practices, like all social justice issues, are deeply intertwined with many others. I am continually re-examining the themes of our work together in AAAS to imagine and actualize effective action.

The last Af Am lecture I attended was in Sever Hall only a few years ago. Instead of Professor Henry Louis "Skip" Gates or Professor Cornel West at the lectern, as I remembered from undergraduate days, it was now-Professor Brandon Terry '05, a friend and classmate who had enthralled me years before with every discussion around that massive table. Seeing your contemporaries teach the next generation, you can't help but reflect on the future. So much has changed, so many students empowered by this incredible department, and thank goodness, because there is so much more work to do.