At UT, the Africana Studies program was initially called the Afro-American Studies program when it began in the 1968-1969 academic year. The program offered two courses: one about the Afro-American family and the other about Black history. By the next academic year, the program offered courses in the Departments of English and Religious Studies. Through a $10,000 grant secured by Professor Edwin Redkey, then chair of American Studies, the program launched officially, offering a minor in Afro-American Studies. Professor Marvin Peek was appointed in 1971 as the first official head of the program.

The program’s name changed to African and African American Studies during the 1990s, under the leadership of Professor Cynthia Fleming, who arrived at UT in 1992 as the program’s first tenure-track faculty member and a joint hire in the Department of History. The program’s current name, Africana Studies, changed under the leadership of Professor Wornie Reed, who sought to keep the program current by following trends in the larger discipline, which were leading to a more diasporic focus, by providing global offerings that complemented the initial focus on African American Studies in the context of the United States.

As a larger discipline comprised of interdisciplinary studies and research, the program known today as the Africana Studies program, comprises faculty members who represent expertise in teaching and research in diverse peoples of the African diaspora (American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx, European, and African), with specializations in far-ranging disciplines, that include, but are not limited to, anthropology, history, language, literature, political science, religion, and sociology.

The program is an independent academic unit in the College of Arts and Sciences, serving as one of several interdisciplinary programs (IDPs). Offering courses to more than 650 undergraduate students, they also may choose to major or minor in Africana studies. Graduate students also may choose to earn a graduate certificate in Africana studies. Students who would like to supplement their on-campus learning experience also have the opportunity to participate in the study abroad program, which emphasizes service learning and coursework in African languages and culture, to enhance their fuller understanding of the African presence around the world.

The program also has historically featured national and international researchers and speakers, who enrich our students’ and community’s learning experiences. As the flagship campus for the University of Tennessee, we have a rich history of collaborations with the Knoxville community, and we believe that learning opportunities can be extended through our outreach and engagement with Knoxville’s local community, especially as we continue to learn more about and engage with the rich history and contemporary presence of Knoxville’s Black community.

“It is my esteemed honor to be appointed our new chair of the UT Africana Studies program,” said Shayla Nunnally, professor of political science. “I aim to continue this strong legacy of leadership through working diligently with our faculty, students, and broader Vols and Tennessean communities.”

Our Year(s) Moving Forward

As of February 2021, our Africana Studies program launched the official start of our commemoration of the 50+ years of Africana Studies as a discipline and as a program at UT. The celebration will span over the next two years, and due to the pandemic, our programming will be virtual for 2021 and in-person for 2022. Working with various members of our communities at UT and beyond, we also aim to be engaged academically, culturally, and socially to disseminate knowledge about our program and Africana Studies, in general.

As we celebrate our 50+ years of Africana Studies for 2021 and 2022, we will inform you about our programming (guest lecturers, artists, movies, commemorations, and research presentations) and special highlights of our program’s faculty and students.
State of World Concerns

Greetings Vols Community and Friends,

I am Shayla C. Nunnally, a professor of political science and our new chair of Africana Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am excited to become a member of the Vols Nation. It is my honor to be joining you for my first year at the university, as I join the rich legacy of leadership with our Africana Studies program, which proudly touts a more than 50-year history at our university. Born of the 1960s student protest movement to enhance educational curricula at various levels of education, with courses that focused on the history, culture, politics, and circumstances of people of African descent, our program represents all these aspects of learning about people of African descent. We promote knowledge-building about African-descent people around the world, or what is also known as the African diaspora.

A Year in Review

As we celebrate the New Year, we are reminded of the dark, challenging, and resilient times of 2020, when, during unprecedented times with the COVID-19 pandemic, we have come to understand more clearly the various racial disparities that bear disproportionate effects on access to health care among communities of people of color. We have grappled also with the legacies of racial construction and discrimination that have contributed to our discourses about injustice and inequality. Our students have continued to process the true meaning of Black Lives Matter, in the nation, as people around the world continue to see continuing cries for further considerations of justice for the police-related shooting of Jacob Blake and the police-related killing of Breonna Taylor.

We also continue to reckon with the effects of slavery and Jim Crow on the development of American society, while centering Black lives and the contributions of African-descendent people, as communities across the country acknowledged the historic discrimination against Black Americans and shored up the historic documentation of what happened to these often segregated and disparaged communities. For example, even in the City of Knoxville, Tennessee, via the use of purported urban renewal programs, our city’s Black community neighborhoods and institutions were razed to build the highway system, and the local city apologized for this grievance. In two, historic US elections in November 2020 and a run-off Senate election in January 2021, we also have witnessed the elections of the nation’s first woman (of African and Asian descent) elected to the vice presidency, former Senator Kamala Harris, and the fourth Black American (man) elected to the US Senate from the American South (the first to represent Georgia), Reverend Raphael Warnock.

In a historic moment during the height of Black Lives Matter protests and the expressions of (Black) supporting activism, we also continue to question the effects of slavery and Jim Crow on the development of American society, while centering Black lives and the contributions of African-descendent people, as communities across the country acknowledged the historic discrimination against Black Americans and shored up the historic documentation of what happened to these often segregated and disparaged communities. For example, even in the City of Knoxville, Tennessee, via the use of purported urban renewal programs, our city’s Black community neighborhoods and institutions were razed to build the highway system, and the local city apologized for this grievance. In two, historic US elections in November 2020 and a run-off Senate election in January 2021, we also have witnessed the elections of the nation’s first woman (of African and Asian descent) elected to the vice presidency, former Senator Kamala Harris, and the fourth Black American (man) elected to the US Senate from the American South (the first to represent Georgia), Reverend Raphael Warnock.

Last summer, under the leadership of our former Interim Chair Dawn Duke and Vice Chairs Katy Chiles and Amadou Sall, our program took a united stand against injustice and asserted the value of Black life, pointing out that Black Lives Matter does not denigrate the lives of others. Rather, it empowers the meaning that Black lives should be treated equally to all people’s lives. This is where Africana Studies, as a discipline comprised of interdisciplinary perspectives, enhances our understanding of people’s experiences in the African diaspora (around the world), while also emphasizing the significance of thought, politics, culture, expression, and activism.

In a historic moment during the height of Black Lives Matter protests and the expressions of (Black) supporting faculty to enhance the learning and discussions about Black people and their professional presence on campus, this past summer Chancellor Donde Plowman announced her support of our program transitioning into a department. This means that, with official approval in the future, we will be able to offer our major and minor in Africana studies, as distinctive undergraduate degrees. The 50-year origin of our Africana Studies program resembles a society of Americans seeking to become more inclusive by educating more. Herein, I provide some of the history of our historic beginnings, as an early-initiated program with coursework in Africana Studies. It is through “Remembering Black Pasts, Building Black Futures,” in homage to the significance of Sankofa, the Akan (Ghanaian) word suggesting that we look back to move forward, that we are inspired to grow our program into a new department.

As we reflect on our growth, we are excited to see one of our own featured in the KnoxBiz 40 under 40 class of 2019. The honor recognizes leaders with a passion for making Knoxville and its surrounding areas better communities. Cory Hodge graduated from UT with a degree in Africana studies from UT in 2015. He works at Maynard Elementary teaching science and math to fourth graders.

On behalf of our faculty and staff in our Africana Studies program, I wish you a wonderful and courageous start of the new year, and we look forward to working with you in our continuing journey to discuss, research, and build knowledge about Africana Studies. With an eye towards revisiting our past, in order to prepare for our future, we celebrate 50+ years of Africana Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

TOGETHER, WE stand, TOGETHER!

In the pursuit of knowledge and excellence, Shayla C. Nunnally, Professor, Department of Political Science, Chair, Africana Studies Program.
Giving Them a Voice

Savannah Brown is a sophomore double majoring in English and sociology with a minor in Africana studies. After college, she plans to go to law school and specialize in civil rights law. Her dream is to become a legal advocate for individuals from impoverished communities, who may otherwise be able to afford proper representation.

“I want to be a voice for those who don’t feel like they have one or are unfortunately no longer here to use theirs,” she said.

During the fall 2020 semester, Brown worked with Professors Shanya Nunnally and Frank Manheim on a research project. Digging through articles and archives was a phenomenal experience for her and that encouraged her to research topics and form connections she never thought of before.

“I have learned an abundance of new and intriguing information that I will be able to utilize in my vision and my budding career,” Brown said. “The amount of black history that is buried, hidden, and neglected is shocking – to say the least. Having the privilege to sit down and rummage through articles on top of archives on top of collections and find a wealth of untold stories has been such a formative and eye-opening experience for me. One I will be continually grateful for as I move forward in my career.”

Shedding Light on the Forgotten

Maria Takele, a graduating senior from Nashville, is majoring in political science with a minor in Africana studies and entrepreneurship. After graduation, she plans to work on a master’s degree in management and marketing.

During her time on campus, Takele has been involved with several programs and organizations. She served as vice president of the African Student Association and graphic designer for Women of Knowledge and Excellence. She is the vice president for both the Diversity Student Leaders Society and Africana Studies Student Association. Additionally, she works closely with Professor Shanya Nunnally as an undergraduate research assistant.

“Through my time working on this research project, I have been able to gain a tremendous amount of appreciation, knowledge, and experience,” Takele said. “I have thoroughly enjoyed my time being able to help uncover buried parts of our history and shed light on the forgotten.”

One of her favorite quotes is from Audre Lorde: “When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

African Roots in the South

Madelynn Weas is a senior majoring in biological sciences with a concentration in biochemical and biomolecular biology and minoring in Africana studies. She is working with Professor Melissa Hargrove on an honors thesis project, Unearthing African Roots in the US South: Surveying Gullah/Geechee culture and history, which includes a historical overview of Gullah/Geechee archaeology. She first became interested in Gullah/Geechee culture as a student in Professor Hargrove’s course in African history.

“These coastal communities of the Lowcountry South represent the root of Africa in the United States,” Weas said. “It has been an eye-opening experience examining a portion of American history that is not often seen in textbooks. It is a privilege to work with Dr. Hargrove, and I am blessed for her to have taken me on as a thesis student. My senior year has been enriched by this experience, and I will be forever grateful. It has also encouraged me to pursue my dreams.”

After graduation, Weas plans to attend graduate school in biology. She intends to go back before potentially going to medical school. Her broader goal is the application of knowledge toward a greater understanding of the complex relationship between humans and the environment, and at more equitable health outcomes for communities of color.

Researching the Postbellum South

Robert Bland, assistant professor in the Department of History, is a historian of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States with an emphasis on the African American experience and the postbellum South. His research and teaching engage questions of racial formation, electoral and cultural politics, and battles over historical memory. At UT, Bland teaches courses on African American history, the US South, and the craft of social and cultural history.

Bland’s upcoming book project examines the legacy of Reconstruction in the African American public sphere. It explores the efforts of Black South Carolinians and their northern allies to preserve the last bastion of radical Republicanism in the South during the half century that followed Compromise of 1877. In doing so, Bland illuminates a series of connections between grassroots struggles in the South Carolina Lowcountry over political patronage, disaster relief, local schools, and representations of Gullah folklore and the simultaneous debate in the national Black press over how to contest the cultural and intellectual dimensions of the emerging Jim Crow order.

His research has been supported by the Social Science Research Council, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Bland received his BA from Williams College in 2007, MA from the University of Mississippi in 2009, and PhD from the University of Maryland in 2017.

Leader in Service Learning

For many years, Amadou Sall has led study abroad trips to various countries in Africa—Accra, Ghana (2005-2012), Cape Town, South Africa (2013-2016), and Dakar, Senegal (2017 and 2019), He is planning a mini-term program 2021 to Ghana. The trips to Ghana included undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty from UT, Tennessee State University, and UT Chattanooga. Before going on several of the trips, he also voluntarily offered and taught a Fulani language to prepare the students to communicate in the new cultural setting and better appreciate the cultural differences they were about to experience.

What is especially remarkable is that he included highly relevant service-learning components as part of the study abroad course requirement. In Ghana, for instance, in addition to visiting several historical and cultural sites, the group helped make improvements in selected elementary and high schools by painting floors, making simple repairs, donating school supplies, and working with an NGO to assist with building a library and computer lab. Read more about the study abroad program at capetown.utk.edu.

Studying the Gullah/Geechee Culture

Melissa Hargrove, lecturer in the Africana Studies program, is recognized as a broadly-trained public anthropologist with ethnographic expertise in Gullah/Geechee culture and underground hip-hop studies. Students in her courses engage in dialogue about coastal environmental sustainability and cultural continuity within and across the broader Gullah/Geechee nation.

Hargrove’s research, teaching, and service interests are framed within the political economy of race and diaspora Gullah/Geechee cultural conservation; gated community development as spatial segregation; space, race, and place in urban contexts/urban renewal and gentrification; contemporary white supremacy; heritage and identity politics in the 21st century; and public, applied, and engaged anthropology. She received her BA, MA, and PhD in anthropology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
Larry S. Perry, II joined UT in fall 2020 as an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Africana Studies program. Professor Perry focuses on the history of the American religious left, its thoughts, thinkers, politics, practice, and its intersection (or lack thereof) with racial justice in the US. Perry’s current book project is titled A Black Spiritual Leftist: Howard Thurman and the Religious Left’s Unfinished Business of Race Relations. In the past, Perry has served as a fellow at the Center for American Progress’ Leadership Institute and as a contributor on CSPAN.

El-Ra Adair Radney is a lecturer in the Africana Studies program. His training and doctoral degree is in African American and African Studies and his specialized niche includes four main topics of intersection: Black political theory, cultural studies, urban study, and Africana philosophy. Radney’s passion is to teach and use Africana Studies as a way to empower and encourage students and the world alike to foster positive development in the interests of the African diaspora.

Fatuma Guyo is a historian of twentieth-century Africa, with a specialization in East-African history. Her teaching and research interests lie at the intersection of pre-colonial and colonial history, borderland history, policy history, women and gender history, oral history, and democratization and social change. What tickles her passion in teaching is the opportunity to share with students the diversity and richness of African continent and help them learn how to broaden their ideas, beliefs and thoughts about the continent and its diverse cultures. She is currently working on her first monograph tentatively titled The Forgotten Frontier: Pastoralists, Livestock and Colonial Policies on the Kenya’s Northern Frontier, 1900s 1990.

Carolyn R. Hodges, former chair of Africana Studies (2016-2019) and vice provost and dean emerita of the UT Graduate School, has committed to establishing the Dr. Carolyn R. Hodges and Dr. Amadou B. Sall Travel Endowment to support students participating in study abroad programs led by Africana Studies. She wanted to establish the endowment to help support and enhance Africana Studies as well as to honor the dedicated work of Amadou Sall, who initiated study abroad programs in Africana Studies and has led numerous study trips to Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa since 2005. Contributions to support the endowment may be submitted to the University of Tennessee Foundation.

Support Africana Studies

CELEBRATING DOUGLASS DAY 2021!

Transcribe-a-thon with the papers of Mary Church Terrell

CELEBRATE WITH US!
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12
11:30 - 2 PM VIA ZOOM
REGISTRATION REQUIRED: tiny.utk.edu/FDD

SPONSORED BY UT Departments of English and History, Africana Studies Program, and the UT Libraries
PRESENTED BY Center for Black Digital Research, Penn State By the People, Library of Congress PSU Libraries and the College of Liberal Arts DOUGLASSDAY.ORG

Campbell Named 2021 Marshall Scholar

Elise “Josie” Campbell is a senior in music with a minor in Africana studies and the first UT student to receive the award since 1983.
We proudly acknowledge the 50-year history of our Africana Studies program at UT.

It has been possible through the extraordinary leadership of several notable directors during the past half-century.