

Anna Howard Shaw Center

NEWSLETTER

Special Edition:

BLACK WOMEN'S LIVES MATTER

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Dear Friends of the Anna Howard Shaw Center

By Samantha Roebuck

For me, what the kitchen is at home, the Anna Howard Shaw Center is at STH. It's the place where people congregate relax, eat(!), work and talk – often at the same time. It has been a life-saving and life-sustaining space within the school, providing unofficial counselling, pastoral care, engaging discussion, a comfy napping space and good natured, (and much-needed) irreverent fun. As great as STH is, there is a lack of communal space that feels warm, leisurely, or home-like. The Shaw Center is the space that breaks this mould. It is the place to meet up with people who are no longer in your classes, or who never have been. It fosters relationships across year groups and programs – even staff and students. I think this is due to a combination of factors: the physical design of the room, the people who work there, their director and the ethos that they foster. The Anna Howard Shaw Center is a space that makes you feel welcome as whoever, whatever, and however you are. It is not an exaggeration to say that I have both wept and laughed here more times than I can remember.

Seminary is hard. Whatever your reason for being here, it is challenging intellectually and existentially. Often the classroom feels like a space of competition and argument. With apologies to my many wonderful male colleagues, it seems to me that conversation is often dominated by a male voice: not only are we studying (to a large extent) texts written, interpreted, published and disseminated by men, it is often (not always) men in the classroom who speak longest and loudest: the conversation often an exchange of contestations, rather than shared exploration. The Shaw Center is different. That is not to say it is a “woman’s” space, which would be problematic in a different way. It is hard to describe but the best I can do is to say that it is a place with a different dynamic, and a unique one at that. The pressures, anxieties and intellectual posturing that come with academic life are absent. That is not to say that there are no intelligent conversations; on the contrary, there are plenty and they can get heated. However, I do propose that in the Center, no one person or ‘group’ holds all the power: the air is very much up for grabs.

While there is much more to the Shaw Center, this intellectual and intimate space has meant much to me, and I can only hope that other students have the opportunity to participate in the work they are doing there. I am extremely grateful to Anna Howard Shaw!

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The Lives of Black Women Matter

By: Choi Hee An, Jordan Zepher, and Kaci Norman

This year, the School of Theology and the Anna Howard Shaw Center are participating in the theme ‘Power, Privilege, and Prophetic Witness.’ We have continued the journey of learning the history and struggles of African American people and seriously engaging with the “Black Lives Matter” movement. On November 5, we partnered with students from the Association of Black Seminarians to co-host their event: “Missing Voices, Daunting Choices: The Erasure of Black Women in Black American Movements,” one of the most powerful events we have witnessed so far. The event originated out of the desire of Jordan Zepher, current staff at the Shaw Center, and Ylisse Bess-Washington, a 2nd year MDiv. Student, to have public spaces to discuss their Black womanhood, and to ask honest and challenging questions with one another. Four powerful guest speakers were invited to participate in this event to share their journeys: Jailyn Gladney, a senior at BU studying sociology and African American studies; Gina Physic, a recent BU graduate with an MA in African American studies, where her research focused on mass incarceration in the United States as it works to uphold statehood ideals; Dr. Saida Grundy, Assistant Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at BU, whose research engages feminist sociology of

The coal mine is America...that is a patriarchal, anti-black America. So when those canaries start singing, nobody wants to hear that because it would haunt them.”

race and ethnicity by looking at the formation of gender within the black middle-class; Dean Pamela Lightsey, Associate Dean of Community Life in BU’s School of Theology, a scholar, social justice activist, and military veteran whose research interests are broad and intersectional. The discussion began with a few questions posed to the panelists before opening up to questions from the larger audience.

Noting the often competitive features that comprise Black womanhood, the first question posed to the panelist asked them to reminisce about the moments they realized they were Black/Black women and the potential of having to choose between these

identities. Dr. Grundy first answered this question, by saying that for her there was

never a point in which her awareness of her identity as a Black woman did not daily shape her interactions, her sociopolitical perspectives, and the perceptions that other people have made of her: “My woman-ness is constituted by my blackness. My blackness is constituted by my woman-ness.” Gina Physic added, “If you’re wearing that hat of ‘I am Black,’ and ‘I am woman,’ there’s a lot of work that needs to be done there, so even if it were possible to say ‘no, I’m just Black’ or ‘just a woman,’ I don’t think it would be worth it.” This question informed the rest of the discussion where both Black and woman identities were held together as something particular that shaped social movements and scholarly engagement.

The next question continued the conversation of competing identities through an exploration of affiliation with either Feminism or Womanism. Because of the way in which Womanism centers conversation on the lived experiences of Black women, taking into consideration race, gender, and class, Dean Lightsey explained that she strongly identifies as a Womanist, “In part because I do believe, when Alice Walker said, ‘Womanist is to Feminist as purple is to lavender,’ that it is a deeper shade.” Lightsey also noted that young social media users have been claiming Womanism because of its focus on a critique of race, where Feminism fails at this task. But this question moved easily into the political realm, and because Feminism is something she can take to “the steps of anybody’s city hall,” Saida Grundy claimed the Black feminist identity, noting that disciplinary differences make an impact on one’s choice to identify as one or the other. Both Physic and Gladney had more loose affiliations with Womanism, indicating that when necessary and helpful, they could claim either identity.

Moderators Jordan and Ylisse then moved the focus for the panelists to the style of Black women’s leadership. Calling out the names of women whose legacies are often left behind, the panelists discussed the erasure of Black women’s leadership from a num-



ber of different angles. Historically, a singular leader has been presented to the public because the public had been conditioned to prize a singular leader over multiple leaders. Physic understands Black women as the ‘canary in the coal mine,’ commenting: “The coal mine is America...that is a patriarchal, anti-black America. So when those canaries start singing, nobody wants to hear that because it would haunt them.” Lightsey points out why we might never hear the canary singing asking the important questions: “Who’s telling this story? How’s the story getting told? Who has control of the story?” Grundy helped us to remember that if we asked the purported leaders of movements who was creating the movement, they would tell a very different story. This discussion of the story of movements has been centered for the panelists in the Black Lives Matter movement and is exemplified through the intentionality of the media’s disguise of the queer black women who began it. But the intentionality of the media is countered with Black Lives Matter’s own intentionality, Lightsey describes, “We will not allow what the public would



want to put upon the movement to dissect, divide, and conquer the movement. So there’s an intentionality to be inclusive in the movement, and to work as a strong group when necessary, and when necessary to recognize the expertise of a particular person at particular times and at particular places.”

The formal panel discussion concluded with an acknowledgement that Black women have been doing the work, not only currently, but throughout history. For Physic, Black women being received in media as role models is exciting and only amplifies what she already asks: “Why would you not want to claim that identity?” Lightsey and Gladney, each in their own way, while acknowledging the good of what is happening, asks us to remember those Black women who came before (whether historically or just this morning) in order to make it possible for Black women to achieve what they are doing today. Grundy reminded the audience that “We [Black

women] literally have been cleaning up this country’s racial and patriarchal mess since we got here, since the entire racial convocation system was founded on our wombs.” For them, it was a mixture of celebrating the ways that Black women are coming into the spotlight after long waits in shadows and acknowledging all the women who remain in the shadows both now and throughout history.

The conversation culminated in a group discussion with the large and engaged audience. Questions were asked from a variety of perspectives challenging the panelists to think of a broad range of solutions to their honest questions. Much of this conversation centered



on the social construction of race and how different groups can respond to their own contexts while also respecting and amplifying the work of Black women. For all the panelists, this sometimes means that white people step aside, do their research, and let Black women tell their stories for themselves. Dean Lightsey explained this by noting that, “This question places the onus on me as a Black person to demonstrate how you ought to do the work of justice. I’m at a point where I want to...put the onus back on the person who asked the question.” In other contexts, it means being aware of the ways oppression will have an impact, regardless, and so being aware that oppression need not stratify because in the end, Black women are all still fighting, and even amidst intersecting oppressions, Black women need to help each other in the midst of a very real and present struggle.

How might a conversation such as this one continue? We were reminded of questions we should be continually asking ourselves, experiences we ought to be remembering and holding as vital, and how each should respond with awareness of both privileges and oppressions within their own context, and humbly hoping to learn from one another. The identities of Black women, while historically erased and made into a singular image, are of course complicated and multivalent. Black women, as told by the panelists, are in the midst of the struggle to be remembered and appreciated for their hard work and often forgotten leadership. At the Anna Howard Shaw Center, we would like to participate in this remembrance and uplifting by continuing to ask hard questions, providing safe spaces for students to be angry, hurt, and joyful, and further the conversation where we are able.

“I’ve been called”: Doing the Work I Was Born to Do

by Rev. June Cooper



I grew up in Newport, Rhode Island, a beautiful seaport city which is home to the world famous Jazz Festival and mansions from America’s Gilded-age. While my family was poor, my sisters and I enjoyed the perks of a higher social status, due to the fact that our father was one of three African American ministers in the city. On numerous occasions I remember that we were invited to the front of the ice cream line, when my Dad wore his clergy collar on Sunday afternoons.

I grew up in a wonderfully ethnically mixed neighborhood where everybody knew my name and I knew theirs. I knew my world was very different from the racially, segregated neighborhoods that we visited when we went to visit relatives in Boston. When we visited my mother’s relatives in the segregated south of the 50s, my sister and I were instructed on to how to act. We were reminded to drink from the “colored” water fountain; it was an odd reminder, but at the tender age of six I clearly understood that lives could be at stake if I chose the “white” fountain. I knew that I was different for sure. Many, if not all of my female, African American peers in the Newport School system were counseled to become licensed in practical nursing. The common expectation was that we would attend the local nursing school at the Newport Hospital, and then we would go to work in the field. It appeared that this was the only option that was available to my peers and me at the time. However, my parents had a very different set of expectations for me. The expectation was that I not only attend college but that I also would graduate and become successful. My family made it very clear that I could become and do whatever I wanted to do. Race would always be a challenge, but it would not deter me.

The church, which was my second home, became a safe haven from the racist white world of the 50s and

This message was loud and clear, and for me it trumped issues of sexism and gender stereotypes that I have experienced in my life. The church, which was my second home, became a safe haven from the racist white world of the 50s and 60s. The church provided a safe community for learning and receiving correction. It was also a place to practice social and emotional skills that would serve me well in the dominant culture. Related and unrelated aunties and uncles grounded me in my racial identity. The message that we all received was that we were Black, beautiful, and that God loves us.

The Civil Rights movement was of great interest to me, and it became critical to my faith formation. I stayed glued to the T.V. and witnessed it all- as if we were there while it was happening. My heart ached for all of the young children and teens that were attacked by white police officers, who were twice the size of their young victims. I remember with great sadness the horror of learning about the four little girls that were killed at the 12th Street Baptist Church as they attended Sunday School. I just could not figure out how someone could intentionally set off a bomb to kill kids that were my age- just because they were Black. On the other hand, Dr. King’s speeches led me to believe that God was with us on this difficult journey and that the “ark of the universe always bends towards justice.” This fueled my passion to work for social justice through teaching and activism. I was too young to participate in the “Civil Right Marches” during the 60s but as soon as I came of age I got busy, not to prove myself as a super Black woman, but to do what God has called me to do in the world. Because I am wrapped in Black skin and live in a racist environment, I have accepted the fact that white privilege operates on many levels: individual, institutional and cultural.

Is it unfair? Yes! Am I angry? Yes! Since I cannot change the color of my skin, I have learned to react to racism in a way that is healthy and whole. I can choose to avoid it and or react to it in fight mode. Both of these reaction can have less than desired consequences. My preference is to react by speaking the truth in love, with the goal of keeping the conversation going and exploring and challenging assumptions and actions. As I reflect on the roles that I have played in the academy and in the various organizations that I have led, my racial

identity has and continues to be in play, because our culture and society continue to judge and determine the self worth of people by the amount of color in their skin. When people look at me, I want them to see me as a woman of color. My hope is that they would own and manage their perceptions and assumptions about people that look like me and then reach out, if they choose, to engage with me so that we can learn about one another with the possibility of creating new understandings and narratives that will serve us well as individuals and as members of the human race. I have experienced racism in all of my work. I have learned that the best way to deal with these situations is to find and connect with people who can be friends and allies. God has always put these people in my path- to serve as a sounding board, coach, and friend, and also to laugh with and cry with when the situation calls for it.

“Rise Up”: A Black Female Scholar’s Journey of Return to Self by Rev. Dr. Sandra Barnes



This past semester, a young woman at the church I attend asked if she could interview me for her Lifespan Development class. She was a college senior, and this class assignment was her final project paper. She sent me the interview questions, and after I responded in writing we later met up for a follow-up in person dialogue. I found some of the questions she asked very interesting, and they gave me an opportunity to deeply reflect on my career as a teacher and an ordained Local Elder in the African Methodist Church. Moving through the memories of my childhood swiftly all the way up to my years of early adulthood, I encountered the high points and low points of my journey as I began to understand how I have navigated the minefield of misogyny in the academy and the church. I agreed to do the interview with the young woman from India, because I believe dialogues like this one bridge the connections between our inter-generation and cross-cultural experiences. Interactions like this one lead to developing authentic relationships and also interrupt stereotyping and misinformation that creates division among people along racial, ethnic, age, and religious lines. This was an opportunity for teaching and learning about the common ground and diverging paths of racial and cultural identities within the United States.

Certainly there were many people in the immigrant church we attend, with very long life stories of whom she could have asked, yet she chose me. In hindsight, the interview process was preparation for me to rise up and take measure of the depth of oppression I experienced as a Black woman in the academy and the church. It gave me a place to reflect on the quality of life I had, based on the choices I made because of racism, sexism, ageism and social class. The one recurring message that kept me alive and pushing back was a message from my Aunt Susie who constantly reminded me that I was a prayer baby. This meant that the women in my family as well as other people in the community were constantly praying for me because my life had purpose. I grew up in Southampton County in Franklin, Virginia at a time when all the Black women I knew called on Jesus for everything. It was not uncommon to hear my grandmother and her friends calling out: “Lord, Jesus, come take this child before I knock her out.” If humming, with hands on hips followed the request, a response from the child in agreement would be: “Oh, help me Jesus!”

I knew the power of Jesus as a blood relative that was never seen but forever present and on call 24/7 as confidante, healer, disciplinary, teacher, and a hiding place. The hyperboles that were spoken by the Black women in my family and community were their attempt to get us to understand the seriousness of the situation. I learned to listen to the intoning voice and read the body language, and I knew that if I did not stop what I was doing I would cross a line of no return. I recalled a memory of my little cousin taking my aunt’s money. She asked if he did it. She told him she would put her hand down his throat and rip his heart out if he ever stole from her again. Those words created such a powerful image in my mind that I knew I would never lie



or steal. I believed she could do it because of her relationship with Jesus. She walked out the room talking to Jesus. Here in lies the seed that was planted, that Jesus would never leave me alone.

Growing up, Jesus was not someone I met on Sunday in church or connected to on some deep, theological level. When this student wrote her paper about me I saw that same image of Jesus that my Grandma and Aunt Susie called on to cover me when I was younger. However, now the amazing thing is that I do not see the me I thought I knew. All of the mean, evil, and abusive behavior and oppressive policies and practices used to keep doors closed to me and lock me out have helped me to realize that there were still some people praying on my behalf the way my grandmother used to. Realizing that, I have prayed for forgiveness for myself first and everyone else second. There will always be people who will see my skin color and gender first and hate me. But, that's not my problem. I look in the mirror and see joy, peace, patience, faith and love bound together by beautiful brown skin and a smiling heart. When I saw this young woman who did the interview at the beginning of the fall semester, I felt excitement and joy because her father allowed her to return to the U.S. to acquire her master's degree. I saw another pillar holding up the bridge for many more generations of women of color to cross the threshold of self into their authentic destiny and purpose. With out-stretched hands I am praying for them.

Growing Up a Black Girl

by Christina Lester

I figured out early on that no one takes me seriously. No matter how many awards or accolades I earn, people seem to care more about the register of my voice than what I have to say. It's absurd and more than a little insulting, but it's what I go through on a daily basis. Compounded onto that are the pre-conceived notions about what it means to be a black girl in America. For as long as I can remember my blackness has influenced and shaped the way people perceive me, especially in the classroom.

I grew up in Philadelphia and started at a small, majority black neighborhood elementary school. Almost all of my teachers were white and try as they might, I was perpetually bored, because the school was too small and too underfunded to truly accommodate more than the district-approved lesson plans. I was later moved to academic magnet schools where I excelled. It was in this academic environment that I learned about myself and was given the opportunity to explore new interests. "Sure sweetheart" was a response that became my most hated phrase. Instead of an encouraging statement that empowered me, it was more of a patronizing pat on the head. When I was younger I wanted to play tackle football in a pee-wee league. They let me join the team, not because they wanted to but because it was cheaper than a potential lawsuit. Despite being the fastest and most coordinated player, I rode the bench all season. I had similar experiences with hockey and basketball and every other team sport I played. My parents didn't discourage me, though they weren't exactly supportive. My mom reactively signed me up for ballet in an effort to make me graceful and dainty, while my dad was convinced I didn't know I was a girl. His solu-

tion was to force me into cotton candy pink. My femininity has never been what one might consider mainstream, and I have come to see that is okay. In high school I wore what was comfortable to me, which usually meant athletic clothing, jeans, and the like. It wasn't "pretty." Beauty standards, especially the ones black women are held to are ridiculous. I was skinny with frizzy hair and wore gender-neutral clothing. To pretty much everyone in my class I wasn't "pretty" or "feminine" and they let me know it. Most of the comments spoke directly to my blackness. "You'll look better if...you wear make up, straighten your hair, and get curves." "Would it kill you to wear a dress?" "You're light-skinned, you really don't have to try hard, but at least make an effort." "You talk too much in class, it's intimidating." And this classroom sentiment wasn't only coming from the students. So I tried for a while to live up to their image of what a black woman should look like, and I failed; I was awkward and extremely uncomfortable.

In college, everything changed. It became an almost every day battle of not just micro-aggressions but racial slurs as well. I've been called loud and sassy for having opinions, and often Professors and peers marvel at how "well-read and articulate I am." It's almost as if I haven't been in a classroom for fifteen



years paying attention. Amazing! What a notion. My favorite is when I answer a question or raise an important point and everyone almost immediately rolls their eyes and disagrees. And then several seconds later, when someone else rephrases it, suddenly it's as if they've discovered fire or something. In spite of all this, I still play sports; I still dress comfortably, and I still speak my mind. My goal is no longer winning people over. My goal is doing what makes me happy and creating space for other black girls and women like me.

Welcome to our new staff, Jordan Zepher



Jordan Zepher is a 2nd year Mdiv student who is serving as the Thursday Lunch Coordinator of the Shaw Center this year. She is currently interested, specifically, in how the theological narratives that we are often taught to believe validate or invalidate our lived experiences as people. She typically enjoys long conversations about intersectional activism, Being Mary Jane, and the occasional pug meme.

The Anna Howard Shaw Center Welcomes New Female Faculty at STH



Dr. Andrea Hollingsworth's expertise is partly in religion and science. Several published articles offer neuropsychological perspectives on religious practices, modes of thought, and texts. She also has background in counseling. She is currently the Scholar-in-Residence at the "Beane House," a residence for STH

graduate students.



Rev. Charlene Zuill is the new Spiritual Life Coordinator at Boston University School of Theology. She has previously served in campus ministry for 15 years, and she is also an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church, in California Pacific Annual Conference. Charlene brings

both a special passion and experience to this position.

In Remembrance:

Honoring those black women who have been killed in 2015

*Mya Hall
Janisha Fonville
Natasha McKenna
Alexia Christian
Megan Hockaday
Papi Edwards
Lamia Beard
Ty Underwood
Yazmin Vash
Payne*

*Taja Gabrielle DeJesus
Penny Proud
Bri Golec
Kristian Grant Infiniti
Keyshia Blige
London Chanel
Mercedes Williamson
Jasmine Collins
Ashton O'Hara
India Clarke*

*K.C. Haggard
Shade Schuler
Amber Monroe
Kandis Capri
Elisha Walker
Tamara Dominguez
Keisha Jenkins
Sandra Bland
Kindra Chapman
Joyce Curnell*

*Ralkina Jones
Raynette Turner*

<http://www.dailydot.com/politics/trans-women-of-color-murdered/>

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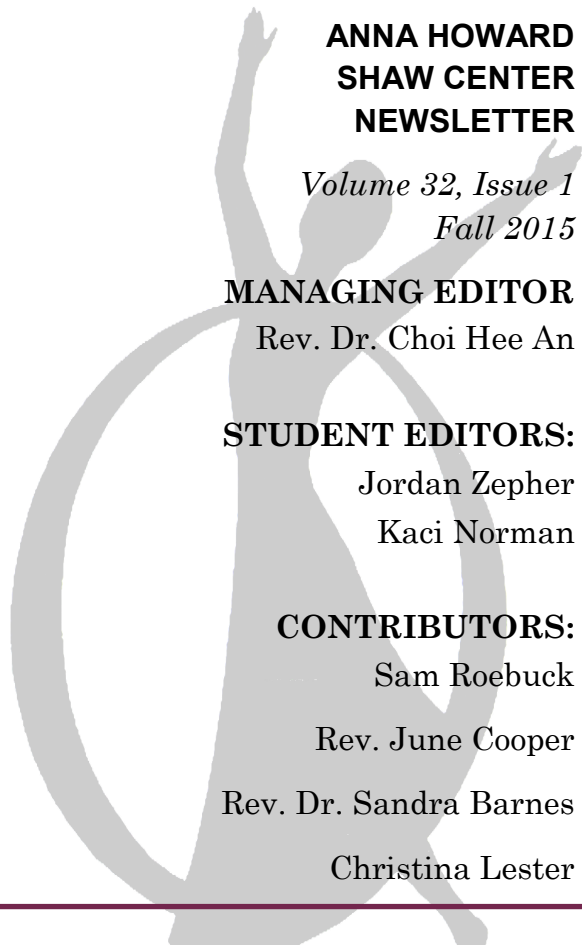
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Christina Lester



Save the Date: _____



**Power.
Privilege.
Prophetic Witness.**



WOMEN IN THE WORLD-APRIL 13, 2016

ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

Speakers: Dr. Traci West, Ylisse Bess-Washington, Mariama White-Hammond, Gloria White-Hammond, Rev. Dr. LaTrelle Miller Easterling

Location: Barrister's Hall, First Floor, BU School of Law

765 Commonwealth Ave.

Time: 11:00am-7:30pm