

## ALUMNI NEWS

### Jonathan Holloway '89 Named Dean of Yale College



Stanford American Studies alum Jonathan Holloway '89 was named the new Dean of Yale College in July 2014.

Despite his busy schedule as Dean, Holloway still lectures in African American Studies, American Studies, and History at the college, focusing on social and intellectual history in the post-emancipation United States. Before becoming Dean, Holloway served at Yale as the master of Calhoun College from 2005-2014, and was Chair of the Council of Masters from 2009-2013; he was beginning a three-year term as Chair of the Department of African American Studies in 2013 when he was tapped for his new role. Holloway is the author of *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (2002) and *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940* (2013), both with the University of North Carolina Press. He edited Ralph Bunche's *A Brief and Tentative Analysis of Negro Leadership* (NYU Press, 2005) and co-edited *Black Scholars on the Line: Race, Social Science, and American Thought in the 20th Century* (Notre Dame University Press, 2007). Most recently, he has written an introduction for a new edition of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, to be published by Yale University Press in 2015. Holloway has held fellowships from the W.E.B. Du Bois Research Institute at Harvard University, the Stanford Humanities Center (where he worked on *Jim Crow Wisdom*), and the Ford Foundation, among other honors and roles in academia. It goes without saying that the American Studies Program is proud to claim Dean Holloway as one of our own!

-- Molly Vorwerck '14

—edited by  
Molly Vorwerck, '14

#### SANDY KALISON PECCERILLO, '79

After graduating from Stanford, Sandy Kallison Peccerillo pursued a three-year program at the Yale School of Nursing. After graduating from Yale in 1996, she worked as a family nurse practitioner, providing primary care at a large drug clinic in New Haven. She then worked at a private practice seeing all ages in an area of Connecticut that had very few nurse practitioners. "I did a lot of public speaking and teaching during that time, but the grad school loans needed to diminish so I found a job at a Community Health Center in Waterbury, CT, one of the poorest cities in the Northeast, with state loan repayment and free immersion lessons in Spanish!" she says. She stayed there for seven years, then took a job working at a private pediatric and adolescent practice. She married Jim Peccerillo (Harvard '78) in 1985 and had two sons. She welcomes any inquiries about Advance Practice Nursing from any interested undergrads or grads considering a career in healthcare.

#### RICK HUMPHRESS, '81

In 1981, Rick Humphress graduated with Honors and Distinction in American Studies under the late Jay Fliegelman. "I have two outstanding memories of that experience," he says. "First, the three-course American History track featuring Jack Rakove, Donald Fehrenbacher, and David Kennedy. Second, I wrote a long honors thesis on John Marshall Harlan with emphasis on civil rights and anti-trust. It was the first paper I ever created using a computer instead of a typewriter as my college roommate, Matt Knox, had just acquired a Mac. It seemed like magic at the time but when I tell me children about it they laugh." After college, Rick received a master's degree in Business Administration and a doctorate in Public Policy and Administration. Currently, Rick consults for Oracle in the public sector helping jurisdictions at all levels implement human resource systems.

#### BARBARA LEVENSON, '84

Currently a legal recruiter in California, Barbara Levenson believes American Studies was the ideal major for her. "As one of the first interdisciplinary majors offered," she says. "I had the opportunity to take wonderful literature and history courses." After Stanford, she went to law school intending (and expecting) to practice law. However, she realized early on that she enjoyed working with attorneys, but was better suited to work with them as a career advisor and coach. For the past 26 years, she has worked as legal recruiter, and in 1999, she and her husband started their own legal recruiting company, Levenson Schweitzer, Inc. For the past few years, she has advised Stanford Law students who are going through on-campus interviews, helping them assess opportunities in different markets.

In her spare time, she serves on the Board of Stanford Professional Women. In 2013, she was elected to the Stanford Associates.

#### JENNIFER KUIPER, '86

Jennifer Kuiper moved to Washington, D.C., about five years ago to start a Congressional briefing series on U.S. policy related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She now works as an independent consultant conducting evaluations of international development programs and conflict assessments. Some of these assignments have included the evaluation of USAID support for civil society in Iraq, conflict assessment in South Sudan and setting up a monitoring and evaluation system for a workforce development project in Jordan.

#### ANNE FARNHAM TAYLOR, '87

For the past 24 years, Anne Farnham Taylor has taught English and History to high school students in the Bay Area and Colorado. "My degree gave me the flexibility to be qualified to teach both history and English, and I have taught many courses in both," she says. "My first year teaching, I distinctly remember using my spiral notebooks from Barton Bernstein's *America Since '45* class to prep for my seminars!" Several years after graduating from Stanford, she went back to UC Berkeley to get a master's degree in English. In her current position, she teaches World History and AP Psychology classes. She frequently leads one-month intensive seminars in subjects ranging from Andean Cultures in Peru to Homelessness in Colorado Springs and even the American Legal System.

#### KRISTIN MACLAREN ABBOTT, '88

Kristin MacLaren Abbott has been working as an illustrator and visual development artist for several years now. As a freelancer, her work is very wide-ranging. Last year, her largest project was to design the entire park for a winter lantern festival in Barcelona, Spain. "It was a thrill to visit the festival in January and see all my work made real. I realize I am the only one who knew the difference if there were only four monkeys where there should've been six, or a giant purple fish instead of a giant orange fish. I can't complain too much after walking through acres of beautiful, light-filled scenes," she says. This year, she is illustrating more children's books and writing some of her own that she hopes to have published. She continues to teach illustration at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Her daughter Elizabeth is a geo-physicist working as a seismic risk analyst in Wellington, New Zealand, her son Robert is a software engineer for Bracket, and her youngest finished his freshman year at Washington University in St. Louis, studying math and computer science. Her husband Bob (Stanford '87, '88, '98) works at Norwest Venture Partners.

#### RUSSELL KOROBKIN, '89, JD '94

Russell Korobkin recently finished his 14th year as a professor at the UCLA School of Law, and was recently appointed a Vice Dean. He writes and teaches in the areas of Contract Law, Negotiation, Law and Economics, and Health

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Care Law. He lives with his wife, daughter, and dog in Los Angeles, CA.

**JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS, '89**

Former Dean of Freshman and Undergraduate Advising at Stanford, Julie Lythcott-Haims has just written her first book, *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* (Henry Holt & Co, 2015), an anti-helicopter parenting manifesto born of her years at Stanford, and as a Palo Alto parent. It was reviewed favorably by *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* and is now a best-seller.

**ASHLEY MCCLAIN, '90**

After graduating, Ashley McClain worked as a legal assistant in midtown Manhattan before confirming that she had no interest in corporate law. In 1994, she entered the University of Texas at Austin's M.S. in Community and Regional Planning graduate program. She finished graduate school in winter 1996, in time to move to Paris with her husband, J.C. Schmeill ('90), where she taught English and interned with the United Nations Environment Programme. "That was an amazing year of travel that took [us] from France to Italy, Russia, and later that year to Singapore," she said. In fall of 1997, she joined a woman-led environmental consulting firm called Hicks & Company where she worked for 10 years. In 2007, she co-founded her own environmental consulting business, CoxMcClain Environmental Consulting, where she has worked for the last 8 years. She has two sons Corbin (15) and Beckett (12). She keeps in touch with friends, roommates, and the Dollies ('87-'88), and she and J.C. are looking forward to attending their 25th Stanford reunion in October of this year.

**KELLY O'NEILL, '90**

Currently based in Atlanta, GA, and working as a veterinary internist in a small animal specialty hospital, Kelly O'Neill and her partner, Erin, are planning a move to Dhaka, Bangladesh, in the next year. In Dhaka, Kelly will be working with a local clinic in training veterinary students and doing public health research in zoonotic and emerging infectious diseases.

**JEANNETTE LAFORS, BA '91, MA '92, PHD '04.**

Jeanette LaFors has been putting her American Studies degree to use in a variety of positions, starting with her first full-time job as a high school social studies teacher at Carlmont High School in Belmont, CA. She came back to the Farm to earn her doctorate in education administration and policy analysis with a focus on instructional leadership. After two years post-doctorate as a Director of Professional Services at Teachscape, Inc., she was hired as the Director of Equity Initiatives at The Education Trust – West, in Oakland, CA, advocating for the high academic achievement of all students—and particularly those of color or living in poverty. She just recently moved to Santiago, Chile, with her husband, Matt Kelemen, PhD (APA) '01, to support education reform efforts in Chile and experience the world from a different perspective with their children Dylan (12) and Adela (9).

**SUZANNE MOLLER COLODNY '92**

Suzanne Moller Colodny volunteers for several organizations including the Starkey Foundation, a nonprofit that has given away 100,000 hearing aids to children and adults around the world, and has recently joined a mission to distribute hearing aids in the Dominican Republic. She recently spoke on a panel for the Stanford Initiative to Cure Hearing Loss (SICHL). "With Starkey, I am able to help people today and with SICHL, I hope to eliminate the need for hearing aids in the future," she says. When not volunteering, she loves seeing her Stanford friends on both coasts, and splits her time between New York City and Sausalito with her husband Mark.

**JONATHAN M. EISENBERG, '92**

After graduating from Stanford, Jonathan M. Eisenberg spent the next year working as a research associate at a non-profit group called The Business Enterprise Trust. From 1993-1996, Jonathan attended law school at U.C. Berkeley. Prior to getting his law degree and passing the California State Bar Exam in 1996, he served as a law clerk to a federal trial judge and practiced civil litigation with an emphasis on intellectual property disputes with three private law firms. Now married with two kids and living in South Pasadena, CA, Jonathan joined the Office of the California Attorney General as a deputy attorney general in 2007.

**CAROLINE PARK, '92**

Caroline is a Deputy Section Chief with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office of General Counsel. While working as a fish lawyer, she has continued to pursue music in various ways. Search YouTube for "cparkplay coffee song" (a ditty on hyper-individualistic society) or "cparkplay metro song" (an ode to D.C. metro).

**ERYN BROWN, '96**

Eryn Brown is a partner at Management 360, currently one of the largest management and production companies in Hollywood. At Management360, she represents writers, actors, and directors from around the world.

**ANNIE SIMPSON FROEHLICH, '97**

Annie Simpson Froehlich is currently living in Washington, D.C., with her husband and two sons, Graham (2), and Elias (2 months). She is an associate at Latham & Watkins LLP, where she practices in the firm's Export Controls and Trade Sanctions group. In this capacity, she counsels clients with respect to compliance with the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), Export Administration Regulations (EAR), and the various economic sanctions regulations administered by the Office of Foreign Assets Control. Living in the nation's capital, she and her family take full advantage of D.C.'s many rich offerings. That said, she misses the Farm and is thankful for the many Stanford grads who have laid down roots in D.C. as well.

**NATHAN REED, '99, MA '02**

Following his graduation from Stanford, Nathan Reed co-termed in Sociology. He then ventured

into the corporate world for twelve years as a paralegal. After deciding that he didn't want to go to law school, he enrolled at the University of Notre Dame to pursue his second graduate degree in sociology. He plans on applying to other programs in the Fall to complete his doctorate in Sociology, and hopes to become a race and sexuality scholar with particular emphasis on how those (and other) social identities take shape in the United States. He thinks this research agenda and career choice is an excellent synthesis of American Studies, Sociology and his personal interests.

**CHRISTINE JACOBSON, '00**

Christine Jacobson works in advertising, crediting her American Studies degree with giving her deep insight into consumer behavior and an interdisciplinary approach to solving creative problems. She lives in New York City with her husband Justin and their dog Scout.

**EMILIANO MARTINEZ, '00**

This July, Emiliano Martinez switched jobs, moving from Associate General Counsel at Humanity United (a private foundation based in San Francisco) to Corporate Counsel at Omidyar Network (a philanthropic investment firm in Redwood City). "I am excited about the move—including the shorter commute since I live in Menlo Park—and am happy to be continuing my career in the nonprofit sector," he says. He lives in Menlo Park with his wife, Meghan, also '00, and two young sons, Julian and Oliver.

**LE TIM LY, '01**

Le Tim Ly is Deputy Director at the Chinese Progressive Association in San Francisco, working to grow a new generation of activists and organizers with the Seeding Change (seeding-change.org) Fellowship. Last year, he welcomed his third child, baby girl Quena, with wife Lolita Roibal (CSRE '03).

**EMILY CADEI, '02**

Emily Cadei started a new job as *Newsweek's* political correspondent in Washington, D.C., in May. She is covering national politics and the 2016 race for the magazine as well as *Newsweek.com*.

**DAVID MARTIN, '03**

After playing on the professional tennis circuit for eight years, David Martin graduated from Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, in 2015. He is currently studying for the Texas Bar Exam, and will work for Winstead Law in Dallas in this coming September.

**MAUREEN SULLIVAN, '04**

Maureen Sullivan lives and works in New York City with her husband and two daughters, Ryan (2 1/2) and Lucy (11 months). She is the President of AOL.com and Lifestyle Brands, overseeing brands that play an important role in women's lives—like MAKERS, the largest collection of women's stories, which was recently nominated for an Emmy. Her firm is launching another MAKERS film this fall to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Women's Summit.

**TANYA KOSHY, '06**

Tanya Koshy is a Product Manager at Google, working on the same-day delivery service, Google

Express. She and her Stanford sweetheart (and fellow Googler), Blair Beverly ('06), are expecting a baby girl in August of this year. She thinks often and fondly of her AmStud classes, honors thesis research, professors, and peers.

**ALLISON FALK, '08**

After playing professional soccer for a number of years, Allison Falk is currently living in San Francisco and working for Dropbox. She completed her first Olympic triathlon in April with her sister. She recently finished up a trip to Lisbon, Portugal, where espresso with traditional custard tarts was an afternoon staple, along with the great beaches, people, and warm weather.

**REBECCA VELASCO, '08**

Rebecca Velasco finished her Masters in Public Policy at the USC Price School of Public Policy in May 2015, where she focused her studies on education policy. Currently, she's working in new school development at the CA Charter Schools Association and is based in their office in downtown L.A.

**KELLEY FONG, '09**

Kelley Fong recently finished her second year of a Ph.D. program in sociology and social policy at Harvard, where she is studying low-income families in America and their interactions with public systems like schools and child welfare. "It's pretty much just a continuation of my AmStud concentration (Children, Youth, and Families in America), so of course I'm loving it!" she says.

**DEAN SCHAFFER, '10, MA '11**

After graduating from Stanford, Dean co-termed in Communication (Journalism), receiving his master's degree in June 2011. For the last year and a half, he's been working as a product manager for a music tech company called Smule, which creates social music apps.

**ALEXEI KOSEFF, '12, MA '13**

After graduating in 2012, Alexei Koseff stayed on at Stanford another year to get his master's degree in journalism. From there, he interned with the *Los Angeles Times* in Washington, D.C., for a summer, which led to a job in the *Sacramento Bee's* Capitol bureau. He moved up to Sacramento in December 2013 and has been writing about California state politics ever since, mostly with a focus on higher education and the state Senate.

**LISA QUAN, '12**

After graduation, Lisa Quan worked as a Research Assistant under Joan Petersilia and Robert Weisberg at the Stanford Criminal Justice Center. In fall 2014, she moved to Princeton, New Jersey to work at Mathematica Policy Research as a Survey Associate. She is planning to go back to school for a graduate degree, hopefully by next year.

**SAM CORRAO CLANON, '13**

Sam left Morgan Stanley at the end of June, where he had been working on the Structured Products

desk since graduating from Stanford in 2013. After spending the summer traveling around Southeast Asia, he started at Harvard Law this fall.

**TAYLOR DEWBERRY, '14**

Taylor Dewberry is beginning her second year at the Washington University School of Law in St. Louis. This summer, she had the opportunity to work as a summer associate at Hunton & Williams LLP and at the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals for Judge James A. Wynn. Next school year, she will be a staff editor on the Washington University Journal of Law and Policy.

**MIRANDA MAMMEN, '14**

Miranda Mammen has been working at the National Center for Youth Law, in Oakland, CA, as FosterEd Operations Manager since October 2014. FosterEd improves the educational outcomes of youth in the foster care and probation systems.

**WILLIAM ROBINS, '14**

The day after graduation, William Robins began a long road trip that would last the majority of the summer. "I wanted to see the country I had studied with my own eyes, and began a meandering path that would bring me through most of the lower 48. I used National Parks and Monuments as my geographical targets, venturing through Yosemite, Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Death Valley, and a number of other historic sites," he says. During this adventure, he spent a few days digging for fossils in Kemmerer, WY, Herkimer Diamonds in NY, and Native American artifacts in Utah. He also explored the Pacific Northwest, buying a crabbing license and learning how hard Dungeness and rock crabs can pinch, and even boarded the *National Geographic Ice Cream Expedition*. Will began his role as Senior Numismatist at Heritage Auctions in Dallas in late September 2014, but soon could feel that California was pulling him back. By the middle of April 2015, he had moved back to Palo Alto. Shortly thereafter, he began an internship in business operations at Gainsight. In the process, Will picked up a new hobby: teaching himself an antique photography method called wetplate collodion.

**MOLLY VORWERCK, '14**

After working basically full time at the Stanford Daily for four years and graduating from the American Studies Program in June 2014, Molly Vorwerck began her career in communications at S.F.-based PR firm TriplePoint. Using her journalism and writing background, she was integral in planning long-term strategy, organizing media tours, and creating promotional content for a variety of gaming and consumer tech clients. After a year at TriplePoint, Molly joined the tech practice at global communications firm Hill + Knowlton Strategies in September 2015. At H+K, Molly works with such tech companies as the Ford Motor Company's Ford Research and Innovation Center, Dolby Digital, and VMware, among others. She plans to keep writing, and in the near future, publish a book (or two... or three).



KRISTIN MACLAREN ABBOTT

*Images from the winter lantern show Kristin MacLaren Abbott designed for a park in Barcelona, Spain*



WILL ROBINS

*Digging for fossils; and aboard the National Geographic Ice Cream Expedition*



SUZANNE MOLLER COLODNY

*Suzanne Moller Colodny helped fit over 3,500 adults and children with hearing aids in the Dominican Republic*

## Q&A: CATCHING UP WITH JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

With her new book, *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success*, former Dean of Freshmen and Undergraduate Advising at Stanford—and American Studies alum—Julie Lythcott-Haims, '89, brings her years of working with students adjusting to life on the Farm to the page. Published this year by Henry Holt and Co., the book exposes the harms of helicopter parenting, asserts the need to give preteens and teens agency over their personal and academic decisions, and above all, gives tips and tricks for raising healthy, independent adults. Fellow alum Molly Vorwerck, '14, sat down with Lythcott-Haims to discuss her new book, its road to the *New York Times* bestseller list, and why overparenting, despite its positive intentions, is ultimately detrimental to adolescent growth:

**YOU RECENTLY LEFT YOUR POSITION AS A DEAN OF FRESHMEN AND UNDERGRADUATE ADVISING AT STANFORD. HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCE AT STANFORD INFORM YOUR NEW BOOK, *HOW TO RAISE AN ADULT*?**

Lythcott-Haims: My book is quite deeply informed by my years as dean, during which time the concept of helicopter parenting of college students moved from a one-off oddity to a regular practice on the part of many parents at Stanford and around the nation. Concern for over-parented students is what made me want to write the book. By the time I was actually writing it, though, I was concerned not only for them, but for their parents (who tend to be frazzled and anxious) and for the sake of all of us who may one day find ourselves living in a society led by such so-called “adults.”

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY INSIGHTS YOU HAVE FOR PARENTS SEEKING TO RAISE HEALTHY, WELL-ROUNDED KIDS?**

If we pause to think about it critically, it's our biological imperative as mammals to raise our offspring to independence. So, at a philosophical or existential level we ought to embrace the fact that our job as parents is to put ourselves out of a job. It may entail interrogating our own ego a bit. If instead of fostering that independence in our kids we are overly protective (think “bubble wrapped kids”), overly directive (“Tiger Mom”), or do too much hand-holding (“parent as concierge”) we might achieve a short term “win” of the unbruised knee or feelings, the higher grade, or admission to the “right” college, but in the long term, when we've done this, we deprive kids of the chance not only to be independent but to construct a healthy sense of self, which is only formed when they do the thinking, planning, deciding, problem-solving, and

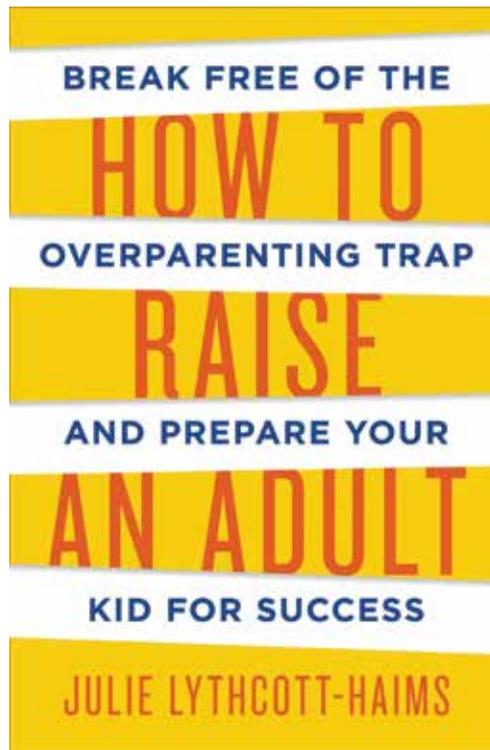
coping (the *be*-ing, if you will) for themselves.

Practically-speaking there are a couple key things people can stop and start doing now. First, stop: 1) saying “we” when you really mean your kid; 2) arguing with all the authority figures in their lives; 3) doing their homework. Second, from toddlerhood forward start building skills in kids with this four step method: 1) first you do it for them; 2) then you do it with them; 3) then you watch them do it; 4) then they do it independently. This method applies to almost any skill—[whether] teaching them to cross the street, make a meal, or do their taxes. Implicit in starting and stopping these behaviors is a willingness to tolerate our kids' failure, and appreciate that failure is one of life's greatest teachers and an essential aspect of childhood.

**WHY DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SO MANY HELICOPTER PARENTS NOWADAYS COMPARED TO 20 OR EVEN 10 YEARS AGO?**

Well, first, it appears to “work”; we all know kids who've been admitted to a highly selective college after having been manufactured to the point of perfection by parents who've carefully cultivated every moment. (The point is, they may have gotten in but then what? Do they have the skills and confidence

to fend for themselves once there, and in the world of work or graduate school after, or will they always need you to be there to handle things for them.) Second, this manner of parenting grew in popularity over time, so many new parents see it simply as the norm in the community in which they are raising kids. And, because it's such an involved style of parenting, it takes a lot of guts to say you're not going to do that—you're labeled lazy, negligent, or uncaring if you buck the trend.



*My book is quite deeply informed by my years as dean, during which time the concept of helicopter parenting of college students moved from a one-off oddity to a regular practice on the part of many parents at Stanford and around the nation.*

Taking a step back and looking at the historical origins, the term was first coined in 1990 by researchers Jim Fay and Foster Cline who had observed in the 1980s a number of shifts toward greater parental involvement in children's lives and a decrease in the opportunity for children to do for themselves. As I detail in my book, these shifts included: 1) two well-publicized cases of stranger abduction leading to our nation's collective fear of "Stranger Danger;" 2) the concept of Play Date (parent scheduling, planning, directing, and mediating play); 3) a self esteem movement (aka "everyone gets a trophy"); and 4) publication of *A Nation at Risk* which argued for more homework and testing.

#### **DID YOUR OWN PARENTING EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE THE CREATION OF THIS BOOK?**

Oh heck yes. My book takes a rather empathetic tone accordingly. My mortifying aha moment came in 2009, when, having just given a big talk to parents of new Stanford freshmen, I then went home to dinner with my own family and began cutting my ten year old's meat. In that instant I realized you can't be expected to let go of your eighteen-year-old if you've been holding tight to your seventeen-year-old, and so on, and that childhood is supposed to offer continual skill-building. I had to ask myself: *When do you stop cutting their meat? When do you stop looking both ways for them as they cross the street? When do you stop helping with homework? When do you let them talk to strangers?* Questions like these formed the basis of my initial inquiry into why so many young adults seem to lack the basic skills needed at college, in the workplace, and in life generally. I think I'm a better parent now that I've seen the results of thousands of upbringings (in the form of other people's grown sons and daughters) and from having learned of the harm of overhelping.

#### **DID YOUR DEGREE IN AMERICAN STUDIES CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. CULTURAL TRENDS?**

I've always been interested in the American condition broadly speaking and in the suffering of "the other" in our diverse democracy, which is why American Studies was the perfect intellectual home for me at Stanford. As an undergrad I never dreamed I'd one day spend so much time writing and thinking about over-parented middle and upper middle class kids, but, as it turns out, those children are suffering.

#### **ANY OTHER BOOKS IN THE WORKS?**

In theory, yes. In practice, for now just being in community with people around the nation who care about this issue is absorbing all of my time, and I have little room left for creative expression to the degree needed in order to hatch a new project. I'll be finishing my MFA in Creative Writing at California College of the Arts this Spring, and it's possible that my thesis—which I intend will be a collection of literary essays focusing on what we think, do, say, and feel when we're not focused on *performing* ourselves—could be a basis for my next book. We shall see. I'm certainly enjoying discovering myself as a writer, and I'm deeply interested in what I might find next. ■



photo: Kristina Vetter

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- Interviewed by Molly Vorwerck, '14

## AN INTERVIEW WITH RAHIEL TESFAMARIAM

On Saturday, April 5, 2015, Stanford American Studies alum and critically acclaimed public theologian, social activist, writer, and speaker Rahiel Tesfamariam, '03, delivered the keynote address at the national Youth Empowerment Conference which was held at Stanford this year, with the theme "DRIVE: Dreams Require Initiative, Value, and Effort," and co-sponsored by American Studies, the Black Student Union, and the Black Community Services Center. Fellow American Studies major Makshya Tolbert, '15, sat down with Tesfamariam to discuss her path from American Studies to who she is now: a leading voice in the public debate about civil rights and social change.

### COULD YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE AT STANFORD - ACADEMICS, STUDENT LIFE, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND BEYOND?

That era of my life was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Coming to Stanford, all I knew was my inner city, working class reality [in Washington, D.C.]. Stanford showed me how big the world is—from classmates who represented all walks of life to my time overseas studying at Oxford. It was undoubtedly my peers that made for an unforgettable experience, as they stretched and challenged me to no end. My freshman year roommate was a Jehovah's Witness, my best friend was in the Nation of Islam, and my boyfriend was a devout Christian. It was during that time that I came to more deeply understand my commitment to the black freedom struggle, embrace my African identity and ultimately have a spiritual awakening that changed the course of my life.

### WHAT AREAS OF YOUR STANFORD EXPERIENCE REALLY TOOK ROOT IN YOUR LIFE BEYOND STANFORD, AND HOW MUCH DID YOUR TIME HERE PUSH THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND COMMUNITY-BASED INTERESTS THAT HAVE BUILT YOUR CAREER?

Amadou Diallo<sup>1</sup> was killed my freshman year and it was the first time in my life that I engaged in social protest. Coupling that with the books (like the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*) I was reading, the provocative class discussions on race and class [I was having with my colleagues], and the organizations I was active in, I was unknowingly being radicalized. How could I not be, with the Black Nationalist energy that existed in

Ujamaa and amongst the black student body at that time? That radicalized consciousness soon became evident in my poetry and spoken word. Stanford was also where I began to see my writing as a powerful tool, leading me to work at a grassroots black-owned newspaper after graduation.



Tesfamariam's blog, "Urban Cusp"

PEOPLE HAVE PINNED YOU AS AN ACTIVIST, SCHOLAR, WRITER, AND THEOLOGIAN, AMONG MANY OTHER ROLES. HOW DO THOSE LABELS RELATE? WHEN AND TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THERE BEEN CONFLICT AMONG THOSE MARKERS OF IDENTITY? IN YOUR OPINION, HOW MUCH DOES THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF YOUR AREAS OF EXPERTISE PLAY INTO THE WORK THAT YOU ARE DOING?

My Christian values and passion for social justice, specifically as it relates to the liberation and empowerment of oppressed people, are the driving forces of my career. As it relates to *Urban Cusp* [Tesfamariam's online life style and social justice magazine], I launched it to ensure there was a media platform that highlighted the issues and perspectives that I am passionate about. It is often hard for me to see a reflection of myself in mainstream media, and I know that I couldn't be the only young Christian black woman who is progressive and a product of hip-hop culture to feel that way. After launching *Urban Cusp* and experiencing its success, I began to more fully embrace my complex identity and the intersectionality of my work as valuable to my generation. As a justice-seeker, I am drawn to the teachings of Liberation Theology and Christ as a freedom fighter. As both a writer and Christian, I know the power of the written and spoken word. I know that "the power of life and death is in the tongue," which is why I am drawn to public speaking. All of these intersections

<sup>1</sup> Amadou Diallo was an unarmed 22 year-old immigrant from Guinea who was shot and killed by plain-clothed NYPD officers in February 1999, igniting nationwide debates about police brutality, racial profiling, and contagious shooting.

inform everything that I do. When there is conflict, it is rarely internal these days, as I have reconciled a lot of my internal tension over identity politics. The conflict most often comes from *Urban Cusp* followers or the general public requiring that I lay one side down in order to privilege the other. And I work daily to resist that need to choose; I instead choose wholeness. And by being fully, unapologetically myself, I find that often frees others to do the same.

**ESSENCE MAGAZINE LABELED YOU RECENTLY AS ONE OF THE “NEW CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS,” A COINAGE WHICH CARRIES A VAST LEGACY OF PAST AND PRESENT CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS IN OUR NATION’S CULTURAL MEMORY. WHOSE CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERSHIP AND LESSONS HAVE YOU’VE TAKEN MOST HEAVILY INTO CONSIDERATION AS IT UNDERLIES YOUR OWN WORK?**

Countless past and present civil rights leaders influence me, but the one that quickly comes to mind is Malcolm X. I have always admired his deep, unconditional love for black people. Malcolm wanted black folks to love themselves and see themselves as beautiful, brilliant, and resilient. He wanted us to break free from the chains of not only systemic oppression and white supremacy but also from self-hatred and nihilism. I believe I am driven by that same love for my people and I am learning to be unapologetic about it. And I too ground my passion for justice and freedom in a spiritual worldview.

**MY FINAL QUESTION: WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS LEAVING THE UNIVERSITY TO ENTER THE WORKFORCE, PARTICULARLY AS IT PERTAINS TO ADVOCACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK? WHAT LEADERS DO YOU THINK YOUNG PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE ACTIVIST-MINDED, COULD LEARN THE MOST FROM AND WHY? WHAT ADVICE DO YOU WISH YOU’D BEEN GIVEN WHEN YOU WERE IN A SIMILAR POSITION?**

A lot of young professionals play it so safe that they never do anything extraordinary. Success in life cannot solely be measured by how much money is in the bank. Never underestimate the value of social capital. If you don’t have any money but a lot of social capital, that can still get you very far. In this same line of thought, remember that the end does not always justify the means. People want leaders that made it to the top without comprising integrity, self-respect and community values.

Seek out both grassroots and mainstream experience, learn the process of developing a respected brand, hone your strategy skills, gain some social media expertise, and improve on your writing skills. All of that is critical in today’s advocacy landscape. I highly recommend overseas travel and immersion trips; there is no better way to train in community organizing than to see what people are doing in search of social change all over the world. Take what you learn and figure out how it is and is not applicable to your local community.

As you are doing all of this, identify people who have done what you want to do in the world. Reflect on what you want to do that’s similar to them and what it is that you want to do that’s never been done.

Lastly, and most importantly, enjoy the journey and learn from it, because we too often are destination-oriented. This is why I always encourage people to read Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*! ■



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