

LHC Newsletter

Langston Hughes Center Newsletter

Monday, April 1, 2013

Langston Hughes Center Newsletter

April 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:** John Brown; Jesse B. Semple Brownbag; Langston Hughes Lecture; African Americans in World War II
- 2. In the News:** LHC Blog; African American Literary Blog; Django Unchained; Toni Morrison; Alice Walker; Death Penalty Discrimination; The "other" Chicago; Chinua Achebe; Maya Angelou; Mass Incarceration; Emmett Till; Claudette Colvin

Sincerely,

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

Upcoming Events

John Brown

What: "John Brown: Warrior? Prophet? Terrorist?" – Tony Horwitz and Jonathan Earle

When: April 4 @ 7:30 pm

Where: Liberty Hall, Lawrence Kansas

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Lawrence Public Library

About: Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and noted author [Tony Horwitz](#) is coming to Lawrence! Together with the [Lawrence Public Library Foundation](#) and [Crown Automotive](#), we are thrilled to sponsor this special guest as part of the [1863 Commemorate Lawrence](#) year-long celebration. Mr. Horwitz will be joined on stage by KU Professor of History Jonathan Earle for a lively discussion about John Brown, his life, and his legacy. Mr. Horwitz is the author of several best-selling books, including his most recent, *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War*. [The Raven Bookstore](#) will be selling copies of Mr. Horwitz's books at the event. We expect a big crowd for this event, so plan on coming early. Doors will open at 7:00 pm.

For More Information see: <http://www.lawrence.lib.ks.us/news-events/events/reconstructing-john-brown/>

Jesse B. Semple Brownbag Series

What: *"Pulled Over: Racial Framing of Police Stops"* – Chuck Epp, University of Kansas

When: Monday, April 8 @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.

Langston Hughes Visiting Professorship Lecture

What: *"Occupy This: Political Representation, Prophetic Voices, Popular Culture and the Contested Rhetorical Legacies of the Civil Rights Movement"* – David G. Holmes, Langston Hughes Visiting Professor, Pepperdine University

When: April 9 @3:30 pm

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

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Office of Diversity and Equity & Department of English

For More Information see: <http://www.diversity.ku.edu/resources/langston-hughes>

About The Langston Hughes Visiting Professorship: The Langston Hughes Visiting Professorship was established at the University of Kansas in 1977 in honor of the African American poet, playwright and fiction writer who lived in Lawrence from 1903 to 1916. Over the years, the visiting professorship has attracted prominent or emerging ethnic minority scholars to the university campus, involving a broad range of disciplines and academic departments/schools.

African Americans in World War II Series

What: "The Tuskegee Airmen" Red Tails Reviewed" – Kevin Willmott, University of Kansas

When: April 9 @ 7:30 pm

Where: Dole Institute of Politics

Cost per person: FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Sponsors of this Event: Dole Institute of Politics, KU Libraries, KU Filmworks, Langston Hughes Center, African and African American Studies, Black Student Union

About: KU professor, writer and director, **Kevin Willmott**, looks at the role of African American World War II soldiers through the film lens. Willmott will critically examine the historical and racial significance of the Tuskegee Airmen in the recent film, Red Tails.

Learn More: <http://www.doleinstitute.org/programs-Dole-forum.shtml>

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/>

Django Unchained, or The Help: How "Cultural Politics" Is Worse Than No Politics at All, and Why

Adolph Reed, Jr. | February 25, 2013| [Nonsite.org](http://nonsite.org)

Django Unchained, or The Help

On reflection, it's possible to see that *Django Unchained* and *The Help* are basically different versions of the same movie. Both dissolve political economy and social relations into individual quests and interpersonal transactions and thus effectively sanitize, respectively, slavery and Jim Crow by dehistoricizing them. The problem is not so much that each film invents cartoonish fictions; it's that the point of the cartoons is to take the place of the actual relations of exploitation that anchored the regime it depicts. In *The Help* the buffoonishly bigoted housewife, Hilly, chastises her husband for a bill that would require employers of black domestic

housewife, Holly, obsessively pushes a pet bill that would require employers of black domestic servants to provide separate, Jim Crow toilets for them; in *Django Unchained* the sensibility of 1970s blaxploitation imagines "comfort girls" and "Mandingo fighters" as representative slave job descriptions. It's as if Jim Crow had nothing to do with cheap labor and slavery had nothing to do with making slave owners rich. And the point here is not just that they get the past wrong—it's that the particular way they get it wrong enables them to get the present just as wrong and so their politics are as misbegotten as their history.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://nonsite.org/editorial/django-unchained-or-the-help-how-cultural-politics-is-worse-than-no-politics-at-all-and-why>

Toni Morrison: "Home" Authors at Google

| March 4, 2013 | *Google*

A fireside chat with Toni Morrison, hosted by Torrene Boone from the Google New York office. In her latest book "Home," Ms. Morrison extends her profound take on our history with this twentieth-century tale of redemption: a taut and tortured story about one man's desperate search for himself in a world disfigured by war.

Frank Money is an angry, self-loathing veteran of the Korean War who, after traumatic experiences on the front lines, finds himself back in racist America with more than just physical scars. His home may seem alien to him, but he is shocked out of his crippling apathy by the need to rescue his medically abused younger sister and take her back to the small Georgia town they come from and that he's hated all his life. As Frank revisits his memories from childhood and the war that have left him questioning his sense of self, he discovers a profound courage he had thought he could never possess again. A deeply moving novel about an apparently defeated man finding his manhood—and his home.

Watch the interview at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBDARw5fdrg>

Alice Walker: "I feel dedicated to the whole of humanity"

Alex Clark | March 9, 2013 | *Guardian*

Pratibha Parmar's film *Beauty in Truth*, about your life and work, makes for fascinating viewing: you've done so many different things in so many different places with so many different people. Is that how it feels to you?

I'm still living at least five parallel lives, honestly! I wonder about it. I have no idea how that happens. But, yes, I live in Mexico, I live in Hawaii and I live in northern California and all my life has been like that. It's as if I got all of this energy from ancestors who were not permitted to leave the plantations for 400 years and I got all of their desire to be part of the world.

The film begins with your upbringing in Jim Crow Georgia, one of eight children, the daughter of sharecroppers. Your family had very little money, but you did have an extremely determined mother.

I think many people in my community had very different kinds of mothers: they had mothers who acquiesced in the system of male and white-supremacist domination and my mother never did. She just could not do it. It just wasn't in her.

Read the full interview at the following link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/09/alice-walker-beauty-in-truth-interview>

Research Exposes Racial Discrimination in America's death penalty capital

Ed Pilkington | March 13, 2013 | *Guardian*

Black defendants facing trial in Houston – the death penalty capital of America – are more than three times as likely to face a possible death sentence than whites, new academic research has revealed.

The study, by a criminologist at the University of Maryland, exposes the extent of racial discrimination inherent in the administering of capital punishment in Harris County, the ground zero of the death penalty in the US. The county, which incorporates Houston, Texas's largest city, has carried out 116 executions in the modern era – more than any entire state in the union apart from Texas itself.

Professor Raymond Paternoster of the university's institute of criminal justice and criminology was commissioned by defence lawyers acting in the case of Duane Buck, a death row prisoner from Houston whose 1995 death sentence is currently being reconsidered by the Texas courts.

Paternoster, whose report is based on the latest quantitative methods, looked at 504 cases involving adult defendants who had been indicted for capital murder in Harris County between 1992 and 1999 – the period during which Buck was charged for murdering his former girlfriend, Debra Gardner, and a man called Kenneth Butler. Paternoster whittled down that pool to 20 cases that most closely echoed that of Buck's own in terms of the factors involved in the crime that were likely to incur a death sentence.

He found that of the 21 men, including Buck, seven out of the 10 who were African American were sent by the Harris County district attorney for capital trial, compared with just one of the five white defendants.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/13/houston-texas-death-row-black-inmates>

The Making of the "Other" Chicago

Mary Mitchell | March 19, 2013 | *American Prospect*

January was the deadliest month in Chicago in more than a decade. Forty-two people lost their lives on the city's streets, most of them to gun violence. For 2012, the total number of homicides was 509, of which 443 involved firearms. While most of the shootings could be attributed to gang feuds, innocent people were caught in crossfire that often erupted in broad daylight and on public streets.

Hadiya Pendleton's shooting death, which took place only a week after the 15-year-old honors student performed at the presidential inauguration, is the latest tragedy to reinforce the perception that Chicago is the murder capital of the nation. Pendleton was killed when a gunman opened fire on a group of high-school students gathered in a public park about a mile from President Barack Obama's Chicago home. Two reputed gang members, Michael Ward, 18,

and Kenneth Williams, 20, were charged with Hadiya's murder and with wounding two other teens. Such shootings have become so common in low-income neighborhoods, people are afraid to sit on their front porches.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://prospect.org/article/making-other-chicago>

Sex, Africa, and Chinua Achebe

Ishmael Reed | February 26, 2013 | *WSJ*

Born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, an Ibo village, Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, one of six children, was the son of Anglican Christian missionaries.

He received his degree at University College, Ibadan, which I visited in 1999 and among whose famous alumni are Ken Saro-Wiwa, Christopher Okigbo, and Wole Soyinka. While there I learned that its students fought the dictator Sani Abacha who retaliated against them ruthlessly.

While literary dissent in The United States is often either marginalized or co-opted, many African writers like Wole Soyinka, [Nuruddin Farah](#), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been jailed, threatened with murder or, like Achebe, driven into exile after someone explained to various dictators what they were writing about. Like Soyinka and N'gugi, Achebe was engaged in international affairs. Most notably his criticism of massacres of Ibos during the Nigerian Civil War. The government blamed the writer for participating in a coup, a designation that compelled him to leave the country with his family. He spent years teaching at American universities, among them the University of Massachusetts, the University of Connecticut, and Brown. The last time I saw him was when he received the Phillis Wheatley award from the Harlem Book Fair. He greeted me as his friend and was stoical about the injuries that were the result of a car accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. As Achebe has said, "The Igbo are not starry-eyed about the world."

Read the full article at the following link: http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2013/03/26/sex-africa-and-chinua-achebe/?blog_id=120&post_id=74067&mod=wsj_valetbottom_email

Achebe's passing marks the beginning of the end of an epoch in African writing

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o | March 26, 2013 | *Daily Nation*

I first met Chinua Achebe in 1961 at Makerere, Kampala. His novel, *Things Fall Apart*, had come out two years before. I was then a second year student, the author of just one story, "Mugumo", published in *Penpoint*, the literary magazine of the English Department. At my

request, he looked at the story and made some encouraging remarks.

My next encounter was more dramatic, on my part at least, and would affect my life and literary career profoundly. It was at the now famous 1962 conference of writers of English expression.

Achebe was among a long line of literary luminaries that included Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Eski'a Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane. The East African contingent consisted of Grace Ogot, Jonathan Kariara, John Nagenda and I.

My invitation was on the strength of my short stories published in *Penpoint* and in *Transition*.

But what most attracted me was not my being invited there as 'writer' but the fact that I would be able to show Achebe the manuscript of my second novel, what would later become *Weep Not Child*. It was very generous of him to agree to look at it because, as I would learn later, he was working on his novel, *Arrow of God*. Because of that and his involvement in the conference, he could not read the whole manuscript, but he read enough to give some useful suggestions.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://www.nation.co.ke/oped/Opinion/Achebes-passing-marks-beginning-of-the-end/-/440808/1731102/-/14st6aqz/-/index.html>

My Terrible, Wonderful Mother

Maya Angelou | March 29, 2013 | *Guardian*

The first decade of the 20th century was not a great time to be born black and poor and female in St Louis, Missouri, but Vivian Baxter was born black and poor, to black and poor parents. Later she would grow up and be called beautiful. As a grown woman she would be known as the butter-coloured lady with the blowback hair.

My mother, who was to remain a startling beauty, met my father, a handsome soldier, in 1924. Bailey Johnson had returned from the first world war with officer's honours and a fake French accent. They were unable to restrain themselves. They fell in love while Vivian's brothers walked around him threateningly.

He had been to war, and he was from the south, where a black man learned early that he had to stand up to threats, or else he wasn't a man. The Baxter boys could not intimidate Bailey Johnson, especially after Vivian told them to lay off. Vivian's parents were not happy that she was marrying a man from the south who was neither a doctor nor lawyer. He said he was a dietician. The Baxters said that meant he was just a negro cook.

Read the full article at the following link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/30/maya-angelou-terrible-wonderful-mother>

Black Mass Incarceration

Bruce A. Dixon | March 27, 2013 | *Black Agenda Report*

The short answers are yes, not exactly, not really, and a whole lot, which tells more about the inadequacies of short answers than it does about whether "New Jim Crow" is a really useful

description, and who it's most useful to.

Is it New?

Prisons are certainly not new, and the employment of prisons to enforce a racially unjust social order isn't new either. The post-civil war Black Codes prescribed heavy penalties for all sorts of infractions by African Americans. But the scale of the modern US prison state simply has no precedent. Nobody has ever locked up this many people for as little, for as long. Whatever you want to call the present situation with prisons, prisoners and US society, you have to call it something brand new.

Is it Jim Crow?

Not exactly.

Michelle Alexander's 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow*, was a breakthrough in many ways. It came at a time when just about every African American family knew there was a crisis, when the shadow of prison literally squatted in the homes of hundreds of thousands, but when the black political class --- the gaggle of preachers, politicians and business types we imagine to be our "leaders" lacked even the language to discuss it, apart from tropes inherited from the jailers themselves, like "personal responsibility", and "do the crime, do the time."

Read the full article at the following link: <http://blackagendareport.com/content/black-mass-incarceration-it-new-it-jim-crow-prison-industrial-complex-real-and-what-differen>

Old Newspapers Shed New Light on Emmett Till Murder

Russell Lewis | March 30, 2013 | *NPR*

New details about one of Mississippi's most infamous murders are coming to light — more than a half-century later. The death of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy who allegedly whistled at a white woman, helped spark the civil rights movement.

Read the full article and listen to the story at the following link: <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/31/175808536/archival-find-could-shed-new-light-on-emmett-till-murder>

The Other Rosa Parks

| March 29, 2013 | *Democracy Now*

At a ceremony unveiling a statue in her honor last month, President Obama called Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus a "singular act of disobedience." But nine months before Parks' historic action, a 15-year-old teenager named Claudette Colvin did the very same thing. She was arrested, and her case led to the U.S. Supreme Court's order for the desegregation of Alabama's bus system. Now 73, Claudette Colvin joins us for a rare interview along with Brooklyn College Professor Jeanne Theoharis, author of *"The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks."* Theoharis says Parks' act of defiance may not have happened if not for Colvin's nine months before. Colvin says learning about African-American history in school inspired her act. "I could not move, because history had me glued to the seat," she recalls telling the bus driver and the police officer who came to arrest her. "It felt like Sojourner Truth's hands were pushing me down on one shoulder and Harriet Tubman's hands were pushing me down on another shoulder."

Watch the story and read the transcript at the following link: http://www.democracynow.org/2013/3/29/the_other_rosa_parks_now_73

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