FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN 
FEMALE NEUROSURGEON
SPEAKS AT THE 5Cs

BY LEAH DONNELLA, POMONA COLLEGE

On Thursday, September 23, 2010, Dr. Alexa Canady spoke at Pomona College as the Intercollegiate Department of Africana Studies’ first featured speaker. Dr. Canady is the country’s first black female neurosurgeon. She obtained both her undergraduate and medical degrees from the University of Michigan, then went on to complete an internship at Yale University. She began working as a neurosurgeon at the University of Minnesota in 1976. In 1981, she moved on to the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania, where she specialized in pediatric neurosurgery and tumors of the central nervous system.

Dr. Canady grew up in Lansing, Michigan. From a young age, her parents encouraged her to take ownership of her education.

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FEATURED FACULTY:

ABDOURAHMAN WABERI

BY LAURENCE POMMELLS, POMONA COLLEGE

Professor Abdourahman Waberi is a visiting faculty member in Africana Studies (Scripps College) for the 2010-11 academic year. Coming to us from Djibouti, via France, Professor Waberi is a world-recognized novelist, short story writer, and poet. Before coming to The Claremont Colleges, Professor Waberi trained and lived in Paris, France. Since then, he has gone on to publish several major works, such as Cahier nomade, Balbala, Transit, and In the United States of Africa, all of which are available in both French and English.

Currently, Professor Waberi is engaged with the study of the African presence in Brazil. Having spent last summer there, he is very interested in the retentions of African traditions by Brazilians of African descent, and he remarked that he was amazed at how well kept and alive the spiritual practices of the Yoruba are in Brazil. While there, Professor Waberi witnessed candomble ceremonies, interviewed members of different community organizations, and traveled extensively to conduct research.

As a teacher, Professor Waberi creates a warm and engaging atmosphere that encourages student participation and learning. In one course, "Contemporary African Voices," he introduced novels from the African continent that have been written in the last 10-15 years. In his view, much of what we know (as Americans) of African literature has come from an era of 30-40 years ago. This perception of Africa and its authors is outdated; thus, he sought to introduce students to the recent works of African authors. During the spring 2010 semester, Professor Waberi’s close connection with other African writers allowed students to meet Alain Mabanckou, author of African Psycho, and Mark Behr, author of The Smell of Apples. These encounters gave students opportunities to interact with the text they were reading in class on a much more intimate level, for the need to speculate was diminished by the author’s presence.

For the spring semester of 2011, Professor Waberi is teaching three courses: "Africana World Cup," "Contemporary African Voices," and "Black France." The "Africana World Cup" course explores the connections among soccer, global culture, and literature emanating from Africa and the African Diaspora. The second course is one that he has been teaching for the last two semesters, introducing students to the contemporary literature of the African continent. And, finally, "Black France" is an interdisciplinary exploration of the cultural, economic, and political experience of Black populations in France.
FEATURED STUDENT: MIRIAM AYOO
INTERVIEWER: LEAH DONNELLA, POMONA COLLEGE

L: Thank you for this interview. To begin with, tell us a little bit about yourself.
M: I am a senior majoring in Africana Studies at Pomona College.

L: What made you decide to become an Africana Studies major?
M: In high school, I took one course that centered on people of African descent, called "America in the Sixties," about the 1960s social and civil rights movements. I enjoyed it a lot and knew coming to college that I wanted to continue to take classes like that. So, freshmen year I took "Intro to Africana Studies" and a course on Black male representations in the media. I really enjoyed them, but I told myself, "I can't be an Africana Studies major; what can I do with it? It just doesn't make sense." I still found myself taking Africana courses, and by the end of my second year, I realized it's the major that I find the most passion and do the best in, and that's what you need in college, to do what you love. I can go into a more specific field when I get my M.A.

L: So do you know what your plans are after college?
M: Right now, I'm looking for a job in a nonprofit field, something simple. I want to return to the East Coast for a year, then apply for a Fulbright to go back to East Africa, specifically, Kenya or Tanzania. Afterwards, I'll look into an M.A. in Public Policy.

L: In an ideal world, where do you see yourself in fifteen years?
M: At a really large, international, nonprofit NGO. I really like international affairs and development, and for my moral sanity, I feel like I need to be in a nonprofit world, at the top ranks of an effective NGO.

L: What has been your favorite thing about attending Pomona College?
M: The different people I've met. I've been inspired by a lot of my peers, the students, and also the faculty. I've been able to do a lot of things here that I don't think I'd be able to do anywhere else. For example, I was in the production of "For Colored Girls" my sophomore year. I'd never acted or been in a production before, and it was great.

L: What has been your least favorite thing about going to Pomona?
M: I'm from the East, close to New York; where I'm from public transportation is just there. I mean, it's more than that; it's being able to reach out to communities, and that's what I love to do. Being here, you're in this bubble in Pomona. So that's been the worst thing, just being stuck here and not having that opportunity to get to know the communities around here. When I go home, people are going to ask me, "How's California? How's L.A.?", and I'm not going to be able to say anything.

L: If you could give advice to an incoming freshman at one of the Colleges, what would it be?
M: I think it would be to come and use all the resources available. Figure out what you want to do and go find the places where you can get the help to get it done. Don't be scared. Also, when you do need support, do not be scared to go to some office, talk to somebody, anything that will help you towards your goal. It's been a rough journey for me, but I'm so happy that I'm at the end of it, and I think I'm going to complete it successfully.

L: Is there anything you want people to know about you?
M: I work at the Draper Center, which is the volunteer center here. I've learned a lot there in terms of trying to bring more opportunities on campus for people like me who want to engage more with communities. I'd like people to remember me as someone who cares about social justice issues, bringing communities together and working in a grassroots way to bring more effective change.
FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE NEUROSURGEON...(continued)

As teachers themselves, they instilled in her the belief that she was smart enough and strong enough to be successful in any field. As an African American female growing up in the sixties, this belief was crucial to Dr. Canady’s success: “If children do not feel that they have ownership, they do not feel empowered,” said Dr. Canady in her speech. Too often, children in underrepresented communities are told that they cannot do something, and without visible role models, they become convinced that they are not capable of certain things. For Dr. Canady, however, failure was never an option.

When Dr. Canady started college, she entered a world that was at times very intimidating; nevertheless, she was careful to keep her discomfort from turning into fear. Instead, she allowed herself to grow from every experience, be it good or bad. She surrounded herself with positive people who were as ambitious and motivated as she. As an undergraduate, Dr. Canady was by no means a perfect student, yet she stood out as an applicant to medical school. Despite her relatively low college GPA, she was an active member of the school’s debate team, as well as an editor for the newspaper. Medical school proved to be a new challenge for Dr. Canady, but she embraced it with fervor, telling herself never to give up. “In a world that wants to reject you,” said Dr. Canady, “you have to decide you’re going to survive.” And survive she did. Upon beginning her career as a neurosurgeon, Dr. Canady quickly became one of the most sought-out and respected doctors in her field.

Today, Dr. Canady is semi-retired, but she continues to mentor students of color in the medical world, especially women. She credits much of her success to the guidance of her own mentors, and believes that it is her responsibility to provide that same support to future generations. When talking with her mentees, Dr. Canady finds herself repeating the same advice again and again: “Never jump steps. Be positive. Ask why before you say you can’t. Work hard. Don’t edit your successes. And above all, don’t be afraid.”

STUDENT NEWS

Salif Doubare (Pomona) is currently studying in Kenya.

Ti’Esh Harper (Scripps) just returned from a semester at Spelman College.

Antoinette Myers (Scripps) just returned from studying in Brazil.

Laurence Pommells (Pomona) is a student representative to IDAS.

Savannah Ross (Pitzer) recently spent a semester studying in Australia.

Latoya Sanderson (Pomona) is a student representative to IDAS.
UC Berkeley Biochemist Speaks at IDAS

by Kopi Ramsay, Scripps College

In November, Dr. Richmond Sarpong, of UC Berkeley, paid our consortium a visit as a guest of Africana Studies. An inspiring figure, he gave a lecture about his move from Bechem, Ghana, where he was born, to Berkeley, CA, where he works today as an Associate Professor of Chemistry, primarily in the fields of organic and organometallic chemistry.

From an early age, Dr. Sarpong was familiar with the world of science, as his father was a doctor who worked for the UN and practiced in Ghana, Zambia, and later Botswana and South Africa. As a young boy and teenager witnessing the ravages of diseases such as river blindness and AIDS as he accompanied his father on his rounds, Dr. Sarpong became increasingly interested in science and medicine. While at Maru-A-Pula High School in Botswana, and preparing for his Cambridge 'O' Level Examinations, he was introduced to organic chemistry by a teacher. From then, his love for science continued to grow.

Dr. Sarpong began his college experience at Macalester College, with the intent of being a pre-med student. However, he found the memory involved in studying biology difficult, so changed to a chemistry major. Dr. Sarpong went straight to graduate school at Princeton University, where he began his doctoral research in organic chemistry. After graduate school, he was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship to Caltech from the United Negro College Fund, and it was at Caltech that he was part of the team that completed the synthesis of the phosphatase inhibitor, digmacidin D protein.

In 2004, Dr. Sarpong left Caltech to join the faculty at UC Berkeley, where he and his research team of post-doctoral scientists, graduate students, and undergraduate students continue to work in the field of organic chemistry. His research interests lie in the synthesis of complex compounds from raw materials found in nature, the goal being to find more cost-effective ways of manufacturing drugs for infectious diseases, so that they may be available at low cost to those who need them.
FACULTY NEWS

Marlene Daut (CGU): Recipient of an NEH Summer 2010 Grant; published a scholarly article in the journal, Nineteenth Century Literature.

Hal Fairchild (Pitzer): Gave a conference presentation at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, San Diego, CA; named Editor-in-Chief of Psych Discourse: Monthly Newsjournal of the Association of Black Psychologists; quoted at length on the subject of pornography in the Black community in Our Weekly.


Rita Roberts (Scripps): During the past summer, Dr. Roberts began editing the letters of African Americans during the Civil War era. Her book, Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863, was published in January.

Darryl Smith (Pomona): On sabbatical leave and conducting research in Japan, the Czech Republic, and New York City.

Gail Thompson (CGU): Her book, The Power of One: How You Can Help or Harm African American Students, was published by Corwin; featured on KJLH’s "Front Page" program, discussing how parents can improve their children’s academic skills. Dr. Thompson also gave presentations in Kansas City, MO, La Puente, CA, and at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Denver, CO. She also received a Fletcher Jones Foundation grant for a book project on helping adult victims of child abuse.

Abdourahman Waberi (Scripps): His edited book, Enfants de la balle, was published. A special conference, "Colloque Waber," was held in Barcelona in the summer, focusing on Professor Waber's work. The conference was attended by scholars from all over the African Diaspora and Europe.

Nicole Weekes (Pomona): Promoted to Full Professor.
FEBRUARY:

Thursday, 10th: Sojourner Truth Lecture: Sonia Sanchez
"From the Black Arts to Hip-Hop"
Rose Hills Theater
7:30 P.M.

Thursday, 24th: Karen Hampton, textile artist
Steele 101, Scripps
4:15 P.M.

MARCH:

Tuesday, 22nd: Neil Roberts, Williams College
"Freedom as Marronage in Rastafari"
Edmunds 101, Pomona
4:15 P.M.

Thursday, 31st: Andrea Chung, artist
Steele 101
4:15 P.M.

MAY:

Thursday, 5th: Senior Thesis Awards Reception
Venue to be arranged
4:15 P.M.
“Staging Black Radicalism”  
Professor Cedric Robinson  
University of Santa Barbara  
By Salif Doubare, Pomona College

On Tuesday, September 20, 2011, distinguished scholar and mentor Cedric J. Robinson spoke at Pomona College’s Rose Hills Theater. Dr. Robinson was born in Oakland, California, in 1940. He attended the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned a B.A. in Social Anthropology, and Stanford University, where he completed his graduate studies in Political Theory and received an M.A. and Ph.D. In 1979, Robinson joined the faculty at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he is currently a professor in the Department of Black Studies and the Department of Political Science. Dr. Robinson is the author of *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition; Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership;* and *Black Movements in America.* Of these works, he is best known for the first.

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FEATURING FACULTY:

DAMIEN SCHNYDER

"THE NEW KID IN TOWN"

BY SEANNA CADÉ LEATH, POMONA COLLEGE

Rumor has it that our new Assistant Professor of Africana Studies, Dr. Damien Schnyder, is extremely helpful and accessible; after witnessing a line of students outside his office during office hours (and being among the waiting). I’d have to agree. Before joining the Claremont Colleges, Professor Schnyder completed his doctoral research at the University of Texas at Austin on public education and prisons, conducting ethnographic research at a Los Angeles County school for 18 months. When asked about his decision to accept the position at the Claremont Colleges, he mentioned the sense of faculty community that resonated with him during the interview process: "Everyone seemed really supportive and interested in the work I was doing, which is something you don’t find everywhere."

Joining the ranks of our faculty, Professor Schnyder is already involved in the Editorial Board for the journal *Black California Dreamin*’, while also working with the Southern California Library, which houses some of the most important records for the Black History of Los Angeles. Along with being one of the faculty discussants for PASA’s October Film Series on Black Love, he’s also working on a book manuscript, “First Strike: Public Education, Prisons, and Masculinities in Southern California.” Professor Schnyder is interested in research that centers on the economic, political, and social impact of juvenile justice centers on Black youth, as well as Black music formation in Los Angeles. Outside the classroom, he enjoys listening to live music, playing sports like tennis, basketball, and yoga, as well as attending Long Beach Poly football games.

Here are some words of wisdom from our new faculty member:

**SL**: What’s a message you’d like to send to students—academically and personally?

**DS**: There’s much work to be done in the field of Africana Studies, and the 5-Cs are a perfect place to maximize the plentiful resources, as well as being a great time to dig in and get it started. Utilize the professors and everything that’s around you because it’s rare that you’ll receive this type of intense training ever again. Also, learn how to read to where you can pull out the main ideas and connect them with conversations in class and other theories. Personally, remember that life is so short; take advantage of all opportunities that the day presents; go out there and get the things that you want.

**SL**: What’s a difficult realization you had during undergraduate or graduate school?

**DS**: (Laugh) Writing doesn’t start until you start editing, and be prepared to take criticism; don’t take it personally.

**SL**: Taking a course with you, what should we know when we enter the classroom?

**DS**: (Another laugh) There will be a lot of thinking required and a lot of discussion. Some classes may have a lot of reading, but there will also be a lot of laughter. We will bring in many different texts from various sources: music, video, blog sites, and graphic novels from fiction sources. In general, there will be a lot of different things going on.

The young professor is passionate about making things better for everyone, but particularly Black people, and loves to spend time with his wife and family. In the future, Professor Schnyder hopes to teach courses on political theory for Blacks in the United States as well as a class on Black music. Already teaching two great classes this semester, watch out for his fall courses: Introduction to Africana Studies A and a newly offered course on prisons in public education. We’re very proud to welcome Dr. Damien Schnyder to the Claremont Colleges as our first full-time, tenure track professor in Africana Studies. If you haven’t met him yet, he’s definitely a faculty member worth getting to know!
In August of 2008, Salif Gildas Doubare matriculated at Pomona College. As a Posse Scholar with an impressive record, Pomona knew that Doubare was an excellent student, but one thing was for sure – Claremont had no idea what it was in for when he arrived here from Chicago, Illinois. Since beginning college four years ago, Doubare has influenced the Claremont Colleges in myriad ways, from volunteering as a math tutor to starting BLOC (Building Leaders on Campus), his own SC organization, to challenging the very notion of what it means to be a student in Claremont. Doubare worked at the Office of Black Student Affairs and was an active member of the Pan-African Student Association. During the spring of his junior year, Doubare studied abroad in Mombasa, Kenya, at which point he learned Swahili and started research for his senior thesis, which focused on “histories untold.” Doubare graduated this May, and the Claremont community is sure to be the lesser as a result of his absence. There are many things that could be said about this man; his list of accomplishments is great, and the list of things he has yet to achieve is even greater. But the words of such a distinguished scholar are better left unfiltered. So here it is, straight from the horse’s mouth.

Salif Doubare’s thoughts on:

Study Abroad: “It must be done by everyone. It’s an experience to go back to Africa and see life from a privileged standpoint…You notice that no matter how far you go from home, there are people like you all over the place. We clicked with [the African youth] right away.”

The decision to become an Africana Studies major: “The subject introduced itself to me and we grew up together. It happened naturally. I realized after a while that the classes I really enjoyed happened to be a certain type of class, they all happened to be in a certain type of department.”

Perceptions of Africana Studies: “One of the most negatively stigmatized majors. People don’t know what it is, they don’t know why, they don’t understand. ‘Why must you look at the world a different way? Why can’t you just do this and do that?’ It’s because I understand that the world was shaped from a certain lens, and I don’t believe I should be blinded. I believe I should see. Let me see it all. Let me see both sides and come to my own conclusion…I thank this department for existing to liberate the mind.”

Pomona College: “I have given this school just as much as it thinks it’s given me.”

Political Correctness: “I don’t like PC. I feel like it’s a tool to pacify true discourse that might combat ignorance by giving [people] safe words.”

Being a student of color in Claremont: “Any group of marginalized students on this campus cannot just be students…white students can just be, whereas us, at every turn, we have to combat. We’re teachers already. We’re the ones that are giving our experience of what black people are, which is ironic because I don’t see myself as solely black. Here, in this environment, all they see is that I’m black. I am black. But I’m also Salif. I’m myself at the end of the day, but nobody wants to see that. I have to fight for my identity.”

Life after Claremont: “I come from a long line of people who don’t work for people. I want to be my own boss. I’d be a great anything I decide to be. It’s just about deciding what I want and getting it. Because I’m capable. We’re all capable.”

Advice to incoming students: “Get out of your circle. Experience. Don’t listen to the he-said-she-said. Go find out for yourself. Open your mind. Never give up.”
HIP HOP SAVED MY LIFE

By Thomas Chatterton Williams

Reviewed By: Leah Janine Donnella, Pomona College

Thomas Chatterton Williams’s premier book, *Losing My Cool: How 15,000 Books and a Father’s Love Beat Hip Hop Culture*, caused quite a stir when it was published in April 2010. *Losing My Cool* is an autobiographical coming-of-age story that delves into themes of race, culture, and philosophy. Throughout the book, Williams reflects on the formative moments of his youth, attempting to endow them with a philosophical significance that can be extended to many young adults of his generation. Williams writes his way chronologically through his life, describing his experience as a young boy who later goes to Georgetown University and ultimately winds up rejecting the ways of his childhood. Readers get an insider’s perspective into a life of competing influences—the wholesome support of family contrasted with the danger of unsavory peer relations. Williams begins his book with a particularly jarring moment: early in his childhood, he is sitting in a car with his white mother when he too is mistaken for being white. Confused and defensive, the young Williams resolves never to be so misperceived again. From that day forward, Williams is determined to transform himself into a paradigm of self-styled “authentic blackness.” With Jay-Z as his mentor and BET as his muse, Williams embarks on a journey of self-repression, stifling his intelligence, upbringings, and economic standing in order to project a ghetto-fabulous caricature of black male America. The lifestyle that he embodies, which promotes misogyny, substance abuse, and violence, is what Williams identifies as “hip-hop” culture.

Williams comes from a middle-class background. His family, while not wealthy, has the means to send him to a private school of his choosing, and to provide a comfortable home free from want. Williams’s parents are extremely well-educated, holding graduate degrees. Both of his parents venerate education and instill values of hard-work, dedication, and persistence in their son. Thomas Chatterton Williams, unlike many of his peers, grows up in a stable household with positive role models and, as he says, over 15,000 books. The fact that he ultimately winds up at a good college is less than extraordinary. Indeed, the first half of this book is not so much about Williams’s father’s powers of salvation, as the title would suggest, but rather, the immensely seductive power of “hip hop” culture. Perhaps a more suitable subtitle for this memoir would read, “How Hip Hop Culture Almost Beat 15,000 Books and a Father’s Love.”

Williams’s real intellectual transformation takes place when he leaves home to matriculate at Georgetown University. For the first semester of school, Williams isolates himself within a certain sector of the black communities at Georgetown and nearby Howard University. He struggles to exude “blackness,” which in his eyes means partying, missing classes, demeaning women, and the like. When winter break finally arrives, he wonders why he is coming home with few friends and on academic probation.

Then comes the “aha” moment. Williams has a breakthrough where he connects with a white classmate at Georgetown. From that day forward, his eyes are opened. He suddenly realizes that the world has more to offer him than dope beats and pumped up kicks. He learns that there is something called a “baguette,” and that it is something that he likes very much. By the time Williams returns home for the summer, he is ready to reject every semblance of “black culture” that he has ever known. He can no longer connect with former friends, and feels isolated from his community.

In the final chapters of his memoir, Williams has some rather unexpected insights. He seems to conclude that in order to progress, young men and women of color need to stop trying to be cool and learn to integrate into mainstream society so that they can learn something real. Williams makes valid observations about his experiences, and by the end of the book seems to have legitimately grown as a person. His insights are sound when it comes to embracing new cultures and moving beyond the limited spectrum of one’s own experiences, but when it comes to acknowledging the value of his culture, I can’t help but wonder whether Williams missed the point of his own journey. He is eager to reject the negatives of hip hop culture, but he also appears to be noticeably ignorant of the wealth of meaning inherent in hip hop culture. Hip hop has always been a way for marginalized people to create their own narratives and define their own experiences. It is not based on an ignorance of white America, but a conscious rejection of the values that accompany white America. Over the course of his long relationship with it, Williams has always been a consumer of hip hop culture, and never an active participant in it. And for all of his professed intellectualism, he seems to have arrived at a literal interpretation of a symbolic resistance.

For further reading check out:
http://elenathealgoboi/hs452w07/kelley.pdf (Brief history of hip hop)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHFe0LRChY (Interview with author and his father)

*Subsequent editions of the book have revised the subtitle to “Love, Literature, and a Black Man’s Escape from the Crowd.”*