

NEH Application Cover Sheet

Humanities Initiatives for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Field of Expertise: Ethnic Studies - Black/African American

INSTITUTION

SAVANNAH STATE UNIVERSITY
SAVANNAH, GA UNITED STATES

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *STUDYING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN SAVANNAH AND SOUTHEAST GEORGIA: DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR*

Grant Period: From 1/2011 to 6/2012

Field of Project: Ethnic Studies - Black/African American

Description of Project: This project seeks to enhance knowledge of the African American experience among faculty, build collaborations to create innovations in interdisciplinary humanities teaching and learning, and establish an on-going forum for exploring the African American experience in Savannah and Southeast Georgia. Activities will include developing an interdisciplinary learning community of faculty, hosting several nationally recognized scholars for public lectures and colloquia, and creating new teaching and learning resources that can be integrated in the Savannah State curriculum and shared with others. The primary focus will be on the historical periods of slavery and emancipation, a focus suggested in part by commemorations of the Civil War's 150th anniversary between 2011 and 2015, with other time periods and issues explored in the future. The project should lend momentum for institutionalizing an ongoing program of innovative interdisciplinary activities.

BUDGET

Outright Request	\$99,929.00	Cost Sharing	\$17,685.00
Matching Request	\$0.00	Total Budget	\$117,614.00
Total NEH	\$99,929.00		

GRANT ADMINISTRATOR

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3. NARRATIVE

A. INTELLECTUAL RATIONALE. Important humanities texts and sources produced over the past few years from a range of disciplines and fields have provided new insights into the African American experience, and have the potential to significantly influence its study and move our interpretations and understandings in new directions. For example, a new electronic database of 35,000 slave ships—known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (www.slavevoyages.org)—enables more comprehensive explorations of the largest forced migration in world history with eight categories of 24 variables. Another is a revealing study of HeLa, the cells of a poor Black Virginia-born tobacco farmer. These cells became the source for one of the earliest lines of human cells used in developing the polio vaccine, and facilitated new discoveries related to cancer, in vitro fertilization and genetic engineering (Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Crown, 2010)). A third example involves a scholar who is one of the pioneers in developing World History as a respected graduate academic field. In his recent book, he utilized decades of his own research on various aspects of African history to create “a paradigmatic shift that bridges conceptual distances between African and its diaspora” (Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture*, 2009). Finally, scholars at Brandeis University’s Institute on Assets and Social Policy at University found that the wealth gap between white and black Americans increased more than four times from 1984 to 2007, a contemporary finding perhaps with roots in patterns of race relations beginning with slavery and emancipation.

Recent developments—debates over textbooks (TX), Confederate Heritage Month (VA), and Ethnic Studies (AR), to name only a few—indicate that promoting an understanding of diverse cultures in the U.S.—the essence of NEH’s mandate and its current “*Bridging Cultures*” initiative—remains a vital challenge on the national agenda. The experiences of people of African descent stand astride many of these discussions and occasionally strident debates. And consequently, the field of African American Studies—broadly conceived and called by several names—Black

Studies, Africana Studies, African/African American Studies, Diaspora Studies—has been and remains a vital contributor to the national dialogue regarding these issues. In fact, African American Studies as an interdisciplinary enterprise has been one of the leading edges in developing and promoting interdisciplinary scholarship and humanities education in higher education since the 1970s, a point too often missed in many recent summaries. It has contributed to and sparked traditional disciplines to broaden their perspectives and address related concerns in productive ways, and to include a broader diversity of human experiences in their purview. If this positive role is to continue, it is incumbent on scholars in Africana Studies to carefully consider the findings from other disciplines and fields and to draw on scholarship that has been thoroughly and competently covered by others.

Historically, historically-Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have played important roles in the study and dissemination of information about the African American experience, both during the period of segregation in higher education, and perhaps surprisingly, in the period since the rise of Black Studies in non-HBCUs (as measured by editorial board positions on professional journals, leadership of professional organizations, and number of faculty). Thorough reflection on new challenges in studying the Black experience and developing new insights, approaches, and curriculum innovations are as imperative in HBCUs today as they are in any other institutions of higher education. This project will develop an interdisciplinary learning community of faculty, participate in lectures, colloquia, and workshops with scholars from the range of academic disciplines, and create and pilot new teaching and learning approaches that can be sustained and integrated in the Savannah State curriculum, and shared with colleagues on other campuses and community settings where the study of the African American experience is ongoing.

We have chosen to focus on the historical periods of slavery and emancipation, a focus suggested in part by the upcoming period of commemoration of the Civil War's 150th anniversary between 2011 and 2015. This is a history marked by great conflict and controversy, then and

now, and it is also a history which touches the lives of the diverse audience of residents in Savannah, the region, and the nation. While there is growing popular interest in the region, more attention must be devoted to focusing the attention of scholars and college students on this subject as well, and to laying a firm foundation and creating a context which can contribute to furthering discussions of these historical experiences based on a common desire for civility and democracy.

B. PROJECT DESIGN: GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTIVITIES

This project will operate for 18 months (January 3, 2011 through June 30, 2012) and will be based on three broad principles: expanding the knowledge base; supporting interdisciplinary campus collaborations among faculty to create curriculum innovations; and promoting sustainability. We have three main goals: (1) enhance knowledge of the African American experience among faculty through exposure to the research and writing of key scholars; (2) collaborate among faculty members to create innovations in interdisciplinary humanities teaching and learning; and (3) establish an on-going forum for exploring the African American experience in Southeast Georgia. Goal 1 pertains to enhancing knowledge; Goal 2 supports collaboration and creating curriculum innovations; and Goal 3 relates to promoting sustainability. Our three goals with implementing activities are discussed briefly below with implementing activities:

Goal #1: ENHANCE KNOWLEDGE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Implementing Activities:

1.a: Organize the SSU Humanities/Africana Faculty Learning Community (FLC) focused on the African American experience. The FLC is an interdisciplinary group of 11 faculty members drawn from departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.

1.b: Sponsor public lectures with each visiting scholar, with broad campus/community outreach;

1.c: Host a more focused Colloquium with each visiting scholar during which members of the FLC can discuss sources, methods, findings, and implications for teaching and learning at SSU;

Goal #2: Create and pilot innovations in interdisciplinary humanities teaching and learning

Implementing Activities:

2.a: Organize workshops on new approaches to pedagogy and new technologies for teaching and learning—including such topics as team teaching, writing-intensive approaches; online resources; critical thinking; experiential, place-based learning (museums), authentic assessment;

2.b: Support faculty travel/participation in select conferences focused on teaching and learning in the humanities: e.g., MERLOT/Multimedia Educational Resources for Learning and Online Teaching, Scholarship on Teaching and Learning, International Conference on Critical Thinking, etc.

2.c: Develop and pilot specific new approaches proposed by FLC faculty for broadening and deepening Africana-related interdisciplinary explorations in the SSU curriculum;

Goal #3: Establish a forum for exploring the African American experience in Southeast GA

Implementing Activities:

3.a: Develop an e-learning module (Web CT) to make available teaching and learning resources that can promote on-campus innovation;

3.b: Create opportunities for live streaming and “anytime, anyplace” participation in the project’s lectures, colloquia, and workshops using webcasting technologies;

3.c: Organize a major dissemination conference (February 2012) on “Exploring the African American Experience in Savannah and Southeast Georgia;”

3.d: Disseminate the outcomes and resources of this project that can be used by public school teachers, community stakeholders, informal education institutions (especially museums), and others interested in exploring the African American experience in Southeast Georgia and beyond;

MAJOR THEMES AND CONTENT. This project at Savannah State University proposes to explore specific aspects of the experiences of African Americans in Savannah and Southeast Georgia within the broader context of U.S. and world history (and even new paradigms such as “Atlantic History”). The foundation for such a focus is based, first and foremost, on the significant

role across historical time that Black people have played in the history of the city, the region, the state, the nation, and the world. One example must suffice. On January 12, 1865, U.S. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and Major-General William Tecumseh Sherman met at Savannah's Second Baptist Church with a determined group of 20 African-Americans, including former slaves and free men. Among the twelve questions posed by Secretary Stanton was this: "in what manner do you think you can take care of yourselves, and how can you best assist the Government in maintaining your freedom?" Rev. Garrison Frazier, a 67-year old Baptist minister, was their chosen spokesperson: "The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land," he responded, "and turn it and till it by our labor . . .," an answer that led Stanton and Sherman a few days later to order that all lands between Charleston, SC and Jacksonville, FL on the barrier islands and along rivers thirty miles inland be reserved for now freed African Americans.

There are few more dramatic episodes in all of African-American history and the history of the U.S. as Black people, in the midst of slavery's demise, put forward their ideas about freedom to men responsible for shaping U.S. policy. And this is only one of many remarkable events central to U. S. history that occurred in this region. Before the U.S. Civil War, the list would include Georgia's founding in 1733 as the only colony which prohibited slavery until 1754; Equiano/Gustavas Vassa's six visits to Savannah as a slave and as a free man in the 1760s; the role of a delegation of Haitian soldiers who fought against the British and for the American Revolution during the siege of Savannah in 1779; and Savannah's role as the site for the invention and promotion of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in 1793, an innovation that furthered cotton production and the industrial revolutions in Great Britain and the U.S. The list could be extended but the point should be clear: there is rich history and heritage valuable to all U.S. citizens to be interpreted in the Savannah region, and this project seeks to build the capacity of the region's only historically-Black university to make this history accessible to increasing numbers of its faculty, students, and the broader community.

Our approach to the African-American Experience is informed by the work of scholars who propose the use of a “paradigm of unity” for such studies—a general framework that facilitates a focus on the variety of particular aspects while maintaining a holistic approach to this broad subject. One such approach developed by Bailey and colleagues suggests that such a paradigm includes multiple units of analysis (e.g., color, class, culture, consciousness, gender, age, geographical location, etc.) studied as they interact across historical periods of time (e.g., Africa, Slave Trade, Slavery, Emancipation, Rural Life, Migration, and Urban Life). This approach allows for interpretations that are both synchronic (existing at a specific point in time and not historically) and diachronic (involving the study or development of something through time). This becomes especially important when interpreting and presenting the African American experience and key aspects such as African cultural survivals in the Americas, changing work experiences “from farm to factory,” or the transformation of Black culture and art—music, graphic arts, etc.—and social institutions such as the church in the rural to urban migration. The vast potential of our dialogue with our invited scholars is captured by Professor Jones’s comment in her appended letter: “In fact, the history of black people in Savannah and the surrounding lowcountry suggests we should consider African-American ***experiences*** in all their rich diversity through space (the Rice Kingdom, the city) and time (the founding of the colony of Georgia to the present).” We agree!

Planning for a sustained discussion of humanities education over the next few years, we have decided to focus on three distinct topics: (a) What broad dynamics shaped the African-American experience during two pivotal historical periods: the American Revolution and the Civil War/Emancipation? (b) What were the dynamics of historical change from the period of African American life in rural America and its transformation with the Great Migration to the cities, both Southern and Northern beginning in World War I, including, for example, the modern civil rights movement. (c) What historical and contemporary developments link the African American experience in the U.S. to the broader dynamics related to globalization and international affairs?

For the first topic, the subject of this proposal, we have identified scholars who are well known for their research and publications in their fields and their published scholarship will comprise the core list of readings for the project, supplemented by additional texts and sources they will identify. Our discussions will be bracketed by the work and presentations of David Waldstreicher on the American Revolution and the Constitution, and Jacqueline Jones on the Civil War era. The insights of scholars whose work focuses on more particular aspects of African American life within this framework will then be our focus: the archaeology of slave plantations (Dr. Theresa Singleton), African and African American cultural transformations (Dr. Michael Gomez), technology and society (Dr. Angela Lawekete); the struggle for Emancipation (Dr. Leslie Rowland); and U.S. economic history and the economic implications of slavery as U.S. history moved forward from the Civil War (Dr. Gavin Wright).

Proposed Scholar	Disciplinary Specialty	Major Texts
David Waldstreicher Temple University	History	<i>Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification & Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution</i>
Jacqueline Jones U of Texas-Austin	History of Ideas Southern History	<i>Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War</i>
Theresa Singleton Syracuse University	Anthropology Historical Archaeology	<i>Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life</i>
Michael Gomez New York University	Departments of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies	<i>Exchanging Our Country's Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South</i>
Angela Lakwete Auburn University	History of Technology Southern History	<i>Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America</i>
Gavin Wright Stanford University	Economic History Department of Economics	<i>Slavery and American Economic Development & Old South, New South</i>
Leslie Rowland Univ. of Maryland	Department of History	<i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867: Land and Labor, 1865</i>

Participating scholars in the Faculty Learning Community will be challenged to develop a set of insights and innovations related to the core activities of institutions of higher education: Teaching, Research and Service. Thus, in addition to a focus on scholarship in the Public Lectures and Colloquia, several workshops will be organized around additional themes focused on “**How Student Learn and How We Should Teach**”: (a) Building Skills: Critical Thinking and Writing

Across the Curriculum; (b) New Innovations in Teaching and Learning with Technology; and (c) Using Museums and Other Place-Based Resources for Humanities Education. For these workshops, scholars in the Savannah area whose scholarship and teaching are excellent resources will be invited. For example, **Professor Thomas B. Klein** of Georgia Southern University will be one of our workshop presenters. He is an expert in linguistics who studies the work of Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner who recorded interviews in coastal Georgia on Gullah-Geechee in the 1930s.

D. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT. This project fits well with Savannah State University's history and mission: "the oldest public historically black university in the State of Georgia . . . fosters engaged learning and personal growth in a student-centered environment that celebrates the African American legacy while nurturing a diverse student body . . ." The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences serves as a "center of learning that transmits and affirms the significance of the African American legacy."

Because of its history and a student body that is 95% African American, SSU has historically devoted substantial teaching, research, and service resources to African American history and culture. Its Africana Studies Program offers both a major and minor in the field, with several interdisciplinary courses. Importantly, the majority of introductory and advanced courses on Black life and culture and contemporary public policy concerns are offered in traditional departments and programs: History, Political Science, Psychology, Social Work, Criminal Justice, English, Mass Communications, Theater, Dance, and Music. In addition to the activities of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, the Marine Sciences program in the College of Science and Technology has been funded by NOAA (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency) to conduct oral histories of African American maritime traditions. Savannah State continues to initiate and collaborate in important activities focused on the African American experience in the city, region, and state. For example, Africana Studies successfully developed a collaborative project funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services entitled

“Building the Capacity of African American Museums in Southeast Georgia.” With the City of Savannah, Savannah State has served as the main institutional coordinator of the Savannah Black Heritage Festival since its inception. As the only historically-Black university in the region, SSU’s collaboration is actively sought and it serves as a partner in many significant humanities-related undertakings (e.g., *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee* (U of GA Press, 2010). Some of these collaborations are described in the Appendix and Letters of Collaboration.

D. STAFF AND PARTICIPANTS. **Dr. Ronald W. Bailey** will serve as project director. He is Visiting Distinguished Professor of Africana Studies and History and interim chair of the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs. He is also emeritus Professor of African American Studies and History at Northeastern University in Boston where he chaired the Department of African-American Studies with a joint appointment in History. Bailey holds an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Black Studies from Stanford University, the first such degree awarded in the United States. As project director, Dr. Bailey will provide oversight of all aspects of project planning and implementation. **Professor Davida Harris**, one of the participating faculty, will also work with Dr. Bailey in project coordination. Joining the project staff will be a graduate student and a part-time secretary to assist with project management, outreach, and documentation.

Savannah State Humanities Learning Community Participants. The following SSU faculty members from across the disciplines have been invited and confirmed as members of the Humanities Faculty Learning Community. Letters of agreement and vitae are in the appendix.

Name (One participant must be selected)	Disciplinary Focus
Cornelius St. Mark, Mohamed Mukhtar	History, African Studies
DeReef Jamison	Africana Studies/Psychology
Shirley Geiger	Political Science
Davida Harris	Sociology
Omega Moore, Kamille Stone Stanton, Joyce White	English
Peggy Blood	Art
Carmen Manning Miller	Mass Communications

E. EVALUATION. This project will conduct a rigorous formative and summative assessment to determine if our implementation is effective and meets NEH's expectations and achieves our goals. **Dr. Sandra Murray Nettles**, former Interim Dean of the Graduate School and Professor at Georgia Southern University, a widely published scholar with extensive research and evaluation experience, will serve as evaluator. As Principal Research Scientist at Johns Hopkins' Center for the Social Organization of Schools, she collaborated with Gary Gottfredson and others in creating an organizational development program called program development evaluation (PDE) and has used this evaluation method in projects funded by IMLS, schools, museums, and other agencies. Dr. Nettles will design evaluation instruments, monitor project activities, and assess the final products. She will also develop indicators of success that will be used in a final report to assess project outcomes for the principles and goals indicated. We will also work with Office of Institutional Research to develop assessments of all of the curriculum innovations implemented as a result of this project which impact student learning outcomes.

F. FOLLOW-UP AND DISSEMINATION. We intend for this project to lend momentum and strategic thinking for developing ongoing innovative interdisciplinary activities, including a possible Center or Institute for studying the international Black experience. Campus collaboration, collaborations with leading scholars in this field, curriculum innovations, an ongoing conference, and dissemination activities contribute to this outcome. The project will build on an ongoing relationship with Georgia Southern University and propose presentations for the 2nd Annual SoTL (Scholarship on Teaching and Learning) Symposium of the South in Statesboro, GA. In addition, faculty will be encouraged and supported to present the project's work at various professional conferences and for publication in relevant scholarly and popular periodicals. Beyond NEH funding, our plans include seeking additional funding for innovative project ideas which emerge from this project, including applications for internal support for Title III funding provided to SSU by the Dept. of Education, and to NEH, the Georgia Humanities Council, foundations, and others.