



Interfaith America's Black Interfaith Fellowship Inaugural Cohort Project Descriptions



Ibrahim Abdul-Matin

Principal, Green Squash Consulting

Muslim

Bio: Ibrahim Abdul-Matin is the author of *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet* and is the co-founder of Green Squash Consulting, a management consulting firm based in New York that works with people, organizations, companies, coalitions, and governments committed to equity and justice and specializes in dynamic strategic and focused stakeholder management and partnership development. He sits on the boards of the International Living Future Institute encouraging the creation of a regenerative built environment and Sapelo Square whose mission is to celebrate and analyze the experiences of Black Muslims in the United States. He also serves as an Interfaith America Senior Fellow, a Senior Fellow with New Yorkers for Clean Power, and on the NYS Advisory Board of the Trust for Public Land.

Project Description: This project is titled, “Restorative Healing Circles for Black and Brown Climate Justice Leaders.” I will curate restorative health circles of faith-based black and brown leaders, working for climate justice. These circles will meet regularly to explore their relationship to their selves, their families, their communities, their work, and to natural world. This will be done through prompts, storytelling, facilitated dialogues, and sharing.



Naila Ansari

Assistant Professor of Theatre and Africana Studies, SUNY Buffalo State College; Founder, The Movement of Joy, LLC

Muslim

Bio: An Assistant Professor in Theatre and Africana Studies at SUNY Buffalo State College, Naila Ansari has merged artistry and scholarship to build and create works through community and collaborative processes that facilitate conversations on race and Black performance. Ansari also currently serves as the Dance Director for Ujima Company, Inc. selected by the late Lorna C. Hill and is Founder and Lead Artist of the Movement of Joy, LLC. Ansari is a collaborator with the UB Arts Collaboratory under the direction of Bronwyn Keenan. Her most recent project and a forthcoming book, “The Choreographies of Black Woman Joy,” focuses on the performance of joy through the creative archiving of oral histories, movement histories, live-performance, and film.

Project Description: The Movement of Joy is an ongoing practice aimed to amass joy testimonials of Black women that meditate on remembering and understanding the movement histories that live in our physical bodies through performance, film, photography, writing, and archiving. This project connects with Black women from all faiths and spiritual backgrounds on how they "move" joy in their lives, through conversation and performance. The mission of this project is to develop a collection that leaves the legacies of Black women's joy and how they "choreographed" their joy in an America that has historically tried to erase the legacy and significance of Black women. In addition to the artistic portion of this project, The Movement of Joy also aims to reimagine Black women and center their joy and their experiences and connectivity to the divine and spirit.

Watch The Movement of Joy trailer [here](#).



Brad Braxton

Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, St. Luke's School
(New York, NY)

Christian

Bio: Dr. Brad R. Braxton is the Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at St. Luke's School in New York, Founder of The Open Church in Baltimore, and a curator and adviser for "Creative Encounters: Living Religions in America," the 2022 Smithsonian Folklife Festival sponsored by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Brad previously served as Director of the Center for the Study of African American Religious Life and Supervisory Curator of Religion at the Smithsonian Institution. He is frequently invited by colleges and universities as a guest lecturer and visiting scholar teaching on religion, diversity, and social justice. Brad earned a PhD in Religion/Religious Studies from Emory University and a MPhil in Theology/Theological Studies from the University of Oxford.

Project Description: The resources and relationships associated with the Black Interfaith Fellowship will substantially enhance outreach opportunities for interfaith dialogue based on the forthcoming book, "A Master Class on Being Human: A Black Christian and A Black Secular Humanist on Religion, Race, and Justice" by Dr. Braxton and Dr. Anthony Pinn (Beacon Press, Spring 2023). Written by two Black scholars of religion, representing two traditions—Christianity and Secular Humanism—that have for centuries existed in bitter opposition, this book models constructive dialogue between these distinctive Black theological-philosophical worldviews. The fellowship will enable us to focus our outreach efforts, including traditional and social media outreach and the potential development of curricular resources, on universities, older adolescent students in independent schools, and grassroots conversations in congregational and community settings. We also may develop a podcast series.



Myokei Caine-Barrett

Bishop, Nichiren Shu Buddhist Order of North America; Chief Priest
Myoken-ji Temple (Houston, TX)

Buddhist – Nichiren Shu tradition

Bio: Myokei Caine-Barrett is the current Bishop of the Nichiren Shu Buddhist Order of North America. She is the first woman and the first American to hold this position. She is the guiding teacher and priest at Myoken-ji Temple in Houston, Texas. Myokei Shonin currently volunteers with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice as clergy to two prison Sanghas (communities). She is currently developing curriculum for: (1) the Nichiren Shu tradition and the Lotus Sutra; and (2) dealing with the trauma of incarceration and racism. She also supports weekend trainings for Healing Warrior Hearts, a Texas for Heroes project designed to truly welcome home veterans. Myokei Shonin is a writer and has been featured in *Nichiren Shu News*, *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, and *Lion's Roar*.

Project Description: The Texas Department of Criminal Justice is looking for programs to be used in faith dorms that are currently strictly Christian based, where inmates of other faith traditions find participation to be oppressive when they are required to attend Christian services in order to continue their participation. This project will develop a program to promote an interfaith community utilizing the techniques we have previously found to be useful in our work among inmates, such as council practice and community building utilizing the arts and music to inspire a deeper dive into the personal. We have used various faith practices to generate healing from the trauma of both racism and incarceration among inmates, a majority of whom are BIPOC. We have explored these topics further with white and Latinx men, which has created a community that is racially diverse and open to exploration of topics not usually approached in the prison setting.



Mark Crain

Executive Director, Dream of Detroit

Muslim

Bio: Mark Crain is a digital strategist and community organizer with local and national experience. After running a web development firm for five years, Mark led communications at Chicago's Inner-City Muslim Action Network, and then ran several digital programs at Obama 2012. Mark is a co-founder of MPower Change, a rapid-response campaigning organization mobilizing Muslims and their allies, as well as the executive director of Dream of Detroit (DREAM), combining community organizing and development on Detroit's Westside. DREAM has rehabbed more than 10 homes, mobilized more than 500 volunteers, planted over 100 trees, secured vacant buildings, removed countless dumpsters of debris, graduated 60 participants from its entrepreneurship class, and holds a street fair that has brought out thousands. Mark has been featured in media outlets including *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Nation*, and *The Guardian*, and National Public Radio.

Project Description: During this project, the Organizing Team of DREAM will facilitate the regular convening of five local faith leaders who shepherd Muslim and Christian denominations within or adjacent to our impact turf. The goals of convening will be to align the houses of worship with our community development objectives, surface potential volunteer leaders from within these congregations, and project Black interfaith solidarity to our broader neighborhood. Serving as a hub for congregants from other local houses of worship to participate in local community development efforts, even as we maintain our own Muslim-led identity, will also be a priority. And as our neighborhood sits on the cusp of gentrification, with massive investor action, our houses of worship will be critical to demanding equity for the residents in our 90% Black neighborhood.



Aisha El-Amin

Associate Vice Chancellor for Equity & Belonging, University of Illinois, Chicago

Muslim

Bio: Dr. Aisha El-Amin is passionate about issues of equity and justice in education. These passions have led her to become an Illinois State Board of Education Certified K-9th grade teacher, an adjunct professor at several colleges and universities, an elected school board member for Community Consolidated School District #168, appointed board member for the *Routledge Journal of Religion and Education*, board member of Masjid Al-Taqwa (Chicago), Board Vice-Chair for Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR)-Chicago, and board secretary with Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). Additionally, Dr. El-Amin has served in several roles at the University of Illinois Chicago before her current role. She holds a PhD in Policy Studies in Urban Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago, an MEd from DePaul University, and a BS in Management Studies from the University of Maryland-European Division.

Project Description: As a way of highlighting, cultivating, and supporting Black interfaith work of youth, in partnership with the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC) using The Black Faith Leader Collective sponsored by Chicago Theological Seminary and Interfaith America past participants as a resource, this project will establish a year-long fellowship for Black youth (18-24) from a variety of faith traditions internal and external to the University of Illinois-Chicago. This Black Youth Interfaith Leadership Fellowship aims to cultivate and support emerging Black faith leaders from diverse religious identities. Elements of the fellowship would include meeting with their interfaith group throughout the semester to engage in discussions around their self-identified culminating group project; attending at least 2 engagements a year with various faith leaders to learn, connect and find mentorship; attending the Interfaith America Interfaith Leadership Institute; and creating and presenting a culminating project.



Tariq El-Amin

Resident Imam, Masjid Al-Taqwa (Chicago, IL)

Muslim

Bio: Tariq I. El-Amin serves as the Imam of Masjid Al-Taqwa (Chicago), a community in association with the leadership of the late Imam Warith Deen Mohammed and is the co-founder and Executive Director of Bridging the Gap Inc., a non-profit organization that focuses its efforts on education, leadership, and service. He is the past Director of Civic Engagement & Interfaith Services at the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC) and the former host/producer of the daily talk radio program "Radio Islam", which aired on WCEV 1450am (Chicago, IL). Tariq is completing graduate studies at Bayan-Chicago Theological Seminary, focusing on Islamic Chaplaincy, and plans to begin doctoral studies afterward.

Project Description: End of life services in Black American communities are often spaces of interfaith gathering and represent an opportunity for interfaith engagement. My personal experience and those experiences shared with me by others paints this engagement as being at times harmful and divisive instead of inclusive. I intend to produce a series of podcast interviews with African Muslim/Christian faith leaders, and congregants about: 1) How they view end of life services as interfaith gatherings; 2) Their experience in leading/participating in those services; 3) The presence of hijab, kufi, "Muslim clothing" at Christian end of life services; 4) The presence of Christian relatives/attendees at Muslim end of life services; 5) Their interpretation of anti-Islamic/anti-Christian remarks; 6) Ways to be authentic to their faith tradition while also being inclusive; and 7) The impact of continued divisive language at these services on the Black community.



Idris Goodwin

Executive Director, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College

Christian

Bio: Idris Goodwin is a multiple award-winning playwright, breakbeat poet, director, educator, and culturist. Idris is the author of over 50 original plays; his titles such as *And In This Corner Cassius Clay*, *How We Got On*, *Hype Man: A Break Beat Play*, *This is Modern Art*, and the groundbreaking *Free Play: open source scripts for an antiracist tomorrow*, are widely produced across the country by a diverse mix of professional theatres, academic environments, and non-traditional spaces. Goodwin has created original content for and/or appeared on Nickelodeon, *Def Poetry*, *Sesame Street*, National Public Radio, BBC Radio, and the Discovery Channel. Idris is Director of The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College. He actively serves on both the advisory boards of Theatre for Young Audiences USA and Children's Theatre Foundation Association. Idris is a 2021 United States Artist Fellow and has been supported by The Kennedy Center, The Eugene O'Neill Conference, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, and The Playwrights' Center.

Project Description: This project, "Divine Styles" (working title), is an interfaith hip hop audio documentary that explores the intersection of contemporary religious practice and hip-hop culture as experienced by those of the African diaspora. Intended for a public radio or podcast format, this documentary will be split across 4-6 episodes of roughly 10-15 minutes each. Through interviews with practitioners, journalists, scholars, and fans, this series explores the intersection of hip hop and religion in the information age. With a distinct focus on Black identified participants and scholars I am interested in the ways the culture has built bridges between faith traditions, and how those faith traditions shaped the aesthetics of the art itself. And conversely, how has hip hop incorporated itself and advanced religious practice?



Melanie Harris

Professor of Black Feminist and Womanist Theologies, Wake Forest University

Christian

Bio: Dr. Melanie L. Harris is Professor of Black Feminist Thought and Womanist Theology jointly appointed with Wake Forest School of Divinity and the African American Studies program at Wake Forest University. Dr. Harris is also the Director of the Food, Health, and Ecological Well-Being Program. A graduate of the Harvard Leadership Program, Dr. Harris is a former American Council of Education Fellow and Founding Director of the Texas Christian University African American and Africana Studies program. Her research and scholarship critically examine intersections between race, religion, gender, and environmental ethics. She is the author of many scholarly articles and books including *Gifts of Virtue: Alice Walker and Womanist Ethics*, *Ecowomanism: Earth Honoring Faiths*, and co-editor of *Faith, Feminism, and Scholarship: The Next Generation*. A former broadcast journalist, Dr. Harris has worked as a news producer for ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates. Dr. Harris earned her PhD and MA degrees from Union Theological Seminary, an MDiv from Iliff School of Theology, and a BA from Spelman College.

Project Description: In collaboration with Harvard Divinity School's Buddhist Ministry Initiative, this project engages an interfaith communal reading practice of “all divine love: prayers for now and always” by bell hooks. Pioneering black feminist, philosopher and cultural critic, hooks who recently died on December 15, 2021, was also well known for her deep Buddhist Christian spirituality. A model of interfaith practice and a fierce scholar activist who readily embraced the full beauty of blackness, hooks often publicly reflected upon the insights she gained through Buddhist meditation and how they informed and, in some ways, re-shaped the Christian understandings that she was taught as a child. Over the course of the year, approximately 20 scholars from various educational and faith-based institutions will gather online for two sessions and meet in person to read the work, "all divine love" by bell hooks in community. Together we will glean wisdom from her writings in order to build an interfaith community committed to racial justice and learn skills to challenge and transform the misconception that feeds the seed of racism.



Steven Harris

Senior Director of Academic Programs at the Center on Faith and Justice, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University

Christian

Bio: Steven M. Harris is Senior Director of Academic Programs at the Center on Faith and Justice at Georgetown University. Prior to joining the Center’s staff, Steven spent several years on Capitol Hill building coalitions and working on domestic and international public policy issues at the intersection of religion, justice, and human dignity. His academic research interests lie at the historical intersection of Black religious thought and Calvinistic theology. He is a contributor to the edited volume, *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*. Most recently, he has considered the theologies of historical Black religious actors in conversation with the contemporary discursive edges of critical race theory and Afro-pessimist thought. A Vanderbilt graduate, Steven holds an MDiv from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, an MA in religion from Yale, and an MA in religion from Harvard, where he is also a PhD candidate in American religious history and African American studies.

Project Description: Drawing on my experience with interfaith, congregation-based direct-action and community organizing, the project will, firstly, undertake a study of black Christian congregations engaged in interfaith community organizing work in the DMV area and, secondly, produce and implement a seminar/webinar training curriculum in interfaith community organizing. The training will instruct congregations on how to start an interfaith alliance in their community—for the purpose of addressing the challenges that many communities are confronting in our current moment (COVID, economy, racial justice, climate change, etc.).



Tanisha Jarvis

Social Science Specialist, Veteran's Affairs

Humanist/Spiritualist

Bio: Tanisha Esperanza Jarvis is a social science specialist in the VA Suicide Prevention office and a diversity consultant with CAMS-Care. She graduated from Spelman College in 2015 with a BA in Anthropology & Sociology. In 2019, she obtained her MA in psychology from the Catholic University of America. Tanisha integrates humanism/spirituality in her research and clinical work. She believes interfaith is an integral part of treating and supporting clients.

Project Description: For the last four years I have focused my clinical, research, and psychological expertise on reducing mental health disparities for marginalized communities, primarily focused on Black suicidality. I propose a project that will provide community engagement in reducing mental health disparities for Black individuals and communities. As a budding scholar within suicidology, I am aware of the lack of racial representation and inclusion within this work. I propose creating a conference, The Black Suicidology Summit, that centers Black identity, voices, research, and methodology in treating suicidal behavior. The preliminary conference will be a virtual conference in sponsorship with Spelman College (my alma mater). The objective is to introduce the public mental health tools via professionals on understanding and combating suicidal behavior among Black communities. This will include various presentations, workshops, and interactive chats. Using an intersectional approach, I want to acknowledge the complexities of Black identity via examining suicidal behavior in LGBTQ+, disability, gender identity, interfaith belief systems, and other expressions of identity. The following year, the conference will be expanded in collaboration at nationwide HBCU's. Holistically, this project is about collective healing using collaborative, psychological approaches that encompasses the whole of an individual's identity.



Michael Brandon McCormack

Associate Professor of Pan-African Studies and Comparative Humanities, University of Louisville

Christian – Black Church Tradition

Bio: Dr. Michael Brandon McCormack is Associate Professor of Pan-African Studies and Comparative Humanities (Religious Studies) at the University of Louisville. He earned his PhD in 2013 from the Vanderbilt University Graduate Department of Religion, where he was also a Fellow in the Program in Theology and Practice. His research explores the intersections between Black religion, popular culture, the arts, and activism. His work has been published in *Black Theology: An International Journal*, the *Journal of Africana Religions*, and as book chapters in numerous scholarly journals and edited volumes. As a recent faculty fellow at the Commonwealth Center for the Humanities and Society at the University of Louisville, his most recent research has focused on the relationships between discourses of afro-pessimism, Black optimism, and notions of Black joy as resistance. Dr. McCormack is also a current Academic Research Fellow at The Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change at the University of Memphis and an inaugural Ascending Stars Research Fellow at the University of Louisville.

Project Description: Through the Black Interfaith Fellowship, I will extend and expand community programming centered on “Spirituality, Healing, and Liberation.” In the Fall of 2021, I partnered with a local group, Books and Breakfast Louisville, to initiate a series of communal conversations on this topic. These community-engaged events were aimed at sustaining community members through a series of talks and discussions with Black religious scholar-activist-practitioners across a range of Black faith traditions. The series lasted five weeks, with the sixth week culminating in the city-wide Festival of Faiths. As a member of the festival's planning committee, I curated and moderated a Black interfaith panel entitled, "The Ghosts and Growing Edges of Black Faith: Intersectional and Interreligious Conversations" as well as the evening session, "Uplifted: Artistic Expressions of Racial Healing and Repair." I will partner with community organizations to offer additional programming that would expand upon our theme of spirituality, healing, and liberation. This time around, I would hope to be able to draw on an even broader range of Black faith traditions, especially including Islamic and Buddhist scholar-practitioners.



Omar McRoberts

Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago

Spiritual

Bio: Dr. Omar M. McRoberts is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and The College of University of Chicago. McRoberts' scholarly and teaching interests include the sociology of religion, urban sociology, urban poverty, race, and collective action. His first book, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* is based on an ethnographic study of religious life in Four Corners: a poor, predominantly Black neighborhood in Boston containing twenty-nine congregations. It won the 2005 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. McRoberts is completing a study of Black religious responses to, and influences on, social welfare policy since the New Deal, culminating with George W. Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. He is also initiating an ethnographic project on cultures of death and dying among Black congregations in low-income urban contexts.

Project Description: As a Black Interfaith Fellow, I intend to complete a book about the religious consequences and uses of social welfare policy over several policy eras. The book challenges the notion, prevalent in both scholarly and public circles, that the government influences religious activity primarily through policies that aim directly to regulate religious expression. Policies regarding the distribution of resources and opportunities throughout society acquire religious valences as well, and historically have weighed on the political and social aspirations of religious institutions. While generations of scholarship have chronicled attempts by black religious movements to influence government, little is known about the degree of entanglement between those movements and existing social policies, and the consequences of this entanglement for patterns of black religious activism. *Black Public Religion* uncovers and explains the social policy-based mechanisms of state influence on black religion in an historical sociology spanning the New Deal, War on Poverty/Great Society, and Welfare Reform eras, and multiple denominational and ecumenical movements.



Kelsey Moss

Assistant Professor of Religion, University of Southern California

Initiated diviner in the West African Dagara tradition / Christian background

Bio: Dr. Kelsey Christina Moss is Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California. She completed her BA at Stanford University with a major in African & African American Studies. She received her PhD in Religion from Princeton University with concentrations in African American & Latin American Studies. Her research interests include Africana religions and the intersections of religion, race, slavery, and colonialism. Moss has received research support from the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture and Georgetown University. Beyond her research, she engages in community efforts that center spirituality as a critical component within movements for transcendent social change and healing from racialized and colonial trauma.

Project Description: I am in the initial stages of developing a curriculum for a community outreach program that would draw from the rich spiritual technologies and wisdom of the diversity of the black sacred imagination and ritual tradition to curate a space for collective healing and becoming. As part of my academic work, I have been tracing the history of the spiritual racialization and violence toward black spiritual traditions, namely the ways colonial actors and the colonial system denigrated, diabolized, and repressed African spiritual traditions during the era of enslavement. Parallel to exploring these themes academically, I have been involved in a number of working groups and communities that are exploring the present-day effects of inherited and transgenerational trauma. As part of this project, I seek to bring together these two previously disparate realms of my work by designing a workshop at the nexus of the spiritual and experiential wisdom of diverse black faith traditions, the history (formal history, stories, and embodied knowing) of black spiritual and healing traditions, and emergent science of consciousness and trauma healing. The workshop and community outreach program would facilitate a healing experience for personal and collective spiritual, psychological, and somatic healing to support the continued liberation of the black community.



Kameelah Mu'Min Rashad

Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology & Muslim Studies,
Chicago Theological Seminary; Founder and President, Muslim
Wellness Foundation

Muslim – Sunni

Bio: Dr. Kameelah Mu'Min Rashad is the Founder and President of Muslim Wellness Foundation (MWF), a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting healing and emotional well-being in the American Muslim community through dialogue, education, and training. Through the Muslim Wellness Foundation, Dr. Rashad has established the annual Black Muslim Psychology Conference and the Deeply Rooted Emerging Leaders (DREL) Fellowship for Black Muslim young adults. Dr. Rashad is also the founding co-Director of the National Black Muslim COVID Coalition, an initiative launched in collaboration with Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative to address need for effective planning, preparedness and organizing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Rashad graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a BA in Psychology and MEd in Psychological Services. She earned a second Master's in Restorative Practices & Youth Counseling (MRP) from the International Institute for Restorative Practices. She completed her PsyD in Clinical Psychology at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA.

Project Description: Using archival research, in-depth oral history interviews, and a Black Muslim-centered appreciative inquiry process, this project aims to correct the gap in the documented history and presence of The Dar-ul-Islam Movement (also called "the Dar") and expand the literature on Black religion in the United States and African American Muslim communities specifically. Save for several brief mentions in the texts exploring the history of Islam in (Black) America, a smattering of online articles, two short personal histories, and a breathtaking photo collection series by former Dar member Khalil Abdul Khabir, the birth, growth, dissolution, and reconfiguration of this important movement is largely unknown to the general public. This project will explore the groundbreaking achievements of the Dar, obstacles to growth and sustainability, external threats and internal vulnerabilities, and the resilience of current members in the face of rising racial violence and Islamophobic attacks.



Dianne Stewart

Professor of Religion and African American Studies, Emory University

Yoruba/Ifa

Bio: Dr. Dianne Marie Stewart is a professor of Religion and African American Studies at Emory University specializing in African-heritage religious cultures in the Caribbean and the Americas. Dr. Stewart joined Emory's Faculty of Arts and Sciences in 2001. She is the author of numerous scholarly articles and chapters, as well as three monographs—*Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*, *Black Women, Black Love: America's War on African American Marriage*, and *Obeah, Orisa and Religious Identity in Trinidad: Africana Nations and the Power of Black Sacred Imagination – Orisa, Volume II*. She is also a founding co-editor, with Drs. Jacob Olupona and Terrence Johnson, of the Religious Cultures of African and African Diaspora People series at Duke University Press. Dr. Stewart is most proud of her leadership of Emory's Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program. She obtained her BA from Colgate University in English and African American Studies, her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School, and her PhD in systematic theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Project Description: My proposed book, "Local and Transnational Legacies of African Christianity in West-Central Africa and the Black Atlantic World," will address the impact of the Kongo Catholic heritage upon the formation of African-oriented Protestant traditions in the United States and the Anglophone Caribbean. It will analyze the intricate transatlantic movements of persons, ideas, and practices that have shaped a partially invisible spiritual network of African Atlantic Christianity. Beyond its potential to transform what we know about Christian religious formation in Africa and the African diaspora, this project will expose the limitations of conventional traditions-based approaches in religious studies and regional approaches to the study of African diaspora religions. Black religious formation during the transatlantic slave trade and slavery was a Black interfaith experience. Black interfaith cooperation is one of the most unacknowledged and understudied experiences of slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean. My book will help to historicize Black interfaith cooperation in the US.



Adam Taylor

President, Sojourners

Christian

Bio: The Rev. Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners and author of *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post Civil Rights Generation*. Taylor previously led the Faith Initiative at the World Bank Group and served as the Vice President in charge of Advocacy at World Vision U.S. and the Senior Political Director at Sojourners. He has also served as the Executive Director of Global Justice, an organization that educates and mobilizes students around global human rights and economic justice. He was selected for the 2009/2010 class of White House Fellows and served in the White House Office of Cabinet Affairs and Public Engagement. Taylor is a graduate of Emory University, the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology. Taylor also serves on the Global Advisory Board of Tearfund UK and is a member of the inaugural class of the Aspen Institute Civil Society Fellowship. Taylor is ordained in the American Baptist Church and the Progressive National Baptist Convention and serves in ministry at the Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, VA.

Project Description: Many congregation leaders lack practical and theologically grounded tools and curriculum designed to help them build and sustain programs and/or ministries that are focused on advancing social and racial justice. While there isn't a one size fit all approach, many pastors, imams, rabbi's, etc. receive very little exposure to public theology through their seminary education and lack training and skills associated with organizing and advocacy. This project seeks to translate some of the content and building blocks that I've compiled over twenty years of working with black churches to strengthen their public witness and advocacy impact. Building impactful social justice ministries requires building relational, strategic, and motivational skills. It also requires the ability to build effective campaigns and coalitions. Finally, the role of public narrative is also critical. These and other skills can and need to be translated and tailored within different black faith contexts.



Amoni Thompson-Jones

Teaching Assistant and PhD Student, Department of Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Spiritual

Bio: Amoni Thompson-Jones is a poet and PhD candidate in the Department of Feminist Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Prior to UCSB, she graduated from Spelman College with a BA in Comparative Women's Studies and a minor in Creative Writing. She currently teaches and leads programs aimed at providing creative spaces for Black girls. Her work has been published in *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection: Imagining Worlds for Black Girls*, *becoming undisciplined: an academic zine*, and the *Journal of Visual Arts Research*. Amoni believes interfaith is a critical lens in which to create nurturing, welcoming spaces for Black girls everywhere.

Project Description: I am working on a project called The Black Girl Digital Imaging Institute that will engage Black girls ages 9-19 in an art and photography project where they can create their own digital archive of Black girlhood. For the Black Girl Digital Imaging Institute, I plan to invite 15 participants to engage in a conversation about art, photography, and visual meaning-making. In addition to studying and discussing Black artists, we would work on a thematic photographic project that engages images and portraits they feel demonstrate their everyday lives. The curriculum would center Black feminist art theory and would be built around the needs and desires expressed by the participants. As a capstone for the Institute, I hope to assist the participants in creating an art installation that explores the tenderness of Black girl life using images captured by Black girls themselves. This project will also be part of my dissertation work and I will interview the participants about the exhibit and the work they contributed. The goal of the Institute is to identify how Black girls interpret and explore questions of space/place, identity/self-making, and interiority/self-possession through visual and aesthetic practices.



Jermira Trapp

Detective, City of Chicago Police Department

Practitioner of SGI-USA Nichiren Buddhism

Bio: Jermira Trapp has been a Practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism with the SGI-USA since 2012. Jermira earned a BS in Public Health with the emphasis in health promotion and a minor in psychology from Northern Illinois University. Jermira is passionate and dedicated to dismantling the stigmatism associated with mental health. On her podcast “Transmuting Daily Mental Trapps,” Jermira shares her personal journey as a source of empowerment on how to transmute your “Daily Mental Trapps.”

Project Description: As a black, Buddhist woman who works in law enforcement. I am passionate and dedicated to dismantling the stigmatization with mental health in the black community. My idea is to host community outreach programs with inner city youth and local churches that could include providing sound therapy and sound healing workshop's utilizing various tools such as drumming, tuning forks, singing bowls (Tibetan / Quartz Crystal). The transmission of these frequencies will help create physiological reactions. I would love to see harmonious gatherings of people of all races and spiritual backgrounds doing the individual work needed that will permeate into the collective; sound baths, sound therapy meditation, and labyrinths created in the community.



Eric Williams

Curator of Religion, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Christian

Bio: Eric Lewis Williams, PhD, is an ordained minister of the Church of God in Christ. He has taught history, religion, and African American studies at several institutions across the country. He currently serves as the Curator of Religion for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. His current research examines the meaning of religion within Africana histories and cultures and the role and influences of African religions in the Atlantic world. Additional research and teaching interests include Black Christian thought, American religious history, religion and material culture, African diasporan religions, Pentecostalism, and phenomenology of religion. His research and studies have taken him around the world. He considers himself a transatlantic commuter, a collector of words, and an emergent jazzman in the world of ideas.

Project Description: Through a critical examination of the autobiographical writings of notable African American artists, activists, and intellectuals including James Brown, Al Green, Nina Simone, B.B. King, Aretha Franklin, Cornel West, James Baldwin, Charlie Wilson, Zora Hurston, and Marvin Gaye, the Examined Life Project will explore how their engagement of the arts undergirded their pursuits of human flourishing. Drawing heavily upon the disciplines of history, theology, philosophy, and psychology, this project will explore the formation of these artists' religious consciousness and how their religious understandings informed their philosophical and artistic productions. This project will explore how these influential figures grappled with their conception of the person of Jesus Christ and their commonly inherited Black Christian faith and examine their understanding of the Christian faith, at times its renegotiation, and even its rejection, in their quest for "the good life."