

AFAM News

A Publication of the Institute for African American Studies

Fall 2015



In honor of National Poetry Month. The Institute for African American Studies partnered with GAPS (Graduate and Professional Scholars) to host "The Stoop: An Evening of Spoken Word & Art." With the hard work of coordinator Arlana Henry, president of GAPS, we were able to bring Tony Award Winning Def Poet Georgia Me to join UGA students, community poets, spoken word artist Lyfe, at Ciné for an evening of "wordsmithing."

Surrounding us was the artwork of Broderick Flanigan, owner of the Flanigan's Portrait Studio in East Athens, a space where youth are encouraged and inspired by the beauty of visual culture.

Inside

- Greetings from the Director
- "Standing in Georgia Writing to the World": a visit by Alice Walker
- "I Am Trayvon Martin": AFAM alum and Trayvon Martin family attorney returns to UGA
- ♣ Student Word, Faculty Notes, Do you Know Your History? (quiz)

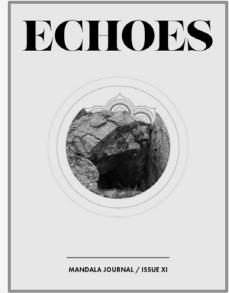
Greetings from the director . . .

The Institute is excited to announce the launch of its new Facebook page. Please be sure to LIKE US. All our events as well as articles of interest to contemplations of black life will be included there. Our Fall lecture series continues this year. In September, UGA Alum and African American Studies major Jasmine Rand, attorney for the Trayvon Martin Family, returned to campus. This fall we also also partnered with the Willson Center to give Pulitzer Prize winning author Alice Walker a hearty welcome to UGA in honor of her being the inaugural Delta Visiting Chair for Global Understanding.

Our faculty continue to do good work. Two of our affiliate faculty debuted new books this fall, Barbara MacCaskill and Ed Pavlic. We held book signings for both at Ciné. We also were fortunate enough to hire a new faculty member, Dr. Amma Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin, Assistant Professor of African American Studies and Theatre and Film Studies. Read on to find a profile of our newest star!

As always we welcome your support in whatever fashion is possible for you, and we look forward to meeting you at one of our events!



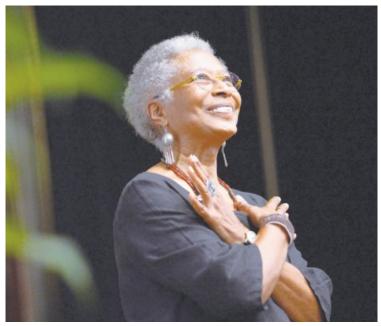


Be sure to access the link to our student journal Mandala, Issue XI at http://mandala.uga.edu.

SHFLTER

Alice Walker, "Standing in Georgia, Writing to the World"

by Valerie Babb



Alice Walker responds to the UGA Chapel audience with a Butterfly greeting to remind of the Butterfly effect, that small events can have large, widespread impacts.

No doubt everyone has a favorite moment from Alice Walker's two-day visit to UGA as the inaugural Delta Visiting Chair for Global Understanding. Mine was listening to her recall the life in Georgia that contributed to making her the woman, writer, and activist that she is. In her talk to a capacity crowd at the University of Georgia Chapel, Walker told of pleasant memories growing up in rural Eatonton where trees, peaches, and the river, were her church.

But she also recalled the not-sopleasant memory of boarding the bus when she left Eatonton to attend Spellman College.

Her instinct was to sit in the front of the bus, but a white woman objected. Walker contemplated showing signs of the civil rights advocate she would become, until she looked out the window and saw her father who had accompanied her to the bus stop to, as she said, send her off to a life he did not understand. She knew that in their segregated world, he would receive the brunt of retaliation should she take a seat in the front. Thinking of him she walked to the back.

It was stories such as this that personalized her visit: her memories of her first trip to Russia as a freshman, or fresh person, and the financial support from members of the Atlanta community that made the journey possible; the connections she made to people in Moscow and Helsinki that made her realize that other whites in the world viewed race differently; and the anecdotes of her driving a car abroad or riding a motorcycle that reminded us that being a Pulitzer Prize winning author does not mean one loses his or her sense of humor.

Walker visited with students from Clarke County, Putnam County (Walker's childhood home), UGA, Spellman, and Emory, and this she later said was the highlight for her, meeting the future. She encouraged them to dream, to be curious, and to think not only of the individual, but of larger society. She participated in an interview at the historic Morton Theatre with Valerie Boyd, Associate Professor of Journalism, Charlayne Hunter-Gault Distinguished Writer-in Residence, and answered questions from the audience. A musical greeting was offered by the Athens Voices of Truth community choir.

At every event Walker emphasized the responsibility we have to one another, and the power of reading. For her, reading was a radical act, an act of liberation, and the route that took her from Eatonton to the world.





Alice Walker and Valerie Babb.

President Morehead Introducing Alice



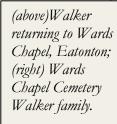
Alice Walker delivering her address "Standing in Georgia, Writing to the World at the UGA Chapel.



From left to right, Karen Villanueva, Beverly Buy-Sheftall, Valerie Babb, Barbara McCaskill, Alice Walker, Michelle Garfield Cook, Dawn Bennett-Alexander, and Valerie Boyd at the 15 October 2015 luncheon honoring Alice Walker.



Wards Chapel Cemetery (left) Alice Walker speaks to community artist and activist Broderick Flanigan backstage at the Morton Theatre.





(above) With Alice Walker, Valerie Boyd who will curate Gathering Blossoms Under Fire: The Journals of Alice Walker (From Alice Walker the Official website).

"Many of you here today no doubt are aware that Alice Walker is an internationally celebrated, best-selling writer, poet, and activist. Her work has been translated into more than two dozen languages, and her books have sold more than fifteen million copies. Many of you probably also know that her awards and honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship; a residency at Yaddo, the artists' community in Saratoga Springs, New York; a Pulitzer Prize; and a National Book Award. What many of you here this afternoon may not be aware of, however, is that some once thought Alice Walker to be cause of the downfall of western civilization and higher education as we know it."

"In the not-too-distant past, the principles of gender equality of cultural inclusivity, so present in her work and actions, were far from universally embraced by those who decided what books should be published, what content should be taught. In the 1980s and 1990s, many self-acclaimed protectors of scholarly and artistic rigor were aggrieved that in their opinions Homer, Aristotle, and Shakespeare were being exiled to make room for Toni Morrison, Ntozake Shange, and Alice Walker. One, in an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, fretted that The Color Purple is taught in more English courses today than ALL of Shakespeare's plays combined."

"Nearly everyone I spoke to about this event eventually said three words to me: The Color Purple. While this is appropriate tribute to a novel that won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the National Book Award for Fiction, and was adapted into a film and Broadway play, Walker's opus includes six other novels, four collections of short stories, four children's books, and volumes of essays and poetry."

"Alice Walker was honored as one of the inaugural inductees into the California Hall of Fame, but her writings reverberate with the southern world of her origins in, Eatonton, Putnam County, Georgia. Throughout her works she draws heavily on her antecedents as a descendant of former slaves and sharecroppers, and her descent from women like her enslaved paternal great-great-grandmother who walked from Virginia to Georgia carrying two of her children on her hips; women like her mother who used her domestic's salary to buy her daughter three key items: a sewing machine to teach self sufficiency; a suitcase to discover that Eatonton was a world, but not the whole world; and a typewriter, a gift for which we are all now very, very grateful. Thank you, Minnie Lou Grant. Georgia will not let go of Alice Walker. In 2007, Walker's archives were opened to the public



at Emory University's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library."

"Walker's ... involvement in the Civil Rights movement foreshadowed a life-long concern for social justice. In 2010 she presented the keynote address at the 11th Annual Steve Biko Lecture at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. In Reykjavik, Iceland she was awarded the Lennon/Ono Peace Walker donated this award to The Margaret Okari Foundation in Kisi, Kenya, an orphanage for the children of AIDS.

Attorney Explains Origins of

"I Am Trayvon Martin"



Attorney Jasmin Rand speaks with guests at reception following her lecture "I am Trayvon Martin: Hoodies Up-How One Case Changed a Nation and Ignited the World" at the UGA chapel.

Some facts of the Trayvon Martin case are vey much part of public knowledge: Martin, a 17-year-old from Florida who was visiting his father, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, former neighborhood watch captain, in 2012. Zimmerman was acquitted in 2013 of murder charges. Other facts are less well-known, such as what were the origins of the phrase "I Am Trayvon Martin."

On September 10, 2015, attorney Jasmine Rand who represented the Trayvon Martin family in their civil suit, explained the history of the phrase at her lecture "I am Trayvon Martin: Hoodies Up-How One Case Changed a Nation and Ignited the World," held at the UGA Chapel.

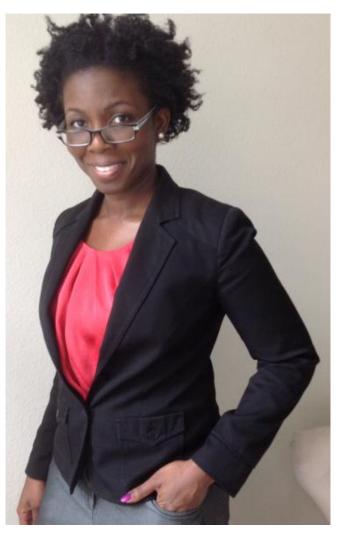
The Institute was particularly delighted to host the event because Rand is an alumna. She graduated from UGA majoring in African American Studies and Political Science, but noted that it was her degree in African American Studies that made her unique among the many applying to law school. She gave moving tributes to past professors Drs. R. Baxter Miller and Sonja Laneheart, and noted that it was the history and rigor of her courses that prepared her for the demands she would face in law school and in her profession. Her path was not always an easy one, rejections from law schools preceded her earning her juris doctor at Florida State University College of Law, and she encouraged students not to give up on their aspirations. Her hard work has paid off in her being Recognized by the Lawyers' Committee For Civil Rights Under Law's National Distinguished Civil Rights Advocate Award.

It was while teaching an undergraduate class at Florida A&M University, and that she gave her students an assignment — to come up with a way to publicize the Trayvon Martin case that would take into account his and his family's point of view. The result was the statement that became a rallying cry: "I am Trayvon Martin." Rand noted, that "The collective conscience of a nation was raised in those words." She continued, "I knew in that moment that my students had learned the lesson I intended to teach them. They were able to put themselves in Trayvon Martin's shoes."

Spotlight on Faculty An Interview with Dr. Amma Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin by Colette Arrand, IAAS graduate assistant

An African American Studies major as an undergrad at Harvard, Dr. Amma Y. Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin credits her early studies in African American history with kindling her passion for telling stories that would otherwise go unexamined in our culture. "It was one of the best decisions of my life," she said," as it opened doors for me, a new way of looking at and thinking of the world, and new ways of doing interdisciplinary work. Without that, I probably wouldn't be here."

Newly arrived to the University of Georgia from an appointment at the University of Colorado Boulder, Dr. Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin (or Dr. Amma, as her students call her) connects the at times very separate worlds of academia and entertainment by fine-tuning her research for wide public consumption. Case in point, her current project At Buffalo, a stage musical about the 1901 Buffalo World's Fair that brings to life over a decade's worth of research on the fair and publicly preformed blackness at the turn of the 20th century. To learn more about this project and what it means to be a "scholartist," our graduate assistant, Colette Arrand, interviewed Dr. Amma.



What's your background? How did you end up coming to UGA?

My family is originally from Ghana, West Africa, but I was born in Tuskegee, Alabama and grew up in Kansas—Manhattan, Kansas. The Little Apple. The Best Kept Secret in the Union. Universities have always been my playgrounds. My parents, they met in Toronto while going to university in Canada, fell in love, moved to Tuskegee—that's where my two sisters and I were born. My father's a professor and my mom (the Einstein of the family) worked at the university as well. My sisters and I grew up literally playing in the halls and the offices of Tuskegee University. When we moved to Manhattan, Kansas, same thing—Kansas State University was

(cont'd from p 8)

our playground. Academia has always been part of my family's journey, but even bigger than academia is just the sense of education as currency. To know more about the world, about who you are. And for our family, it means a lot for us, I think, as an immigrant family living in America.

But if you had asked me, fifteen years ago, even *ten* years ago—maybe even six years ago—would I stay in academia? I would have said, *I'm not too sure*.

It never feels that way, does it?

It never does. But ultimately, I'm all about being in a place where I can do my work. And my work is—I ask two questions: How can one use theater, film, and television to tell history?

... it's great being here in Theater and

Film Studies, and joint with the Institute

to see what fruit will come out of this

appointment.

for African American Studies. I'm excited

And how does performance affect the ways in which members of the African diaspora come to see and understand each other? So everything I do, every

project I take, every article that I write, every book that I think of, every musical or documentary project that I work on are the rehearsal spaces in which I'm pursuing answers to my two questions. And the best-case scenario is when I can answer both questions at once. My work has been every place—I'm both inside and outside academia. Again, exploring how I can tell untold stories from history.

My current project is a musical that we are taking on a commercial run, and are very optimistic that it will make a Broadway run, called *At Buffalo*. It's about the 1901 Buffalo, New York World's Fair. We look at race on display in this crazy fair, and basically blackness on display at the turn of the

20th century in America. It's been an exciting project to develop within a university context and also a professional context, bringing in my students—I bring a lot of my work into my classrooms. For example, it began, really, as my graduate work, my masters work.

It became my dissertation project, and most people turn their dissertations into a book. This argument was better embodied—I was like, this has to be on stage. It's gone everywhere from being workshopped by professional actors to workshopped by NYU Tisch students, to when I had a two-year post-doc at UC Berkeley and I formally taught a course called Black Theater Workshop, which was a historic course by Professor Emerita Margaret Wilkerson. It was great to revive that course again through that project which worked with the undergrads,

grads, and faculty members in trying to create this musical in fourteen weeks from scratch using verbatim archival material. And that experience

confirmed for me that, yes, this has to be a professional musical. From there, I kept some grad students on the project as my main collaborators [UC Berkeley doctoral students playwright Josh Williams and composer Khalil Sullivan], and I took it to CU Boulder, where I had my first faculty position as a professor. CU Boulder was very supportive of the project. I received grants to further develop it and bring on more faculty collaborators, more student collaborators who are still on the project to this day. Now we're taking it out of the university—workshopping it in a professional context.

For me, fundamentally, it's about being in a place to do the work. So now my future work here—I'm excited to see what I do at UGA, with UGA students, because I like to work with my

students. UGA has this idea of experiential learning. I didn't know that that's essentially what I do—I bring students on to professional projects and allow them the opportunity to apprentice in the real world. They just so happen to be able to get course credit for it as well. While they're learning practical skills, they're also learning heavy scholartistic artistic—practices. scholar That scholartist, comes from a colleague named Joe Shahadi. I love that term, because it suggests that there is no separation between the theoretical and practice—that performance studies scholartist, I have to explore my arguments and embody them in different ways. And so it's great being here in Theater and Film Studies, and joint with the Institute for African American Studies, I'm excited to see what fruit will come out of this appointment.

It's rare for a dissertation to be something that's not a book, and even rarer for something that becomes a book—especially in an academic circumstance—to make it beyond the academy. You're hoping for a Broadway run for At Buffalo. What would it mean to bring a musical with such an academic focus to the biggest possible stage?

I think it would mean a lot. There was a recent article ["How I Became Invisible" by Sharon Ullman in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*] written by a historian who brought out this unknown, early 20th century story dealing with queer identity that nobody had found. All of a sudden she gets calls out of the blue from friends that someone has made a play, and the play sounds exactly like her academic book. And then she saw the play, and she was like—*"these are the same arguments that I painstakingly spent hours in the archives finding, and now I'm seeing it on the stage."* She wrote to the playwright to get credit and

thankfully the playwright then acknowledged her, but the idea that these arguments can be embodied and have a successful run-it's already in our fabric. In popular culture, in entertainment circles, just think about it. Every Oscar season, every Tony Awards season, historical themes, historical subject matters, are always award contenders. So what would it look like if scholartists who know the rigor of our research and know the rigor of historical interpretation, were able to have the skillsets to present our research in popular cultural formats and have it be just as scholarly for academia to acknowledge, and just as entertaining for the public to accept and applaud? Imagine such a world. I just think, for me, it's one of the beacons of purpose I see with my work. That that's essentially what I aim to do.

What does that road look like? It is an unpaved road, which makes me excited, to be one of-I don't know how many other people are doing the work the way that I do it—but one of at least several people who see the need for such things. Along the way, that means I have to be a translator. I have to translate to academia, what does it look like to create art and entertainment according to those professional practices? Likewise, for the public, what does it look like to engage in rigorous archival theory presented on a Broadway stage or in a blockbuster film? So that's why with At Buffalo we are showing these Audiences see the archival possibilities. documents; that we are making literal academic interpretations on stage. You see the document and you see the actor interpreting that document in front of you. I love it. I love that challenge.

Scholastically, the stereotype is that an academic does the work on their own. But this is a very collaborative project.

It's highly collaborative, which is what

(Continued from page 10)

professional projects really look like.

Even a book—that eventually gets filtered through an editor.

Exactly. And to show that labor. Also, it's highly pedagogical in that sense. All of us are learning from each other at the same time, and I like that. I like that the classroom has become the space for experimentation—the literal classroom—and also we've flipped the space in which the classroom takes place. It takes place over Skype and Skype production calls. It takes place in our creative team meetings. It takes place in the rehearsal studio. So it's exciting to think of it like that and to stay encouraged, because the response from students who have been on the journey with me—this is the 13th year since I started it, because At Buffalo started when I was

a master's student—so this is 13 years that this project has been in the making. And I started working in earnest with

my students through my teaching beginning in 2011 at Berkeley. So this project has been there for four years now, and the students who have stayed on with the project—like Josh and Khalil and Assistant Musical Director Amy Osatinski [CU Boulder]—can attest to the humbling moments we all have about recognizing that we're all learning together. What does it look like to even consider shifting professor/student dynamics when you think of each other as colleagues and collaborators?

Where does film, theater, and television enter into the conversation for you?

That just comes from the three areas that I love the most, the three media formats that I like presenting my work in the best. As a scholartist, the scholar part of me will theorize about where you see history on stage or screen. So my articles

will and my book projects examine performances that deal with historical subject matters. The artist side, the practical side, that's everything from—I worked with The History Channel during grad school, because I did not get the memo that during the summers I should be drafting my dissertation project. But my questions were, how can I use theater, film, and television to tell history, and how does performance affect the ways members of the African diaspora know and understand each other? So that first question I could answer by working for The History Channel in the summers and as a freelancer over the course of the year. That's where the film and television parts really come in to my practical experience. The theater parts—that's just the medium that I create first. I work in live-ness first. Future projects though, I have some really interesting projects that are in

the pipeline that are film projects, that aren't beginning from a stage because they are film projects. For me, it comes

back to: What is the best format to present this argument? What is the best medium to have this conversation? Different media, different formats, dictate what form those arguments should take.

When a new project first comes to mind, do you immediately know This is a film, this is a play? Or do you have to really think about that?

Intuitively, I know.

. . . what does it look like to engage in

rigorous archival theory presented on a

Broadway stage or in a blockbuster film?

There is that switch, back and forth. It's different to write for film, and it's different to write for the stage.

Absolutely, and it's different writing an episodic series versus a two hour miniseries versus—

AT BUFFALO

Yeah, formats within formats—

—within each genre. Intuitively, I always have a sense of, Well, okay. This needs to be this. At Buffalo is totally a musical because this fair had so much music and musical numbers already, with these crazy attractions. I haven't even explained the project! [More information about Αt Buffalo be found can at www.atbuffalomusical.com.] I knew that. But there were moments when we were writing and trying to figure out the story, because how can you figure out the story when the archive misses some really crucial pieces of evidence that we want to have. How do we write this story verbatim from the archive when we're missing stuff? Sometimes, we're like, maybe this actually is a three part miniseries. Maybe it needs to be televised instead. Those moments come as we're working with the projects. But so far, what I've experienced is that my initial, kind of divine sensibility of what this project should be tends to be accurate. I think the other thing, though, is recognizing that each project, depending on the form that you go after, has different timelines, which, when we talk about [creating these projects] within an academic structure, it takes time to incubate a new musical project. Especially when you're working with multiple collaborators versus when I'm working on a solo book or if I'm not working with anyone, period. Even being courageous enough to follow the argument and what form it wants to take is key to being a scholartist trying to do such work in academia. And reconciling, being able to confront what does that mean on a seven-year tenure line contract. What does that mean? And you may have the play done, but then you still have to find the producer and the production house to mount that play. Or if you have the film done, you still have to find the distributor. I find it a wonderful challenge. I love challenges. I find it invigorating to just follow what Elon Musk says. He says something in his

interview with 60 Minutes to the effect that he knew that when he started Tesla Motors, he knew it would probably be a failure. And the interviewer asked, well, why did you do it? And Elon Musk basically said why not do it? Even if you know that the probable outcome is failure, if it's a good idea, if it's worth it, then why not take the risk? I like such thinking.

You're setting yourself up for challenges on at least three levels. There's tenure, which is daunting enough as is. Then there's sitting down and doing the work. And then all of the work that goes into seeing that work actually get produced for an audience.

I think what I love about that, and I say this about the arts in general, is regardless of anyone's spiritual beliefs, I fundamentally believe—and all artists will acknowledge in some way, shape, or form—that our artmaking is a spiritual practice of some kind. You can always feel something going on, and it's like—Oh! And when you think about it, an actor rehearses and they know their lines, then they get on stage and they forget the lines. Or the lighting cue that worked well in dress rehearsal all of a sudden misses. That, for me, is exercising faith. You're not sure you're sure of what you hope for and you're certain of what you cannot see. All of the best visionaries are like that. They see something that other people cannot see. And they're willing to take the risk to see that manifest. I like such things. Is it difficult at times? Oh yeah. But we need dreamers. We need more dreamers in the world.

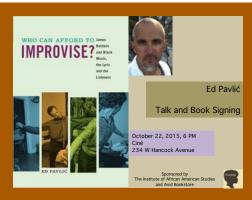
The fact that it's difficult makes it worth doing.

Exactly. We get stronger in the process. We can all use a little bit more strength.

Faculty and Staff Notes

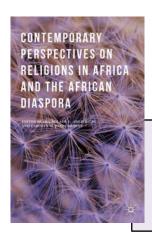
The Institute celebrates the appearance of new books by core and affiliate faculty.

With exacting research, Dr. Barbara McCaskill's Love, *Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory* tells of Ellen Craft, who could pass for white, disguising herself as a gentleman slaveholder, and her husband William accompanying her as a "slave" valet until by train, steamship, and carriage they arrived in Philadelphia





In Who Can Afford to Improvise?
James Baldwin and Black Music,
the Lyric and the Listeners, Ed Pavlić
presents a meditation on the life,
writings, and legacy of James Baldwin
and their relationship to the traditions
of black music, from gospel and blues
to jazz and R&B.



Dr. Carolyn Medine along with Dr. Ibigbolade A. Aderbigbe co-edited *Contemporary Perspectives on Religions in Africa and the African Diaspora*, a collection of essays exploring African and African diaspora religions in a global context.

Other faculty notes . . .

- ❖ Dr. Lesley Feracho was the recipient of a Multicultural Curriculum Award.
- ❖ Dr. Carolyn Medine was the recipient of a Sandy Beaver Teaching Award



From left to right, Dr. Valerie Babb, Mansur Ali Buffins, Dr. Freda Scott Giles, Shaunteri Skinner.

The 2015 winners of the *Lee Roy B. Giles Encouragement Award*, are already doing great things. Shaunteri Skinner received a summer grant from the Honors College to go to New York to conduct research in the Malcolm X papers at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. She has since begun an Honors thesis on this subject as well as a CURO project with Dr. Carolyn Medine. Mansur Ali Buffins has started the Clarke Middle School Black Male Empowerment Program. "It is a free program dedicated to improving the academic performance of Black boys at Clarke Middle School and equipping them with skills and motivation to overcome obstacles to their educational and social success." It includes one-on-one mentoring and tutoring sessions, a speaker series, and visits to among other places, the Georgia Museum of Art and The Russell Library.



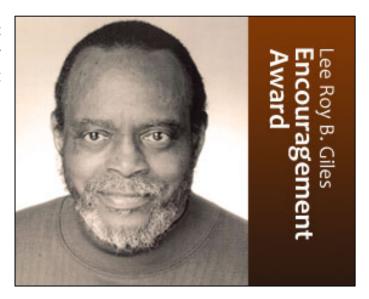
Do You Know Your History?

- ¶ Who was the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize in any category?
- ¶ What country did W. E. B. Du Bois choose for citizenship when he left the United States?
- ¶ What African American's cells are used for research into cancer, AIDS, the effects of radiation and toxicity, and gene mapping, among other uses?
- ¶What Athenian was the first black woman dentist in Georgia? *

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^{*}Answers: 1) Gwendolyn Brooks 2) Ghana 3) Henrietta Lacks from whom HeLa cells are derived. 4) Ida Mae Hiram.

Be sure to visit the Institute for African American Studies Website for information on Lectures and Events

www. Afam.uga.edu

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