

A C O N V E N I N G

April 21st and 22nd, 2006  
New York City, NY

CONVERSATIONS FOR SUSTAINING BLACK STUDIES IN THE  
21ST CENTURY



*Celebration of 35th Year of African American Studies at UF*

thomas-houston, 2004

ORGANIZED BY FOR MY PEOPLE PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Co-sponsored by University of Florida African American Studies Program

Hosted by the Ford Foundation

# For My People Productions, Inc.

## **Mission Statement**

The goal of For My People Productions, Inc. (FMPP) is to promote understandings of the experiences of the poor, women, Blacks and other minorities in the African American Diaspora in hopes of facilitating social change and justice for all those whose lives these experiences touch. FMPP's particular concern with the African American Diaspora addresses the history of the movement of Black Americans across spatial boundaries and the impact the varying socio-cultural, economic, and political forces encountered have on their lives. This association of scholars, professionals, and community leaders encourage the breaking down of barriers that prohibit change and justice by collapsing the glaringly present town-gown divide through the use of the arts, media, public forums, and institutes. The members believe that knowledge is the key to understanding and that education is a human right. It is the obligation of every knowledgeable person to share that knowledge for the benefit of society. Without informed understandings there can be no change.

## **Executive and Advisory Board Members**

Dr. William Conwill, Asst. Professor University of Florida (Gainesville, FL)  
Ms. Jean Dennison, Graduate Student, ABD, University of Florida, (Tulsa, OK)  
Dr. Faye, V. Harrison, Professor University of Florida (Gainesville, FL)  
Ms. Jamie Johnson, Community Relations (Coral Gables, FL)  
Dr. Ann Kingsolver, University of South Carolina Professor (Columbia, SC)  
Mr. John W. Miller, Retired SC Employment Security Commission (Florence, SC)  
Mrs. Sybil Rosado, Graduate Student, ABD, University of Florida (Columbia, SC)  
Dr. Daryl Michael Scott, Department Chair Howard University (Washington, DC)  
Mr. Mark Schuller, Graduate Student, ABD, UC, Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara, CA)  
Ms. Willa Dean Stevens, Admin. Asst. University of South Carolina (Columbia, SC)  
Dr. Marilyn M. Thomas-Houston, Asst. Professor University of Florida (Gainesville, FL)  
Mr. Carl E. Thomas, Musician/Songwriter (Mableton, GA)  
Mr. Kelvin Thomas, Videographer/Editor (Rock Hill, SC)  
Mrs. Ramona Thomas, Engineer DuPont (Chester, VA)

## **Organizational History**

FMPP was formalized as a not-for-profit organization in the state of Florida by Marilyn M. Thomas-Houston in August 2005 as a way to "give to the community" that which she obtained through the benevolence of others. Her vision for accomplishing this goal was to assemble a group of community residents and academics looking to foster conversations, collaboration, and cooperation across socioeconomic, ethnic, and racialized lines. Members of the organization use their knowledge and understandings as means of institut-



Haiti Palace Burning

Schuller, 2004

ing change, securing equal rights, and promoting social justice in an increasingly oppressive globalized world. FMPP produces documentaries, sponsors the hosting of websites, assists in proposal writing and project coordination, and offers services as a fiscal agent for individuals and other organizations looking to make a positive impact in society.



# Conversations for Sustaining Black Studies in the 21st Century

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

One month after her arrival as the new Program Officer in Education and Scholarship at the Ford Foundation in January, 2005, Irma McClaurin identified the need to create a forum through which "20-25 scholars of former Ford grantees and others" could institute "conversations on sustaining Afro-American studies for the future; in a follow-up memo five months later, the vision for such a convening was articulated as such not only an "opportunity to learn more about the field" but also as a means for "new and emerging scholars"<sup>1</sup> to enter into conversations around critical questions related to the future of Black Studies.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1988 and 2004, the Ford Foundation awarded approximately 69 grants related to Black studies research, program development, and institutionalization.<sup>3</sup> Despite this support for the field, a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* asked "Can Black Studies Be Saved?" The article cited many contributing factors to the struggle for survival of Black Studies. This article, and the letters to the Editor it generated protesting the disparaging remarks made by critic Shelby Steele, identified the numerous challenges Black Studies Programs face today: inadequate funding, lack of institutional support and validations, hiring dilemmas, and budgetary declines. It is within this hostile environment that this convening takes place, supported through a grant from the Ford Foundation in its continuing mission to encourage and strengthen "counterposing voices of support" for the field of Black Studies. What the critics and those in support of the field have made clear, to face a sustainable future, Black Studies will have to rethink its current structures, institutional relationships, content, methodology and its strategy for leadership succession.



Black Unity Rally, 1969

*Rutgers Special Collection and University Archive*

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

In fall 2005, For My People Productions, Inc., received a grant to organize a national conversation between prominent and emerging scholars of Black Studies. FMPP's strategy was to maximize the impact of that conversation by making the discussion and the ideas it generated accessible to all interested in the continued growth and development of Black Studies. Towards that end, this "Conversation" will ensure the greatest impact through the production of an audio-video internet archive of the April 21-22, 2005 event; the publication of concept papers for distribution to universities and especially key administrators and a completion of a documentary that chronicles the history, struggles, gains, goals and value of Black Studies. FMPP believes the documentary will become an excellent resource for use in introductory courses, while preserving the historical record of the development of Black Studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Interoffice Memo entitled "A Convening on 'The Future of Afro-American Studies as a Field,'" February 5, 2005 and follow-up memo dated May 5, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The term Black Studies is used to refer to all programs of study of the Black experience including but not limited to Afro-American Studies, Africana Studies, African American Studies, and African Diasporic Studies.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Ejima, "Analysis on Black Studies Funding.." Internal Report, December 5, 2005.

# AGENDA

Friday, April 21st, 2006  
The Ford Foundation ♦ Conference Room  
320 East 43rd Street  
NYC, NY

8:00 AM

Continental Breakfast

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8:30 AM

Welcome

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*marilyn m. thomas-houston, Convening Director, For My People Productions, Inc.*

*Alison Bernstein, Vice President, Knowledge, Creativity & Freedom, The Ford Foundation*

*Janice Petrovich, Director, Education, Sexuality, and Religion Unit, The Ford Foundation*

*Irma McClaurin, Program Officer, Education, Sexuality, and Religion Unit, The Ford Foundation*

8:45 AM

Opening Panel

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**Topic:** How far have we come in institutionalizing the field of Black Studies and how far do we have to go? What efforts must be made to move the field from the periphery of academia to the core?

**Panelists:** *Esther Terry, University of Massachusetts*

*James Turner, Cornell University*

*Delores P. Aldridge, Emory University*

**Facilitator:** *Alison Bernstein, The Ford Foundation*

9:45 AM

Second Panel

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**Topic:** What is/should be the relationship between Black Studies and Critical Race Studies, Diaspora Studies, African Studies, Afro-Latino(a) Studies, and Africana Women's Studies?

**Panelists:** *Edmund T. Gordon, University Texas, Austin*

*Dorothy Randall Tsuruta, San Francisco State University*

*James Stewart, Penn State University*

**Facilitator:** *Ronald W. Bailey, Northeastern University*



10:55 AM

Third Panel

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**Topic:** What directions should new scholarship in the field take: e.g., intersectionality, sexuality, class, internationalism, environmental justice?

**Panelists:** *Lee Baker*, Duke University  
*Kimberle Crenshaw*, UCLA  
*Molefi Asante*, Temple University  
*Josephine Bradley*, Clark Atlanta University  
*Carole Boyce Davies*, Florida International University

**Facilitator:** *Daryl Michael Scott*, Howard University

12:30 PM

Lunch Break

1:00 PM

Fourth Panel

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**Topic:** What are the funding alternatives needed to assist in sustaining Black Studies?

**Panelists:** *Kevin Gaines*, University of Michigan  
*Beverly Guy Sheftall*, Spelman College

**Facilitators:** *Janice Petrovich*, The Ford Foundation

1:45 PM

Fifth Panel

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**Topic:** Do national Black Studies Organizations have a role to play in the institutionalization of the field?

**Panelists:** *Summer Henry*, The National Council of Black Studies  
*Sylvia Cyrus-Albritton*, Association for the Study of African American Life and History  
*Charles Jones*, Georgia State University  
*Abdul Alkalimat*, University of Toledo

**Facilitator:** TBA

3:15 PM

Sixth Panel

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**Topic:** How connected is Black Studies to communities? How central is Participatory Action Research, community involvement, and social activism to the field?

**Panelists:** *Geneva Smitherman*, Michigan State University  
*Charles P. Henry*, University California Berkeley  
*Warren Whatley*, University of Michigan

**Facilitator:** *James de Jongh*, City College of New York

# AGENDA

Saturday, April 22nd, 2006  
Roosevelt Hotel ♦ Sutton Suite  
45 East 45th Street  
NYC, NY

8:00 AM

Continental Breakfast

8:30 AM

Panel Seven

**Topic:** What represents "best practices" in the field (program administration & pedagogy) and what is the best way to disseminate? Include the role of technology in your response.

**Panelists:** *Stanlie James*, University of Wisconsin-Madison

*Nathan Norment*, Temple University

**Facilitator:** *Abdul Alkalimat*, University of Toledo

9:30 AM

Panel Eight

**Topic:** What role can chief administrators play in the sustaining Black Studies?

**Panelists:** *Ronald Bailey*, Northeastern University

*Claudia Mitchell-Kernan*, University of California, Los Angeles

*Maulana Karenga*, University of California, Long Beach

**Facilitator:** *Irma McClaurin*, The Ford Foundation

10:45 AM

Panel Nine

**Topic:** What will it take to establish intergenerational leadership succession?

**Panelists:** *Austin Jackson*, Michigan State University

*Rhett Jones*, Brown University

*Daryl Michael Scott*, Howard University

**Facilitator:** *Manning Marable*, Columbia University

12 NOON

Wrap Up

## Project Director and Coordinator

marilyn thomas-houston, an Assistant Professor of Anthropology, former Interim Director of African American Studies at the University of Florida and founding President of FMPP, is an activist for social change within academia and the larger society. From her research on Black Americans in the United States, she has published two books, "Stony the Road" to Change (2005) and Homing Devices (2006). A graduate of NYU (1997), she is also a visual anthropologist and documentary filmmaker. Her current research project, "From These Roots," focuses on the culture of social relations for descendants of Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and other areas of the African American Diaspora and she continues her work on the impact of public housing policy and practice on the lives of the people they are designed to help.





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## Panelists

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**DELORES P. ALDRIDGE** (Ph.D., Purdue University) is the Grace Towns Hamilton Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at Emory University, the first distinguished chair named for a living African American woman and in African American Studies at a major institution. Dr. Aldridge was the first African American woman faculty member at Emory where she became the founding director of the first Black Studies degree granting program in the South in 1971 which she administered until 1990. In 2003, the Delores P. Aldridge Excellence Awards were inaugurated at Emory. This is one of three awards named for her, another being the Excellence Faculty/Staff Award at one of her alma maters, Clark Atlanta University.

She is the recipient of more than **100** awards and honors including the unprecedented two term elected president of the National Council for Black Studies. She has served as consultant to more than **90** foreign governments, US federal agencies, social agencies, educational institutions and foundations as well as corporate entities and is author or editor of more than **160** commentaries, monographs, articles and books.

She has guest edited special issues of *Phylon: Review of Race and Culture*, *Journal of Black Studies*, and *Western Journal of Black Studies* and authored two seminal works: *Black Women and the Economic Marketplace: A Battle Unfinished* (1974) and *Toward Integrating Africana Women into Africana Studies*

(1992). Other work include *Out of the Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies*, co-editor(2000) and editorial columns in *The Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today*.

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**ABDUL ALKALIMAT** received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago in 1974. He is the Director of the Africana Studies program at the University of Toledo and Professor of Sociology. Alkalimat moderates a major African-American Studies discussion listserv, H-Afro-Am, with over one thousand professionals in the field of Africana Studies. He created and edits Malcolm X: A Research Site as well as eBlack Studies.

He is on the editorial board of *Black Scholar* and has been a member of the editorial boards of *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* since 2002, *Information, Communication and Society* since 2000, *Sage Race Relations Abstracts* since 1995, and *cy.Rev: A Journal of Cybernetic Revolution, Sustainable Socialism and Radical Democracy* since 1994. *Africa World Review* (UK; since 1990) *Black Scholar* (founding board member; since 1969)



**MOLEFI KETE ASANTE** is Professor, Department of African American Studies at Temple University. Asante has 65 books to his credit, among the most recent are *The History of Africa* (Routledge, 2006), *Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait*, (University of Sankore, 2006), *Handbook of Black Studies*, (2005), co-edited with Maulana Karenga, *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, (2004), co-edited with Ama Mazama, *Race, Rhetoric, and Identity: The Architecton of Soul. Erasing Racism: The Survival of the American Nation*, (2003), *Ancient Egyptian Philosophers* (2003), *Scattered to the Wind, Custom and Culture of Egypt*, and *100 Greatest African Americans*. The second edition of his high school text, *African American History: Journey of Liberation*, 2nd Edition, (2001), is used in more than 400 schools throughout North America.

Professor Asante created the first Ph.D. Program in African American Studies while chair of the department in 1987. He has directed more dissertations in African American Studies than any contemporary scholar, having produced more than 130 doctorates in the field. He was inducted into the Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent at the Gwendolyn Brooks Center at Chicago State University in 2004.

Dr. Asante is the founding editor of the *Journal of Black Studies* (1969) and was the President of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee chapter at UCLA in the 1960's. He became the first permanent director of the UCLA Center for Afro American Studies in 1973. Professor Asante's articles appear in more than 50 different journals in English, French, Chinese, Spanish, and Twi.

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