



BLACK STUDIES FACULTY IN THE 1923 READING ROOM - AN ARTISTIC CHOICE TO MIX OLD AND NEW, SYMBOLIC OF THE UNIVERSITY'S PATH TO THE FUTURE.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WADE HUDSON

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Black

Studies

celebrates its one-year anniversary, we invite readers to take a seat at the table with some of the many people who helped bring the department to life – and continue to help it flourish – as well as important allies of the program, such as Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Rather than a story, we asked these trailblazers to tell us, in their own words, about their connections to this interdisciplinary program that blends art with activism, geography with global health, politics with poetry, and religion with race.

What is Black Studies? What does it mean to those who teach it? And where is it going?

Their answers tell a story of social change, collaboration, and tenacity – but also a story of passion for their work, that they now see reflected in the faces of their students. They talk of a place that values scholarship, that is forging new solidarities with Indigenous communities, and that celebrates the intellectual depth of their collective.

At the most fundamental level, it is a place where, as Dr. Juliane Okot Bitek notes, people can be themselves. But it is also a place where people are part of an ongoing dialogue about how Black Studies can have an impact on our community, our country, and our world.

This is part of that conversation.



The long work of Black Studies at Queen's

[Barrington Walker](#)

Barrington Walker is a Professor in the Department of History at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., and is its Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. From 2001-19, Dr. Walker was a member of the faculty at Queen's, specializing in Black Canadian History and histories of race, immigration, and the law. Dr. Walker was the first Black person to earn tenure in the Queen's Department of History.

I was hired as an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Queen's University in 2001 to teach and research modern Canadian history with an emphasis on law, immigration, "race," and Black Canadian history. The courses I taught in Black Canadian history (and Black North American history) came at a difficult point in time in the Canadian academy. Black history and studies were not widely taught at Canadian universities. The infrastructure for these sorts of offerings was slim; there were few

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tenure-track and tenured positions, few endowed chairs, and no departments, programs, or concentrations in the country. Amid this rather bleak landscape, I encountered a university at Queen's that had little in the way of diversity among the ranks of students, faculty, and senior administrators, and even less in the way of Blackness and Black people. Initially, I had doubts about whether I could successfully teach histories of Blackness in a place that was marked by what a well-known study of Queen's during that time dubbed a "culture of whiteness." Indeed, the first day that I stood before my seminar on "The Black Experience in Canada," I realized, to my shock, that I was the only Black person in the room. As it turned out, most of the students were curious, respectful, and hardworking, and the majority of my new colleagues were welcoming; Queen's became a place where studying Blackness in Canada was possible. It is gratifying to know that I had a part in tilling the soil for the program that has blossomed today.

Katherine McKittrick

Katherine McKittrick is Professor in the Department of Gender Studies and the Canada Research Chair in Black Studies. Dr. McKittrick's research has explored the methodologies, citational practices, and theoretical frameworks used by Black scholars, and examined

how narratives of imprecision and relationality interrupt knowledge systems that seek to observe, index, know, and discipline Blackness.

It goes without saying that Black Studies was a dream project emerging from the research, writing, and activism of undergraduate and graduate students at Queen's University. While there has been incredible encouragement and work done by faculty and staff – Barrington Walker, Kristin Moriah, Beverley Mullings, Stephanie Simpson, Alana Butler – my students drew and continue to draw attention to the urgency of studying Black Studies, as it relates to organizing for social

"MY STUDENTS DREW AND CONTINUE TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE URGENCY OF STUDYING BLACK STUDIES, AS IT RELATES TO ORGANIZING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SUPPORTING EACH OTHER IN OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES."

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justice and supporting each other in our day-to-day lives. When I began teaching at Queen's in 2004, it was the curiosity and brilliance of these students, who brought into focus the difficult but beautiful politics and pedagogies of Black Studies: to share ideas about how to navigate racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression; to read and study scholarship that is focused on liberation for Black and non-Black people; to build and deepen solidarities with Indigenous communities; to demand that we collectively understand the university not as a site where Black communities are evidence of diversity, but as institutions that provide the conditions to hold space, formal or informal or secreted or momentary, for imagining better futures. The students – Jasmine Abdelhadi, Aruna Boodram, Leeza James, Darcel Bullen, Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, Milka Njoroge, Melissa D'Souza, Akilah

*Katherine McKittrick
Professor, Department
of Gender Studies
Canada Research Chair
in Black Studies
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Beckles, Kavita Bissoondial, Yasmine Djerbal, Carla Moore, Bianca Beauchemin, Danyel Haughton, Yaniya Lee, Muna Dahir, Amanda Lyn, Kendall Witaszek, Celine Gibbons-Taylor, Elliot Jun, Kara Melton, Taylor Cenac, Laura Kwak, Sali Lafrenie and more – quietly contributed to what we now call the Minor in Black Studies, offering clues, stories, conversations, and theories that centre and generate care, collaboration, and social change. Listing their names is not simply an act of gratitude. It is an active acknowledgement of a population at Queen's that is so often erased, yet who have done meaningful work altering campus life through activism and scholarship.

Kristin Moriah

Kristin Moriah is an Assistant Professor of English at Queen's University and Satellite Fellow at the Pennsylvania State University Center for Black Digital Research. Dr. Moriah is the 2022 recipient of the American Studies Association's Yasuo Sakakibara Prize, which honours the best paper presented by an international scholar at the organization's annual meeting. Dr. Moriah's research interests include Sound Studies and Black feminist performance, particularly the circulation of African American performance within the Black diaspora and its influence on the formation of national identity.

Daniel McNeil
Professor, Department of
Gender Studies
Queen's National Scholar
Chair in Black Studies
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I am an Assistant Professor, and I began working at Queen's in 2018. I moved back to Canada from the U.S. to take up my new role. When I started looking at graduate programs so that I could study Black literature and culture at an advanced level, it felt like there were very few options in Canada. It seemed as if, in comparison to the U.S., very few university researchers here shared those interests or were in positions where they could supervise and guide my work. It made sense for me to enroll in a PhD program in the United States at that time because it felt like that was where work in Black literature was most strongly supported. I think that dynamic has changed dramatically. We have such a strong contingent of Canadian and international scholars and students working in the field of Black Studies at Queen's. We have recruited a truly outstanding group of faculty members and students. It is amazing to see how far we've come in terms of recruiting Black faculty and supporting research in Black Studies the past few years. And it has been such a pleasure to do this work as part of a collective. There is strength in numbers. I think this is one of the most exciting places in Canada to pursue research in the field of Black Studies right now.

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Black Studies is...

Daniel McNeil

Daniel McNeil is a Professor in the Department of Gender Studies and the Queen's National Scholar Chair in Black Studies. His award-winning teaching and research explore key themes and issues in Black Atlantic Studies and multiculturalism. In 2022-23, he received the inaugural Editor's Award from the *Canadian Journal of Communication*, published *Thinking While Black: Translating the Politics and Popular Culture of a Rebel Generation*, and co-produced and co-hosted the first season of the Black Studies Podcast.

Throughout 2022-23, the Black Studies program hosted a series of screenings, conversations, and celebrations to mark the launch of the new interdisciplinary program. At the launch events at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre on Oct. 21 and 22 – which carefully and creatively conveyed the efforts of Black faculty, staff, students, and community members to imagine and build Black Studies – we were fortunate to learn from generations of students at Queen's. One conversation with an alum was particularly memorable.

On the one hand, the alum generously shared that they were inspired by the possibilities of a Black Studies program. They welcomed the representations of Black life, livingness, and culture in the Black Studies graphic element designed by the award-winning South African-based design studio Mam'gobozi, which worked in collaboration with Alyssa

Vernon (Queen's, ConEd'22) and the Black Studies program group. They found the artwork conveying collective joy and collective struggle that the South African artist Pola Maneli developed for the Black Studies program to be incredibly compelling. They also valued the short narrative film *Black Studies Is...*, which was conceived by the Black Studies program group and produced by Katherine McKittrick, and featured anti-racist activists, artists, and intellectuals from around the world responding to the prompt, *Black Studies Is...* On the other hand, the alum also provided an important reminder that community members can feel somewhat deflated and alienated when they hear the names of scholars and theorists in Black Studies that they don't know.

This ambivalent reaction resonated with me, and it continues to guide and inform collaborations with scholars, artists, and activists to develop projects and initiatives – such as the Black Studies podcast and Black Histories and Futures Month reading lists and playlists – that communicate the complexities and nuances of global Black communities to local and translocal audiences with imagination and sensitivity.



Juliane Okot Bitek
Assistant Professor of
Black Creative Writing

“AS AN AFRICAN-BORN PERSON LIVING IN THE DIASPORA, MY BLACK STUDIES IS GLOBAL, AND IT ENCOMPASSES HISTORIES, CULTURES, AND PRACTICES OF BLACK PEOPLE BEYOND THE AMERICAN AND CANADIAN CONTEXTS.”

Juliane Okot Bitek

Juliane Okot Bitek

Juliane Okot Bitek is a poet-scholar, and an Assistant Professor of Black Creative Writing and Cultural Production. Some of the themes in Dr. Okot Bitek's writing have included war and trauma, history and cultural memory, and Black and Indigenous cultural relations. Her 2016 collection of poetry, *100 Days*, considered how to remember the 1994 Rwanda genocide. The collection earned Dr. Okot Bitek the 2017 Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry and the INDIEFAB Book of the Year (Poetry) Award.

For me, Black Studies offers a space for us to think seriously and critically about Blackness and Black people in relation to creativity, world-making, and resistance. Given the abundant collection of brilliance of my colleagues in Black Studies, I will limit my comments to Black Studies in my practice. As an African-born person living in the diaspora, my Black Studies is global, and it encompasses histories, cultures, and practices of Black people beyond the American and Canadian contexts. Introducing my students

to writers, thinkers, and doers from a global Black world to open up myriad ways of being in the world is very exciting to me. Black Studies at Queen's offers an intellectual and artistic home, where I can be myself.

Kesha Fevrier

Kesha Fevrier is an Assistant Professor and Queen's National Scholar in the Department of Geography and Planning. Dr. Fevrier's research centres on the everyday lived experiences of marginalized groups in the global South. One of Dr. Fevrier's recent research projects examined electronic waste recycling in Ghana and demonstrated how the politics of race and ethnicity coalesce to inform the value of space, and shape racial and ethnic geographies there.

My Caribbean roots demand nothing less than a global approach to Black Studies that attends to our shared histories, lived realities, collective futures, and aspirations of freedom. Teaching under the umbrella of Black Studies, whether Black Ecologies, or Black Environmentalism, is an opportunity to pursue urgent questions about the universal precarity of Black life, but also the many ways that Black people – inside and outside major diaspora locations – and their intellectual and cultural traditions resist, transform, and thrive in spite of it all. My Black Studies is decolonial, and expansively inclusive. It's global.

“[THE 2022-23 BLACK STUDIES SPEAKER SERIES THEME OF BLACK QUEER RELIGIONS] ILLUMINATES THE INTERSECTIONS OF BLACKNESS, WOMANISM, QUEERNESS, QUARE(NESS), AND RELIGION.”

Jennifer Leath and Joseph Kangmennaang

How does Black Studies attend to community?

Jennifer Leath and Joseph Kangmennaang

Jennifer S. Leath is an Assistant Professor in Black Religion and Queen's National Scholar. Dr. Leath's research focuses on the intersection of sexualities and religions in sacred communities and spaces of African Diaspora. Dr. Leath's research and teaching interests also include the physics of metaphysics of womanism, the intersections of Buddhist and womanist thought, interdisciplinary approaches to interreligious dialogue, and theories of justice.

Joseph Kangmennaang is an Assistant Professor in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, and Queen's National Scholar in Black Health and Social Change. Dr. Kangmennaang is a health geographer whose research focuses on health inequalities, immigrant health, and non-communicable disease control and prevention. Dr. Kangmennaang promotes the well-being of marginalized communities through scholarship on how Black immigrants live, work, and play.

Reading While Black is an opportunity for Black Studies faculty and students to explore discourses in Black Studies through texts engaged in common. In our first meeting of the year, we discussed M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Through these *Reading While Black* convenings, we hope to develop our research, writing, pedagogical, and community-building approaches to Black Studies.

The 2022-23 Black Studies speaker series theme of Black Queer Religions evaluates the possibilities of “quare” discourses and praxes. This speaker series illuminates the intersections of Blackness, womanism, queerness, quare(ness), and religion. Consisting of four panel discussions (Black Queer Buddhisms, Black Queer Christianities, Black Queer Islams, and

Black Queer Indigeneities and New Religious Movements), this speaker series presents voices of leading scholars working at these intersections, while also providing opportunities for community members from Queen's University, Kingston, Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa to engage in public conversations about the complexities that underpin identity, identification, and religion.

Dalitso Ruwe and Vanessa Thompson

Dalitso Ruwe is an Assistant Professor of Black Political Thought with the Department of Philosophy. Dr. Ruwe's research interests include the intellectual history of Africana philosophy, anti-colonial theory, Africana legal history, Black male studies, and Black philosophies of education. Dr. Ruwe completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Guelph in 2020-21, where his research focused on the Black Abolitionists debates on American slavery that emerged from the National Negro Conventions of 1830-64, and the role that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and migration to Canada afforded to Black thinkers' development of socio-political and legal critiques of American Slavery.

Joseph Kangmennaang
Assistant Professor, School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
Queen's National Scholar in Black Health and Social Change
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Vanessa Thompson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Gender Studies, and Distinguished Professor of Black Studies and Social Justice.

Dr. Thompson's work is rooted in traditions of activist scholarship, anti-colonial theories and Black feminist methodologies. She collaborates with Black and anti-racist movements that are engaged in abolitionist struggles and transformations. Some of Dr. Thompson's recent research has focused on how Black urban activist movements challenge French Republican state racism, transnational and transatlantic abolitionist practices, and imaginaries in the Black diaspora.

Teaching While Black workshops at Queen's are spaces for faculty and pre-doctoral and post-doctoral students to reflect on our commitment, principles, values, and journeys as educators to develop and disseminate critical knowledge about and in collaboration with global Black communities. In our workshops, we have exchanged ideas about interdisciplinary teaching and how to support mutual learning between students at Queen's and local and global Black communities. We have also discussed "Decolonizing the University" with student activists from South Africa in conjunction with ongoing reflections about public scholarship and community engagement.



Vanessa Thompson
Assistant Professor,
Department of Gender Studies
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Studies and Social Justice
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Black Studies, Community, and Art

[Emelie Chhangur and Qanita Lilla](#)

Artist, curator and writer Emelie Chhangur is the Director and Curator of Agnes Etherington Art Centre, where Curator and writer Qanita Lilla is the Associate Curator, Arts of Africa.

Agnes Etherington Art Centre is in the process of transformation and change. We take seriously Queen's new strategic framework and its calls to action, acknowledging that

ourselves. We turn our institutional positionality toward social justice. Over the past year, we've made significant strides in this direction: all purchased art directly supported BIPOC artists; exhibitions and public programs featured 90 per cent QTBIPOC artists; and we changed gallery practices by establishing polyvocal policies.

This summer, our Brown Butter house party and solstice celebrations featured collaborations between Black artists and chefs. We brought the streets to the gallery by graffitiing our façades!

Now we're working through community-engaged design processes for Agnes Reimagined, taking advantage of unprecedented opportunities to rethink museum practices by building alternative architectures to restructure them, ensuring our new building won't be a container for old systems but a proposition for new possibilities.

Agnes's 2022 exhibitions caringly carry forward the past while simultaneously speculating new futures, nurturing creative sustenance beyond colonial frameworks. From Collections Count + Care, which reflects on our responsibility of homing collections, to Land Protectors, which honours Indigenous artists/activists on Turtle Island who steadfastly safeguard survivance, to Fugitive Rituals, that invited artists to imagine alternative institutional systems, to embodying energies of Black futurities exemplified by artists Pamela Matharu, Winsom Winsom, Camille Turner, and Sandra Brewster, we model forms of history as forums for recognition, resilience, and radical love through counter-archival impulses, intergenerational connections, and feminist genealogies that cite what came before. 🏠

"IN OUR WORKSHOPS, WE HAVE EXCHANGED IDEAS ABOUT INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING AND HOW TO SUPPORT MUTUAL LEARNING BETWEEN STUDENTS AT QUEEN'S AND LOCAL AND GLOBAL BLACK COMMUNITIES."

Dalitso Ruwe and Vanessa Thompson

the institution, not communities, needs to change. As an ally, Agnes is active and engaged; as a public, university-affiliated art institution, we propel the cultural transformations characterizing contemporaneity.

To expect community to care about Agnes, we must reverse engrained engagement strategies by asking instead: How does Agnes attend to community? We question what an art centre centres by de-centring