

Langston Hughes Center Newsletter

March 2013

Hello Everyone,

This is the e-newsletter for the Langston Hughes Center (LHC). The Langston Hughes Center (formerly the Langston Hughes Resource Center, founded in 1998) is an academic research and educational center that is building upon the legacy and creative and intellectual insight of African American author, poet, playwright, folklorist and social critic, Langston Hughes. The Center coordinates, strengthens and develops teaching, research and outreach activities in African American Studies, and the study of race and culture in American society at the University of Kansas and throughout the region. Each month the LHC sends out an e-newsletter to inform you about upcoming events at KU and throughout the region, as well as provide you with any recent news of general interest to those concerned with the work of the Center.

See below for the latest LHC e-newsletter. More information about our events and programs can be found on our website at <http://www2.ku.edu/~lhcaas> . Please feel free to pass this information along to friends and colleagues.

In this newsletter:

1. **Upcoming Events:** James Steele; Jesse B. Semple Brownbag; Charlotte Pierce Baker; Houston Baker; Symposium on Diversity
2. **In the News:** LHC Blog; African American Literary Blog; Emmett and Trayvon; Heller Study; Black Studies; Lincoln Again; Jamaica Kincaid; Forgotten Abolitionists; Ella Baker; Eslanda Robeson; Rosa Parks; Voter Registration; Jamaica Kincaid; Rosa Parks; HBCU's

Sincerely,

Shawn Leigh Alexander
Associate Professor of African and African-American Studies
Director, Langston Hughes Center
University of Kansas

Upcoming Events

James Steele

What: *"The Betrayal of the American Dream"* – James Steele, contributing editor, *Vanity Fair*

When: March 6 @ 7:00 – 8:00 pm

Where: Kansas Union, Woodruff Auditorium (University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus)

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Student Union Activities

For More Information see: <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2013/mar/04/pulitzer-winning-investigative-journalist-speaking/>

Jesse B. Semple Brownbag Series

What: "*The Marley Hypothesis: Racism Denial and Epistemologies of Ignorance*" – Phia S. Salter, Texas A&M University and Glenn Adams, University of Kansas

When: Monday, March 11 @11:30 am - 1:00 pm (11:30 –12:00 social period and brownbag lunch)

Where: Langston Hughes Center, Room 1, Bailey Hall (University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus)

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Langston Hughes Center

About The Jesse B. Semple Brownbag Series: The Jesse B. Semple Brownbag, every second Monday of each academic month, is an informal forum for the African Americanist community and those who are interested in the general study of race, culture, and American society. The forum discusses activities on campus, historical and current issues related to race, and culture and social relations in America. It offers opportunities for visiting scholars, KU faculty, and KU students to present their ongoing research. Langston Hughes' character Jesse B. Semple, or Simple first appeared in the *Chicago Defender* on February 13, 1943. Semple became a voice, often in comic or satirical fashion, through which Hughes could comment on international relations, current events and the everyday concerns of the African American community.

Charlotte Pierce-Baker

What: "*The Fragile Life: A Mother's Story of a Bipolar Son*" – Charlotte Pierce-Baker, Vanderbilt University

When: March 26 @ 4:30 pm

Where: Kansas Union, Jayhawk Inc. (University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus)

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Department of English, The Project on the History of Black Writing, and Jayhawk Inc

Houston Baker

What: *"Why are Black Public Intellectuals Afraid of the Ocean: Slave Ships, Diaspora Literacy, and Cultural Erasures in the Age of Obama"* – Houston Baker, Vanderbilt University

When: March 27 @ 5:00-7:00 pm

Where: Kansas Union, Big Twelve Room (University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus)

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Department of English, The Project on the History of Black Writing

Spring Symposium on the Scholarship of Diversity

What: *"3rd Annual Spring Symposium on Scholarship of Diversity"* – Keynote Speakers: James Johnson, UNC Chapel Hill and Nancy Cantor, Syracuse University

When: March 28 @ 8:00 am – 1:30 pm

Where: Kansas Union

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO ALL KU Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Students with RSVP <http://www.diversity.ku.edu/node/45>

Sponsors of this Event: University of Kansas Office of Diversity and Equity, the Office of the Provost

For more information click on the following link: <http://www.diversity.ku.edu/>

In The News

Langston Hughes Center Blog

See news entries related to African American Studies at the following link: <http://afs.ku.edu/~lhcaas/The%20LHC%20Blog/The%20LHC%20Blog.html>

African American Literary Blog

See entries from various authors at the following link: <http://projecthbw.blogspot.com/>

Emmett and Trayvon: How Racial Prejudice Has Changed in the Last 60 Years

Elijah Anderson | February 28, 2013 | *Huffington Post Black Voices*

Separated by a thousand miles, two state borders, and nearly six decades, two young African American boys met tragic fates that seem remarkably similar today: both walked into a small market to buy some candy; both ended up dead.

The first boy is Emmett Till, who was 14 years old in the summer of 1955 when he walked into a local grocery store in Money, Miss., to buy gum. He was later roused from bed, beaten brutally, and possibly shot by a group of white men who later dumped his body in a

nearby river. They claimed he had stepped out of his place by flirting with a young white woman, the wife of the store's owner. The second boy is Trayvon Martin, who was 17 years old late last winter when he walked into a 7-Eleven near a gated community in Sanford, Fla., to buy Skittles and an iced tea. He was later shot to death at close range by a mixed-race man, who claimed Martin had behaved suspiciously and seemed out of place. The deaths of both boys galvanized the nation, drew sympathy and disbelief across racial lines, and, through the popular media, prompted a reexamination of race relations.

Read the full article at the following link: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elijah-anderson/emmett-and-trayvon-how-racial-prejudice-b-2773439.html?utm_hp_ref=black-voices

Heller Study Finds Public and Institutional Polices Widen Racial Wealth Gap

| February 27, 2013 | *Brandeis Now*

New research shows the dramatic gap in household wealth that now exists along racial lines in the United States cannot be attributed to personal ambition and behavioral choices, but rather reflects policies and institutional practices that create different opportunities for whites and African-Americans.

So powerful are these government policies and institutional practices that for typical families, a \$1 increase in average income over the 25-year study period generates just \$0.69 in additional wealth for an African-American household compared with \$5.19 for a white household. Part of this equation results from black households having fewer opportunities to grow their savings beyond what's needed for emergencies.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://www.brandeis.edu/now/2013/february/wealthgap.html>

Read the full report here: <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/Author/shapiro-thomas-m/racialwealthgapbrief.pdf>

Goodbye Black Studies!

Cecil Brown | February 26, 2013 | *Black Agenda Report*

"What do you have planned for February 1?"

I was sitting across from the very attractive new African-American chair at UC Berkeley, the recently installed replacement for Charles Henry, who retired last July, after some thirty years as professor and chair.

She repeated it. "*What do we have planned for February 1?*"

She didn't know what I was talking about, yet she surmised that it was an important event coming from an African American male over the age of 60.

Why is February 1, 1960 important? From her smirking and eye-cutting, I can tell she senses that it was *significant* for African-Americans (something that you are *supposed* to know), but she is not sure.

The fact that Feb 1, 1960 is vague to her, and still vivid to me, indicates an important generation gap. Why is this date so significant to Blacks who are over forty and so negligible to those under forty?

I grew up under segregation and she did not. (How soon we forget!). This historical amnesia is symptomatic of a crisis in black education.

With the continuing decline of African American enrollment at U C Berkeley, and from other UC campuses, particularly UCLA, African American departments have made a shaky shift from black-centered departments to post-racial-centered ones. In this shift, a white professor has more opportunity and respect than a Black professor from the Sixties – as I was about to discover.

At U C Berkeley, where the non-black population is about 35,899, the black students were only 2.9% in the fall of 2011 and only 3.4% in the fall of 2012 — 130 and 143, students respectively. Before the passing of Prop. 209 (that forbade race as a consideration for admissions) black enrollment had been as high as 20%. At one point in its turbulent history, the African American studies actually attracted Black students, but with the decline of the students being admitted, came the decline of the department's enrollment.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://blackagenda.com/content/goodbye-black-studies>

Lincoln Again

Manisha Sinha | February 26, 2013 | *History Workshop*

The “Lincoln industry,” through which Abraham Lincoln has become the most-written about American, used to be confined to historians and other writers. But between the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth in 2009 and the sesquicentennial of the Emancipation Proclamation in 2013, a period during which the nation’s first black President continuously paid homage to the sixteenth President, Lincoln has come to reign unchallenged in popular culture too, nowhere more so than in Steven Spielberg’s *Lincoln*, which was considered by many an Oscar favorite. Perhaps historical criticism has proven to be a kiss of death for the film’s chances.

Hollywood has long made movies about Lincoln and the Civil War, few of which have reached the blockbuster status of Mr. Spielberg’s version. Those “historical” films that became legends owed their inspiration more to contemporary prejudices than to history. The cinematically accomplished yet historically pernicious [The Birth of a Nation](#) and [Gone With the Wind](#) seemed to vindicate Plato’s warning of the seductive power of art, a world of shadows, to obscure truth. One can only shudder at the arrival of a mini-series based on right-wing, Fox-talk-show-host Bill O’Reilly’s [Killing Lincoln](#), which is riddled with errors. Civil War historians have a love-hate relationship with movies and television series that poach on their turf. We mostly admire the path-breaking series on slavery, [Roots](#), and the movie [Glory](#). Despite taking some artistic license with facts, they, we all agree, served history well. On the other hand, the neo-Confederate [Gods and Generals](#), like the cause it champions, belongs to the dustbin of history.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/lincoln-again/>

Jamaica Kincaid

| February 23, 2013 | *New Yorker* / *PRI*

When Jamaica Kincaid was growing up on Antigua, she never dreamed of moving

But misfortunes in her family led her to leave in the 1960s, when she was a teenager. She came to New York to work as a nanny. Before too long, her short stories were being published in the Paris Review and The New Yorker.

Kincaid was the "it girl" of the literary scene.

Kincaid's work (Annie John, Lucy, Autobiography of My Mother) has often dealt with her Caribbean upbringing, but her new novel, *See Now Then*, is set in North Bennington, Vt. — the town where Kincaid has lived for many years. It's the story of Mrs. Sweet, a mother with two grown children in a marriage that's gone very sour.

Many particulars of the book — the town, the gardening, the Caribbean upbringing, the unsuccessful composer, the dissolving marriage — resemble Kincaid's real life, but she insists *See Now Then* is not autobiographical.

"I wasn't thinking of myself, I was thinking of all sorts of larger things," she said.

The book is both poetic and fragrant, while at the same time a little other-worldly and ruthlessly and shockingly unsentimental.

"It's possible it's influenced by where I spent my formative years which is incredibly beautiful, but in which some rather brutal things happened in the world after 1492," Kincaid said.

Read the full article and listen to the interview at the following

link: <http://www.pri.org/stories/arts-entertainment/immigrant-author-discusses-winding-road-from-caribbean-to-pages-of-the-new-yorker-13064.html>

The Forgotten Emancipationists

Manisha Sinha | February 24, 2013 | *NYTimes*

On the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, discussion over who freed the slaves, fueled by movies like "Lincoln," have become commonplace. While historians have debated the relative roles of Abraham Lincoln and the slaves themselves in the coming of emancipation, few have paid attention to the abolitionists, the forgotten emancipationists in the story of black freedom.

Listen to the program or read the transcript at the following

link: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/24/the-forgotten-emancipationists/>

Ella Baker and the Limits of Charismatic Masculinity

Pascal Robert | February 21, 2013 | *Huffington Post*

In perhaps one of the most important biographies of a civil rights leader published, Professor Barbara Ransby has conveyed the epic life and struggle of a woman whose sheer skill, leadership, and ability to mobilize the marginalized and dispossessed to full participation in their fight for human dignity is almost unprecedented in American history. In her book, *Ella Baker & The Black Freedom Movement*, Professor Ransby documents the life of Ella Baker, a black woman born to a middle-class family in North Carolina in 1903 who, after witnessing the staunch spiritually based dedication of her mother to serving the poor in the South, transforms into a sheer force of will that worked with all the major civil rights organizations of her time, and helped mobilize to create two of the most crucial to the Civil Rights Movement: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Before we continue to heap a single praise or Hosanna to men like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Wyatt T. Walker, Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, Thurgood Marshall, W.E.B. Du Bois, or any of these other gentlemen we idolize as embodiments of masculine heroism, we should know about one woman, of many, who had more wisdom, courage, and vision than almost all of them: Ms. Ella Baker.

Read the full article at the following link: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pascal-robert/ella-baker-and-the-limits_b_2718608.html

Remembering Eslanda Robeson

Barbara Ransby | February 12, 2013 | *Democracy Now*

In a Black History Month special, we remember the lives of the legendary civil rights activist, singer and actor Paul Robeson and his wife Eslanda, whose story is not as well known. One of the most celebrated singers and actors of the 20th century, Robeson was attacked, blacklisted and hounded by the government for his political beliefs. Eslanda Robeson, known by her friends as "Essie," was an author, an anthropologist and a globally connected activist who worked to end colonialism in Africa and racism in the United States. We're joined by historian Barbara Ransby, author of the new biography, "Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson."

Watch the segment and the transcript at the following link: http://www.democracynow.org/2013/2/12/remembering_the_overlooked_life_eslanda_robeson

Rosa Parks

Jeanne Theoharis | February 4, 2013 | *Democracy Now*

Born on Feb. 4, 1913, today would have been Rosa Parks' 100th birthday. On Dec. 1, 1955, Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her act of resistance led to a 13-month boycott of the Montgomery bus system that would help spark the civil rights movement. Today we spend the hour looking at Rosa Parks' life with historian Jeanne Theoharis, author of the new book, "The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks." Often described as a tired seamstress, no troublemaker, Parks was in fact a dedicated civil rights activist involved with the movement long before and after her historic action on the Montgomery bus. "Here we have, in many ways, one of the most famous Americans of the 20th century, and yet treated just like a sort of children's book hero," Theoharis says. "We diminish her legacy by making it about a single day, a single act, as opposed to the rich and lifelong history of resistance that was actually who Rosa Parks was." We also air audio of Rosa Parks in her own words. In the midst of the boycott in April of 1956, she spoke to Pacifica Radio about the action she took.

Watch the segment and the transcript at the following link: http://www.democracynow.org/2013/2/4/on_rosa_parks_100th_birthday_recalling?autostart=true

Voter Registration Has an Ugly History, and Some Want to Revive It

Brentin Mock | February 4, 2013 | *Colorlines*

Despite the clear fail of voter suppression efforts and the strong resolve of voters last year, rightwing forces are still [determined to make voting harder](#). And despite the clear need for [modernizing voter registration](#), conservative election officials are zeroing in on the registration process as a place to achieve their goals, by requiring proof of citizenship and adding unnecessary criteria for who can be registered and when.

At a recent Heritage Foundation panel, some of the biggest opponents of voting rights lined up to [decry modernizing voter registration](#), calling it a "threat." The moderator, the voter

fraud wolf-crier [Hans von Spakovsky](#), said solutions like universal voter registration and Election Day registration invite fraud and allow “non-citizens” to vote. There remains no evidence of ineligible voters throwing an election, or people from another country defrauding an outcome, or for that matter of meaningful incidents of any of the fraud these folks continue to insist exists. Still, at the panel [Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach](#) proclaimed “aliens” are stealing our votes and invading our voter rolls.

Read the full article at the following

link: http://colorlines.com/archives/2013/02/do_we_even_need_voter_registration.html

"Our Sassy Black Friend" Jamaica Kincaid

| February 4, 2013 | *Mother Jones*

Jamaica Kincaid's office at [Claremont-McKenna college](#), where she is a literature professor, is filled with hints of her political leanings. There's an Obama mug, a statuette of the Lincoln memorial, and—“just for provocation,” she insists—a miniature bust of Karl Marx. When I showed up to interview her a few weeks before the election, and the topic inevitably arose, Kincaid paused abruptly and looked down at her outfit in mock horror. “I'm not wearing my Obama T-shirt!” she exclaimed. “I rushed out of the house! This is serious—it's a talisman. I wear it every day.”

Her political sensibilities are not surprising, given the prominence of class and race in her work, not to mention her personal history. Born Elaine Potter Richardson in colonial Antigua, Kincaid came to the United States at 16, sent by her cash-strapped family to work as an au pair in Scarsdale, the tony New York City suburb. By 25, Kincaid had landed a staff writer job at *The New Yorker*, where she would remain for 20 years. Now 63, she has churned out a dozen books—including *Annie John*, *Mr. Potter*, and *Autobiography of My Mother*—hauled in countless awards, and, to top it off, has stayed startlingly hip: She's hooked on *Game of Thrones* and *Homeland*, and when her cellphone goes off, the ringtone is Jay-Z and Kanye's “Ni**as in Paris.”

Out next week, her new book, *See Now Then*, reveals just how current she really is. Her first novel in nearly a decade, it is very loosely based on the dissolution of her marriage to composer Allen Shawn (son of William, former editor of *The New Yorker*.) It's a stark, modern anatomy of married life that packs in everything from a cross-dressing neighbor to a Nintendo-junkie son. In our wide-ranging chat, Kincaid talked about her motherly shortcomings, converting to Judaism, and her brief career singing backup for a celebrity drag queen.

Read the full interview at the following

link: <http://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/02/interview-jamaica-kincaid-see-now-then>

Rosa Parks: "I had been pushed as far as I could stand"

Jeanne Theoharis | February 2, 2013 | *Salon*

“Whites would accuse you of causing trouble when all you were doing was acting like a normal human being instead of cringing,” Rosa Parks explained. “You didn’t have to wait for a lynching.” Such were the assumptions of black deference that pervaded mid-20th century Montgomery, Ala. The bus with its visible arbitrariness and expected servility stood as one of the most visceral experiences of segregation. “You died a little each time you found yourself face to face with this kind of discrimination,” she noted.

Blacks constituted the majority of bus riders, paid the same fare, yet received inferior and disrespectful service — often right in front of and in direct contrast to white riders. “I had so much trouble with so many bus drivers,” Parks recalled. That black people comprised the majority of riders made for even more galling situations on the bus. Some routes had very few white passengers yet the first 10 seats on every bus were always reserved for whites. Thus, on many bus routes, black riders would literally stand next to empty seats. Those blacks able to avoid the bus did so, and those who had the means drove cars. Black maids and nurses, however, were allowed to sit in the white section with their young or sick white charges, further underscoring the ways that bus segregation marked status and the convenience of white needs, and did not simply regulate proximity.

Because Montgomery saw itself as a more cosmopolitan city than some of its Southern neighbors, signs or screens separating the black and white sections were no longer used. It was a “matter of understanding [of] what seats we may use and may not use,” Parks explained, with the power and discretion, particularly over the middle seats, “left up to the driver.” “The bus driver could move colored people anywhere he wanted on the bus,” Nixon reiterated, “because he was within his rights under a city ordinance.” The arbitrariness of segregation, the power and place it granted white people, was perhaps nowhere more evident than on the bus.

Read the full article at the following

link: http://www.salon.com/2013/02/03/rosa_parks_i_had_been_pushed_as_far_as_i_could_stand/

Challenges of Historically Black Colleges

Mike Krings | February 1, 2013 | *KU News*

A journalist’s job is to tell the stories and document the history of a community as it happens. Jerry Crawford II, assistant professor of journalism at the University of Kansas, is working to determine how historically black colleges and universities continue to educate future journalists while facing the challenges that all higher education must endure, in addition to several unique problems that threaten the schools’ very existence.

Crawford has been presenting his research into how historically black colleges and universities, commonly referred to as HBCUs, achieve or seek accreditation in light of the unique challenges they face. Declining state and federal funding, high teaching loads, pressures from state governments, lack of tenure and high turnover are among the challenges he found.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://www.news.ku.edu/2013/01/31/journalism-professor-explores-unique-challenges-historically-black-colleges>

If you would like to unsubscribe send an email to lhcaas@ku.edu to let us know, and we'll remove you immediately.

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