



CENTER FOR
AFRICANA
STUDIES

CHANGING
THE
NARRATIVE

SPRING 2026

The **SOJOURNER**
TRUTH *Newsletter*

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR AFRICANA STUDIES AT CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

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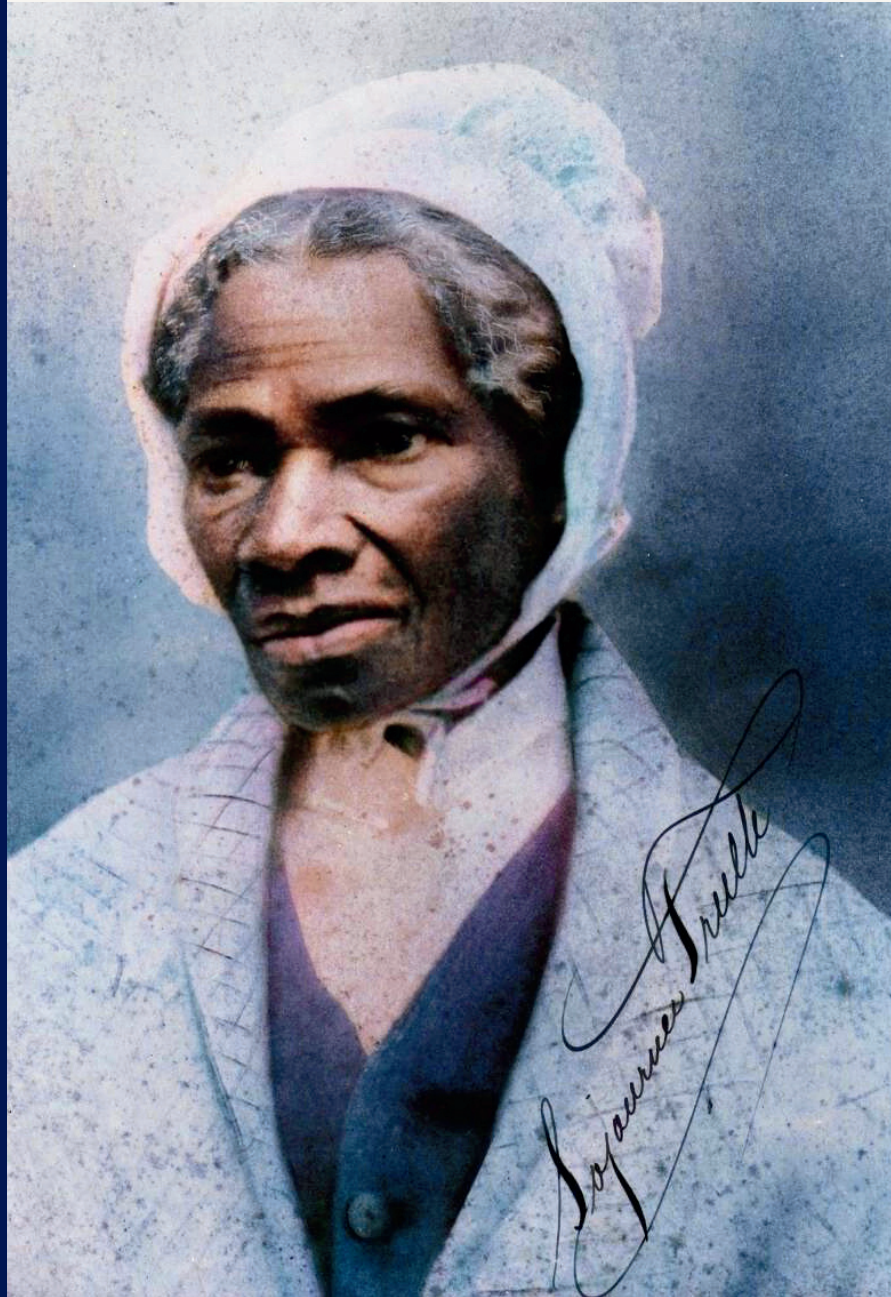
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"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And Ain't I a Woman?"

- Sojourner Truth

Isabella Baumfree was born into slavery in 1797. Growing up in a New York estate, working for her master. She spent her childhood riddled with the miseries of being a slave, often being cruelly sold, mistreated, and frequently beaten. Around 1815, she fell in love with a fellow enslaved person named Robert, with whom she had five children. By 1827, her master refused to honor his promise of freeing her, nor uphold the New York Anti-slavery law of 1827. Resulting in Baumfree running away, which she informed her master, "I did not run away, I walked away by daylight." Baumfree experienced various encounters with religion, ultimately prompting her to convert. She became a preacher and changed her name to Sojourner Truth in 1843. She spent this period being involved in the growing anti-slavery movement. As well as a women's rights convention in 1851. Where her now well-known speech "Ain't I a Woman?" Speech was delivered.



SOJOURNER TRUTH

"A'INT I A WOMAN?" SPEECH



CENTRAL



CENTER FOR AFRICANA STUDIES

A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

The Center for Africana Studies' five-year strategic plan is intentionally aligned with Central's commitment to equitable global engagement, inclusive excellence, and high-impact educational practices. The Center serves as a strategic hub for Africa-focused academic partnerships, interdisciplinary programming, and student access to global learning opportunities. Africa is one of the continents identified by the institution as a strategic global region for sustained partnerships, supporting faculty exchange, student mobility, experiential learning, research collaboration, and community-engaged learning. Recognizing passport access as a structural barrier, the Center integrates U.S. passport education and application support into its global engagement strategy for the next three years to first year Pell eligible low-income students. By incorporating passport assistance into programming and grant budgets, the Center removes a critical obstacle for first-generation students, expanding participation in study abroad, internships, and experiential learning. Collectively, the Center's five-year strategic plan strengthens Central's global engagement mission, expands Africa-centered partnerships, increases external funding capacity, and ensures equitable student access to international opportunities. The Center for Africana Studies functions as both a thought leader and implementation partner, advancing sustainable, inclusive, and mission-aligned global engagement at Central.



OLUWATOYIN AWODERU, MBA '06

"As we continue this academic year, the Center for Africana Studies remains committed to advancing interdisciplinary scholarship, global engagement, and community-centered learning grounded in Africa and the African Diaspora. Through our programming, local and global partnerships, and student-focused initiatives, we are deepening conversations around culture, social justice, and global responsibility while creating meaningful opportunities for experiential and international learning."

"Thank you to our students, faculty, staff, and community partners for your continued support, collaboration, and vision. Together, we are building a Center that not only reflects our shared histories but also shapes our collective future."



Our Mission

Amalia Warkoski

Graphic Designer, Interviewer, Writer
Transition to Work Intern | Exercise Science



Tracy Pierre

Graphic Designer, Interviewer, Writer
Transition to Work Intern | English



Kauren Howe

Researcher, Writer
Transition to Work Intern | Social Work



Crystabel Afwireng

Researcher, Interviewer
Transition to Work Intern | Earth Science



Victoria Ojide

Researcher
Transition to Work Intern | Pre-Nursing



Winston Hendricks

Photographer
Transition to Work Intern | Mechanical Engineering



Elizabeth Duncan

Team Lead
Transition to Work Intern | Criminology



EDITORIAL TEAM

At Central Connecticut State University, the Center for Africana Studies champions academic excellence and cultural understanding of the global African experience. Through dynamic scholarship, community engagement, and student empowerment, it celebrates the rich heritage and diverse contributions of the African Diaspora. Home to the hands-on Archaeology Laboratory for African and African Diaspora Studies, uncovering Connecticut’s Black history. The Center also offers the Transition to Work Internship Program, which provides Central students with opportunities to develop real-world work experience and essential professional skills. Through the program, students strengthen competencies in communication, organization, time management, project management, group dynamics, and collaborative decision-making. The internship also emphasizes emotional and social intelligence, helping students learn how to navigate professional environments effectively and become more self-aware of how their individual contributions can positively or negatively impact a workplace.

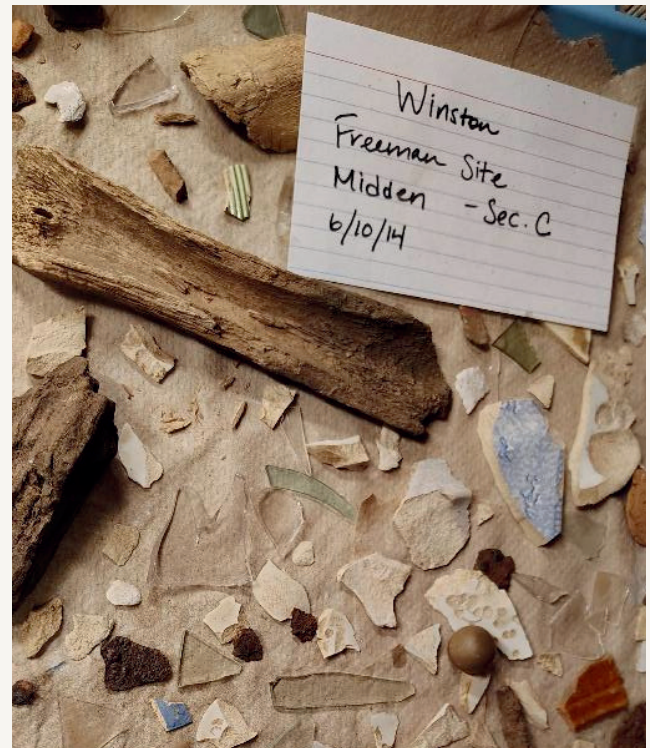




The Center For Africana Studies

THE ARCHAEOLOGY LABORATORY FOR AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORA STUDIES (ALAADS)

The Africana Studies Center proudly brought its Archaeology Laboratory for African and African Diaspora Studies (ALAADS) into the spotlight, offering transition-to-work interns an extraordinary opportunity to engage deeply with African American history through the lens of archaeology. Their inaugural assignment took them to the Freeman site, where interns carefully cleaned, cataloged, and weighed artifacts that carry immense historical significance. These seemingly ordinary objects serve as powerful storytellers, revealing the daily lives, struggles, and ingenuity of both enslaved and free Black communities. Through this hands-on experience, history moved beyond textbooks and archives, becoming something tangible, personal, and profoundly meaningful. By pairing archaeological practice with historical records, the interns helped illuminate narratives of resilience, survival, and innovation, demonstrating how archaeology can uncover voices of the past and bring them vividly into the present.



THE JOURNEY PODCAST



Introducing *The Journey*, the new podcast from Central's Center for Africana Studies that amplifies powerful voices and celebrates the depth and diversity of lived experiences. Each episode explores compelling topics such as men's and women's mental health, Black history, and transformative student journeys, offering moments of reflection, insight, and inspiration. Hosted by Winston Hendricks (Mechanical Engineering major) and co-hosted by Nargis Meghani (Marketing major). The Journey features dynamic, candid conversations with students, faculty, and community leaders rich with wisdom, authenticity, and plenty of laughter. Now streaming on Central's YouTube channel (@ccsu.edu) and Spotify (@The Journey), the podcast draws its name from the enduring legacy of Sojourner Truth, honoring resilience, justice, and the ongoing paths that shape our shared future.

Want to be a guest?

Step into the conversation and be part of The Journey.

Email Winston at st_wh2065@ccsu.edu

Did You Know?

At Central, 40% are students of color, 53% of students are first-generation, and 35% are Pell-eligible with low-income. Nationally, only 10% of U.S. undergraduates study abroad, with even lower participation from underrepresented communities according to the Institute of International Education (IIE). This helps break down those barriers creating life changing, transformative experiences for our students. Let's open the world to our students one passport at a time. We, as an institution, envision a world where all Central students regardless of income, background, or identity, have the tools to become global citizens, engage in transformative learning, and thrive in a diverse workforce.



2026

Central Global

Africa has been identified as a key priority region, as part of Central Connecticut State University's global engagement strategy. In alignment with this vision, the Center for Africana Studies has taken a lead role by aligning its five-year strategic plan with institutional goals, advancing partnerships, student and faculty engagement, recruitment, language education, and the development of a National Resource Center on Africa. This commitment laid the foundation for Central's first institutional student recruitment and partnership visit to the African continent, Ghana, an experience the Provost reflects on in this interview. The Center is happy to report that students from Ghana are currently attending Central, and one graduated this year. As part of Central Connecticut State University's



Ghana Trip March 2024

commitment to international education and global engagement, Provost Kimberly Kostelis, recently traveled to Ghana to explore strategic academic partnerships, international student recruitment opportunities, and community-based

collaborations across secondary and tertiary education sectors. The visit was informed by extensive research and planning by the Center for Africana Studies aligned with the University's global strategy and distinctive excellence in international education.

While in Ghana, Provost Kostelis engaged with institutional leaders at the University of Ghana to discuss opportunities for sustainable partnerships, including faculty collaboration, research and non-research initiatives, student exchange pathways, and partnerships. These discussions emphasized mutual benefit, capacity building, and the importance of culturally responsive collaboration.

The visit also provided her opportunities to visit several secondary schools for international student recruitment. With Africa projected to remain the youngest continent globally for decades, Ghana represents a strategic location for engaging academically prepared, globally minded students

Engagement

interested in U.S. higher education. Conversations focused on undergraduate recruitment, accelerated bachelor's to master's pathways, and the importance of affordability, transparency, and cultural factors during student recruitment.

In addition, the Provost visited a primary (elementary) school - Kulgona Primary School in Northern Ghana - adopted by the Center for Africana Studies to which several computers and chairs had been donated by Central. Provost Dr. Kostelis conducted the Ribbon cutting event to open the school for students' learning and computer literacy as part of Central's commitment to local educational and community partners to explore STEM-focused K-12 collaborations, experiential learning opportunities, and global community engagement initiatives.

Overall, the trip strengthened institutional relationships, affirmed Central's commitment to Africa as a key region within its global engagement strategy, and laid the groundwork for future collaborations that benefit students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. The Provost's presence underscored the University's long-term vision for inclusive global partnerships rooted in shared learning, innovation, sustainable development and expanding global opportunities for our students. *"This experience underscored the essential role that dedicated support pays for international student staff."* - Provost Dr. Kimberly Kostelis



Ghana Trip March 2024

American Passport Project

Thanks to new funding from the Institute of International Education (IIE), the Center for Africana Studies is helping 25 first-year, Pell-eligible Central students take their first step toward studying abroad by providing free U.S. passports. This exciting initiative expands access to global learning opportunities, with a special focus on Africa and the African Diaspora. By removing the cost of obtaining a passport, the program breaks down a major barrier to international travel. More than just a document, a passport opens doors to new cultures, perspectives, and possibilities - empowering students to see the world, embrace global experiences, and imagine themselves as part of a connected global community, inspiring confidence, curiosity, and lifelong global engagement.





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PICTURES
OF
CLUBS
HOSTED
IN
THE
CENTER
FOR
AFRICANA
STUDIES



Favor Uwaya | Nursing
President of the Africana Students Organization

Q&A

WITH THE PRESIDENT OF ASO FAVOR UWAYA



Q

How do you create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members?

“The way we have created an inclusive and welcoming environment is during the club fair we always share this is a space open to anyone. When someone from a different culture attends our meetings, we always try to tailor the questions so that they can fit any lived experience.”

Q

What unique perspective or experiences do you bring to your leadership position?

“Being African and growing up in a Nigerian environment/culture allows me to connect with other students raised the same way. Other African students can relate to cultural norms and experiences.”

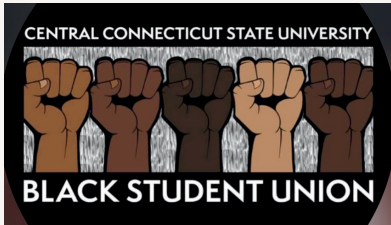
Q

How has holding a leadership position within your club impacted on your personal and professional life?

“Holding a leadership position has impacted my personal life because I was able to meet and make friends from the club. Professionally, I feel like I have better skills working in a team, as disagreement and a lot of conflict resolution comes with being a leader.”

Q&A

WITH THE PRESIDENT OF BSU TENERICKA WILLIAMS



Tenericka Williams | Biology
President of the Black Student Union

Q

What unique perspective or experiences do you bring to your leadership position?

“Growing up as a military child and a Black woman in the South, I have had the opportunity to visit many places and meet people from diverse backgrounds. These experiences have taught me how to convey love, joy, and support universally, and they enable me to handle challenges with grace and understanding.”

Q

What challenges have you faced as a Black female leader, and how have you overcome them?

“Sometimes I’m not taken seriously, especially because I have a friendly demeanor, but I don’t let that stop me. I make it clear that I am here to lead with full dedication and support for my club and its members. I stand confidently alongside male leaders and others, proving that I belong on equal footing.”

Q

What motivated you to take on a leadership role in this club, and what does your club mean to you?

“I was initially afraid to step into a leadership role, but with encouragement from my friends, I decided to take the leap. I see myself as a representative of positive Black joy and leadership, and I wanted to advance that vision. The BSU means a lot to me because it is the safe space that once welcomed me — a space where students feel seen, supported, and celebrated.”



Jah Moses | Graphic/Information Design
Public Relations Officer of United Caribbean Club

Q&A

**WITH THE PUBLIC
RELATIONS OFFICER
OF UCC
JAH MOSES**



Q

What motivated you to take on a leadership role in this club, and what does your club mean to you?

“I have been a part of this club since I transferred to CCSU, I saw it as a safe place to truly be myself on campus and I was passionate about it. I became a leader because I wanted to make an impact before I graduate.”

Q

How do you balance your responsibilities as a club leader with your other responsibilities?

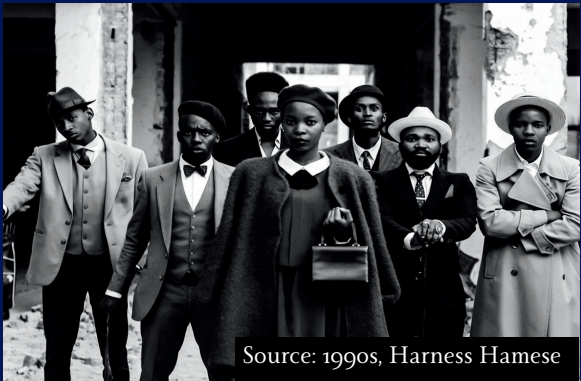
“How I balance all of my responsibilities is simple, really it all comes down to time management, setting deadlines for yourself, and creating a detailed schedule that includes all of your responsibilities.”

Q

What challenges have you faced as a black leader, how have you overcome them?

“I think one of my biggest struggles in this position is the creativity in creating events for the club. But when overcoming any issue I get second opinions and I stay humble when asking for help.”

Black dandyism rewrote the fashion narrative by turning style into a bold statement of identity, pride, and resistance. In a world that often sought to marginalize Black bodies, Black dandies used sharp suits, vibrant colors, and impeccable grooming to challenge stereotypes and assert their dignity. Their fashion wasn't just about looking good - it was a form of rebellion, a way to claim space and demand respect in societies that tried to deny them both. Through tailored jackets, polished shoes, and confident swagger, Black dandies transformed clothing into a powerful tool for cultural expression and social change.



Source: 1990s, Harness Hamese

This movement continues to inspire today's fashion scene, reminding us that style is deeply intertwined with storytelling and self-definition. Black dandyism celebrates individuality while honoring a legacy of resilience and creativity. It invites us to see fashion not just as surface-level glamor but as a vibrant language that communicates history, pride, and the ongoing fight for equality. In every stitch and silhouette, Black dandies have shown how dressing with intention can shift perceptions and change the narrative - one sharp outfit at a time.

CHANGING

BLACK FASHION: Threads of Resistance



Source: "Harlem Couples" series by Anthony Barboza, C.1970s

In the vibrant tapestry of global fashion, few styles have wielded as profound an influence as Afrocentric fashion, an aesthetic born from Black culture that reshaped narratives around identity, pride, and heritage. Emerging prominently during the 1960s and 70s, Afrocentric fashion was more than a trend; it was a bold declaration of self-love and resistance. As Black communities across the world grappled with the legacies of colonialism and systemic oppression, this style reclaimed traditional African textiles, patterns, and silhouettes, turning them into powerful symbols of empowerment. Vibrant Ankara prints, regal headwraps, afro hair, and intricate beadwork became visual poetry, telling stories of ancestry and resilience that mainstream fashion and beauty trends had long ignored. Moreover, the influence of soul music and artists like James Brown and Nina Simone further propelled Afrocentrism, with songs like James Brown's "Say it Loud - I'm Black and I'm Proud" becoming anthems of the movement. This cultural movement not only influenced fashion but also laid the groundwork for the future of hip-hop fashion.

THE NARRATIVE

This movement did more than just beautify, it challenged the Eurocentric standards of beauty that dominated runways and magazines. Afrocentric fashion invited the world to see Blackness through a lens of dignity and creativity, transforming what was once marginalized into a source of global inspiration. Designers and wearers alike used clothing as a canvas to rewrite history, celebrating African heritage with unapologetic pride. The ripple effects of this were felt far beyond the fashion world. It ignited conversations about cultural appreciation versus appropriation, sparked a resurgence in Black-owned businesses, and inspired a generation to embrace their roots unapologetically.

What makes Afrocentric fashion so revolutionary is its ability to blend tradition with modernity. Today, designers fuse ancestral motifs with contemporary cuts, creating garments that are both timeless and cutting-edge. This fusion has not only changed how Black fashion is perceived but also expanded the definition of beauty and identity in the global fashion dialogue. It's a reminder that clothing is never just fabric, it's a statement, a history, a movement. Afrocentric fashion continues to challenge the narrative, proving that style can be a powerful form of activism, connection, and celebration.



Source: Naturally '68 photo shoot, featuring Grandassa Models and founding members of the African Jazz Arts Society and Studios."

STREETWARE

Streetwear and hip-hop fashion revolutionized the narrative for Black communities by turning everyday clothing into a powerful form of self-expression and cultural pride. Emerging from the streets and airwaves, this style blended bold graphics, oversized silhouettes, and iconic brands with a raw, authentic energy that spoke directly to the experiences of Black youth. Far from just a trend, hip-hop fashion became a visual language of resistance, creativity, and identity - challenging mainstream norms and carving out a space where Black culture could thrive unapologetically.



Source: The Dope Boyz , Juelz Santana, T.I., Young Jeezy mug. (2006)

This fashion movement didn't just influence style; it reshaped how Blackness was seen and celebrated worldwide. From turntables to runways, streetwear and hip-hop have blurred the lines between music, art, and fashion, making culture accessible and relatable on a global scale. By embracing their roots and flipping stereotypes, Black designers and artists turned fashion into a form of storytelling and empowerment—proving that style isn't just what you wear, but a statement of who you are and where you come from.

*“Every time we
get a chance to get
ahead, they move
the finish line.”
-Mary Jackson*

Inspired by the relentless spirit of Sojourner Truth, who championed justice and equality, Mary Jackson spent nearly two decades as an engineer before taking on a leadership role at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). There, she led NASA's Federal Women's Program, pioneering opportunities for women and minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Jackson's legacy shines as a powerful example of how resilience and determination can shatter barriers and propel progress toward true equality.

Forgotten legend: **Mary Jackson**

Mary Jackson was a trailblazing mathematician and aerospace engineer at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), America's premier space exploration agency, becoming the agency's first African American woman engineer. She began her career as a "Human Computer" but overcame significant racial and gender barriers to earn her engineering credentials. Her journey reflects a powerful example of courage and perseverance in the face of adversity.



Source: NASA.gov



Source: NASA.gov

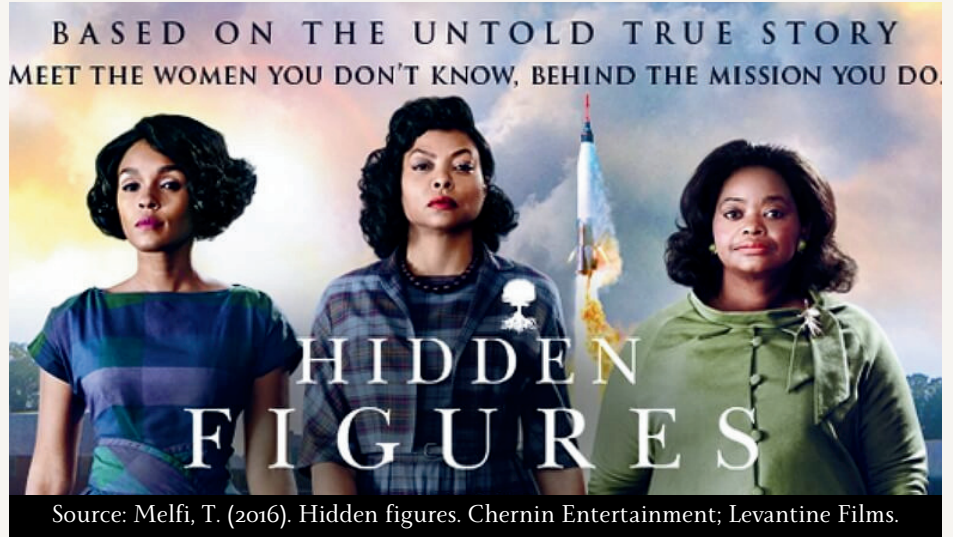
HIDDEN FIGURES

Movie Review

By: Victoria O. and Amalia W.

The movie *Hidden Figures* is a truly inspiring and motivating film, especially for young women of color, but also for anyone striving to overcome obstacles and pursue their goals. The film highlights the extraordinary contributions of three brilliant women, Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who worked at NASA during the Space Race of the 1950s and 1960s. This period marked an intense competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to demonstrate superiority in space exploration. Despite facing racial and gender discrimination, these women played crucial roles in some of NASA's most significant achievements. As a college student, I found myself deeply motivated by their stories, and the film broadened my perspective on an important yet often overlooked part of American history. *Hidden Figures* does an excellent job of balancing the professional accomplishments of these women with their personal lives, making their experiences feel both powerful and relatable.

One of the most impactful aspects of *Hidden Figures* is its exploration of the intersection between race, gender, and science. The film reminds audiences that groundbreaking achievements are often made by individuals whose contributions go unnoticed simply because of societal barriers. Through perseverance, intelligence, and courage, Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary challenged the limitations placed upon them and reshaped the future of science and technology.



Source: Melfi, T. (2016). *Hidden figures*. Chernin Entertainment; Levantine Films.

The movie also strongly emphasizes the importance of unity and resilience, values that are especially meaningful for students navigating academic and personal challenges. Watching these women refuse to give up, even when the odds were stacked against them, serves as a powerful reminder that success is rarely achieved without persistence.



Source: Melfi, T. (2016). *Hidden figures*. Chernin Entertainment; Levantine Films.

Personally, I do not view *Hidden Figures* as just a historical film; rather, I see it as a timeless reminder that hard work, dedication, perseverance, and unity can overcome even the greatest obstacles. The film serves as a call to action, encouraging viewers to recognize the "hidden figures" within themselves and others. By embracing our abilities and taking pride in who we are, we can open the door to endless possibilities. *Hidden Figures* is truly a must-see film that offers inspiration, education, and empowerment for everyone, regardless of background.

LEGACIES

A fierce abolitionist and entrepreneur who made a significant contribution to the cause of the black movement. She was a financier of John Brown's raid, a member of the Underground Railroad, and an individual who fought pertinent legal battles to give the black community civil rights in California. She earned her wealth through shrewd investments in real estate and businesses. She utilized the wealth to aid the escape of the enslaved from slavery and to overthrow the segregation laws. Her untiring endeavor to bring about justice honored her as the "mother of civil rights in California."

"You tell those newspaper people that they may be smart, but I'm smarter. They deal with words. Some folks say that words were made to reveal thoughts. That ain't so. Words were made to conceal thought."

Mary Ellen Pleasant



Madam C.J. Walker

"I am not ashamed of my humble beginning. Don't think because you have to go down in the washtub that you are any less of a lady!"

Born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 and was an American businesswoman. She was one of America's first self-made female millionaires. She experienced challenges with a scaled infection of her scalp, but she eventually created hair products that catered to African American women. She began her business with her husband's assistance under her name, Madam C.J. Walker. She was able to build her business into a multi-million-dollar empire by opening a factory and a school of beauty by 1908, employing thousands of women. She was considered an important figure not only for her success but for providing opportunities for Black women.

Marcus Garvey inspired people through "customized" suits and "vibrant" dashikis that influenced the "Civil Rights" and "streetwear" movements. Garvey was put on trial for mail fraud by the FBI despite being under constant surveillance. He was found guilty in 1923, although this verdict was politically tinged, and he went on to serve two years before being deported to Jamaica. He continued with his activism until his death in 1940. He was declared Jamaica's first national hero in 1964. Fast forward to 2025 President Biden granted him a posthumous pardon.

"If you have no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in the race of life. With confidence you have won even before you have started."

Marcus Garvey



REMEMBERED



A preeminent African American writer, critic, and essayist who contributed immensely to the development of the Black movement by promoting a vision of Black culture integrated into American culture rather than some marginalized 'other' within it. Through Murray's works such as *The Omni-Americans*, he contested popular views that tended to offer interpretations of black American society through the lenses of victimization and pathology. He celebrated black American society by embracing its complexity, richness, and creativeness, positing that "the diversity of black experience was central to American experience." Murray's thoughts impacted racial discourses on American society by cultivating a vision that "black people were both full members of America, and America was part of black experience."

"The blues is not the creation of a crushed-spirited people. It is the product of a forward-looking, upward-striving people."

Albert Murray



Edward Bouchet

"The pursuit of knowledge is the greatest adventure one can embark upon."

Edward Bouchet made history in 1876 as the first African American to earn a PH.D. in Physics from Yale University. Although he accomplished such a great achievement he still faced racial discrimination that obstructed him from research opportunities. So he decided to take another route in teaching in Philadelphia at the Institute for Colored Youth, where he inspired many young minds. Bouchet's dedication to education and science has left a lasting impact, fostering a love for learning among his students and encouraging them to overcome obstacles of their own. His legacy is one of resilience and determination, serving as an inspiration for oppressed communities to break barriers and pursue excellence in whatever they so choose.

"Memories of our lives, of our works and our deeds will continue in others."

— Rosa Parks

Sources:

Albert Murray | *African-American, Jazz, Novelist*. (n.d.). Britannica.

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Marcus Garvey: Quotes, Books & Death | *HISTORY*. (2009, November 9). History.com.

Mary Ellen Pleasant (U.S.). (2023, March 7). National Park Service.

Madam C.J. Walker. National Women's History Museum.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Candice Wallace:

Brings a Diverse Perspective to Psychological Sciences



DR. CANDICE WALLACE

Meet Dr. Candice Wallace, Assistant Professor in Central Connecticut State University's Department of Psychological Science and the co-director of the John Lewis Social Justice Institute. Dr. Wallace brings a rich blend of life and academic experience to her work, shaping how she teaches and engages with the campus community.

Dr. Wallace earned her PhD in social psychology from Howard University; her research focuses on everyday human interactions and how they shape our thoughts and actions.

A common misconception she wishes more people understood is that psychology extends far beyond therapy and disorders; it is fundamentally about understanding mental processes and behavior.

Her professional path has included teaching at both historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) in the South and, currently, at a predominantly white institution (PWI) like Central. She notes that the contrasting environments have influenced her self-awareness as a Black woman, a perspective that informs her ongoing dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at the university.

As many faculty members know, the role of a professor involves significant effort outside of lectures. Dr. Wallace emphasizes the extensive preparation required for class and the vital support for students and the broader university community.

Dr. Wallace's impact at Central shines through her passionate mentorship, campus service, and groundbreaking research. She takes pride in guiding Black students to success, recently celebrating a research assistant's Undergraduate Research & Creative Achievement Day (URCAD) award-winning project on Black hair.

Beyond mentorship, she's deeply involved in creating an inclusive campus culture. "Her research exams how culture shapes psychological outcomes, highlighting its protective role in buffering people of color from effects of negative experiences." With a unique upbringing and rich life experiences, Dr. Wallace brings a powerful voice and invaluable perspective to her role as a faculty member.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Jovannie Tobias (Earthlybits LLC): Brings a Diverse Perspective to Business



Meet **Jovannie Tobias**, vendor at the Center of Africana Studies' Open house and Afro Festival. She is the passionate owner of **Earthlybits**, an organic brand specializing in handmade bath and body essentials like soaps, scrubs, and body butters. She pours immense time, research, and hard work into every product, aiming to create meaningful and memorable experiences for customers who use her products.

For Jovannie, her Black identity deeply influences her work, and she takes pride in representing Black women in a beauty industry that often overlooks them - especially highlighted by her label featuring a Black woman front and center.

Though she once dreamed of becoming an archaeologist, journalist, or historian, Jovannie's journey into soap-making has been a powerful act of self-discovery. She finds joy in researching natural ingredients and crafting products that nourish different skin types. What truly moves her is hearing how her handmade creations have positively impacted her customers and their loved ones, reinforcing her dedication and love for her brand.



“I would love to have my products sold in establishments such as Trader Joe’s. This is what I am actively pursuing.”

-Jovannie Tobias



Looking ahead, Jovannie is driven by big ambitions, including seeing **Earthlybits** products expand beyond body care, bringing up candles and other potential products. She's actively working toward this goal and envisions a future where her brand is widely recognized and celebrated. Reflecting on this journey, she hopes to look back with pride, knowing she turned her passion into a thriving, meaningful business.

The Center for Africana Studies proudly celebrates the graduation of our Transition to Work Intern, Ahkam Abdul Haffiz Cantapary, whose journey reflects a powerful legacy of changing the narrative inspired by Sojourner Truth's courage and leadership. Ahkam embodies the mission of the Transition to Work Program through her strong time management, emotional intelligence, and commitment to collaboration, consistently showing up as a reliable and supportive team player. She not only excels in her responsibilities but also inspires and uplifts fellow interns, helping them find their voice and confidence. Like Sojourner Truth, Ahkam leads by example, challenging expectations and creating space for transformation. The Transition to Work team congratulates Ahkam as she moves forward, carrying a legacy of strength, empowerment, and possibility.

HONORARY MENTION



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CENTRAL



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