



*Africana Studies
and the
Future of Freedom:*

The Larry H. Mamiya Memorial Conference
Celebrating 50 years of
Africana Studies at
Vassar College

WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Friday, November 1 –
Sunday, November 3, 2019



AS OF 10/24/19 SUBJECT TO CHANGE

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1

3:00pm

Check-in for Conference, VILLARD ROOM, MAIN BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR

4:00pm

Tribute to Larry H. Mamiya and remarks by Stacey Floyd Thomas '91, Associate Professor of Ethics and Society, Vanderbilt University Divinity School followed by a performance of the UJIMA Singers

VILLARD ROOM, MAIN BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR

4:20-6:10pm

Directors' Panel: "Between Reparations and Resilience"*

The conservative mantra of "personal responsibility," which discouraged progressive policy intervention by the US government in the late 20th century, shows signs of dissipating with the rhetoric around reparations—while it enjoys primacy among nation-makers in the rest of the globe. Are scholars and students of Africana Studies to make anything of this disjuncture, if indeed one exists? * See page 4 for full description.

Moderator: Blanche Bong Cooke '89, the *Robert E. Harding Jr. Associate Professor of Law, University of Kentucky College of Law*

Panelists: Quincy Mills (*History*), Zachariah Mampilly (*Political Science*), Joyce Bickerstaff P '86 (*Education*), Milfred Fierce (*Emeritus*)

6:15pm Cocktail Reception

ROSE PARLOR, MAIN BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR

7:00-8:00pm

Opening Address

VILLARD ROOM, MAIN BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR

Saidiya Hartman (Comparative Literature-Columbia), MacArthur Genius Fellow, and author of *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*

Moderator and Interlocutor: Mia Mask, *Professor of Film, Vassar College*

8:30pm Reading by Shona Tucker, Associate Professor and Chair of Drama "Growing Wild"

CLASS OF 1951 READING ROOM, THOMPSON LIBRARY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2

9:00am

Check-in for Conference, TAYLOR HALL 102

9:30-11:15am

"What the Dark Past Has Taught Us"

TAYLOR HALL 102

The panelists will discuss intellectual and political legacies that point to the project and promise of freedom and its futures in Africa and the African diaspora.

Moderator: Samson Opondo, *Political Science, Vassar College*

Panelists: Lewis Gordon (*Philosophy*), Nisrim Elamin (*Anthropology*), Sherie Randolph (*History*)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2

11:30am–1:15pm

“When They See Us”

TAYLOR HALL 102

How do words and witnessing work against the grain of structural isolation? This panel considers if and how black bodies and lives register in our experience. What forms of representation map out routes of healing, survival, and care?

Moderator: Jasmine Syedullah, *Assistant Professor, Africana Studies, Vassar College*

Panelists: Jemma Decristo '08 (*Sound Studies*), Glenda Carpio '91 (*English*), Monica Ndounou (*Theater*)

1:30–2:30pm

Alumnae/i Mingle and Lunch

(for all registrants)

2ND FLOOR, GORDON COMMONS (FORMERLY ACDC)

3:00–4:45pm

“The Futures of Freedom”

TAYLOR HALL 102

This panel reflects on the futures of freedom in light of new struggles and new political projects. Panelists address issues ranging from anti-blackness to critiques of U.S. empire.

Moderator: Tyrone Simpson, *Department of English, Vassar College*

Panelists: Silvio Torres-Salliant (*English*), Keisha Khan Perry (*Anthropology*), Lester Spence (*Political Science*)

5:30pm

Matthew Vassar Lecture and Keynote Address

VILLARD ROOM, MAIN BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR

Aminatta Forna (*Novelist*)

Introduction: Ismail Rashid, *History, Vassar College*

7:00pm

Dinner and Dance

ALUMNAE HOUSE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3

10:30am

Jazz Brunch

Zamir Birnbach Trio (*Class of 2020*)

ALUMNAE HOUSE



*** Directors' Panel: "Between Reparations and Resilience"**

(Full description of the Friday afternoon panel)

Since 1989, Representative John Conyers has appealed to his colleagues in Congress annually to begin investigating the prospects of the United States instituting a reparations program that would remedy the exploitation of African slaves during the country's antebellum period and the social persecution and discrimination that U.S. blacks have endured since the practice's abolition. For almost 30 years, Conyers's appeals have failed to gain traction. However, due to the persistent clamor from black intellectuals supporting the initiative—namely Randall Robinson, William Darity, and Ta-Nehisi Coates—the idea of reparations has emerged as a debate item within the Democratic Party as it seeks to nominate a presidential candidate for the 2020 election.

Beyond U.S. borders exists an equally vibrant discourse that seems to counter the local one about reparations. Eminently popular among governance theorists and state-builders is the idea of cultivating resilient societies and peoples. Resilience, a concept that, according to Jonathan Pugh, champions "self-organizing adaptivity" and "empowering subjects to make life choices that better enable them to adapt to the conditions of their lives," aims to chasten governments seeking to institute progressive systemic change for their nations. This framework, Pugh observes, "is not fundamentally about challenging unequal socio-economic relations, but rather about creating resilient subjects." On the surface of things, U.S. and international discourses find themselves functioning at cross purposes.

The conservative mantra of "personal responsibility," which discouraged progressive policy intervention by the United States government in the late 20th century, shows signs of dissipating with the rhetoric around reparations—while it enjoys primacy among nation-makers in the rest of the globe. Are scholars and students of Africana Studies to make anything of this disjuncture, if indeed one exists? Should we view these developments from a temporal lens? Is the United States or African Americans making progressive political headway in ways that other nations and other facets of the African Diaspora remain unable to achieve? Are reparations a sign of U.S. blacks' new orientation toward the idea of liberalism? What factors have seemingly allowed adaptability to become a necessary idea abroad?

