

**Prof. Leslie Brown's Sterling A. Brown 1922 Citizenship Award Speech (May 18, 2009):**

Sterling Brown graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Williams in 1922, received his MA from Harvard, and spent his career as a poet, critic, and literary activist. As a voice of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movement, it was his work to seek and iterate an authentic black voice. Annoyed at white literature for its inability to transcend stereotypes, Brown mined black southern culture for analytical language and folk heroes that spoke legitimately to black life.

It is appropriate for this award to go to this next student, for just as Brown's came to symbolize the reclaiming of black voice, her work at Williams has focused on how each of us can or cannot claim our place and speak ourselves in the college community. Shayla Williams' is the first student's name I learned on campus, even though I did not have her in my class. Her record of leadership was already legendary, but I came into contact with her through the program Claiming Williams.

Now I have talked in faculty meetings and have been terrified to do so. But Shayla apparently convinced a faculty known for their aversion to change and experimentation and their love of status and hierarchy to cancel classes for an entire day, not to go to the mountains, but to spend time – faculty, students, and staff – in collective exploration of difference and privilege as they inform our individual experiences at Williams. These are acts of bravery and courage, of tenacity and admirable stick-to-it-ness, and of creativity, vision, and imagination. I don't know what she is going to do after college (and she doesn't know either), but we'd best watch out. I understand that there will be a presidential election in 2028 and Shayla will be running.

**Prof. Stephane Robolin's Gaius C. Bolin 1889 Prize in Africana Studies Speech (May 18, 2009):**

Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to announce, on behalf of the Africana Studies faculty, this year's Gaius C. Bolin, 1889, Prize in Africana Studies. This is a prize annually awarded for the best scholarly work crafted by a Williams undergraduate in the field of Africana Studies. It is awarded in memory of the first black graduate of Williams College (1889), who became a prominent lawyer in Poughkeepsie, NY.

I am pleased to point out that, this year, the Bolin Prize will be jointly awarded to two Africana concentrators, and I want to take a moment to dwell on their accomplishments.

The first recipient is a Mellon Mays Fellow and a major in English. She has chosen to write her senior honors thesis in Africana Studies, becoming the 1<sup>st</sup> student to do so in Africana Studies proper and the 3<sup>rd</sup> student ever to write a thesis if we include Africana's prior incarnation of African-American Studies. She closes her emails with a telling quote by Michelle Cliff, who has been a powerfully influential writer in her life: "she was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life." In the case of Anisha Warner, she was of course quite deliberately reaching for an explanation, and part of her reaching was sought through the writing of her senior honors thesis, entitled "Reflections on Migratory Subjectivity: Caribbean Women Writers and a Plural Conception of Identity."

Now, anyone who knows Anisha, knows that she makes her own way, that she cuts her own path. On a campus that does not offer course in Caribbean literature, Anisha threw herself in her studies with an unmitigated intellectual passion that I have come to see over the years. She even enrolled in a summer course in Caribbean literature to supplement her knowledge. Offering up the nuanced concepts of split consciousness and the space of the "in-between," her thesis examines the works of Jamaica Kincaid, Michelle Cliff, and Paule Marshall to explore the representations of first and second generation Caribbean female immigrants to the United States.

The second recipient of the Bolin Prize is a Williams College Undergraduate Research Fellow, a Ruchman Student Fellow at the Oakley Center, and a major in Comparative Literature. Annie Quarcoopome has also written a senior honors thesis on Caribbean literature, but hers takes up the francophone tradition, and I am happy to report that she has successfully defended her thesis in Comparative Literature only 2 hours ago. Annie began by exploring the significance of negritude in the work of Aimé Césaire, and this project has flourished into a comparative study entitled "Metis/Metisse cou-coupe: History, Violence and Metissage in the Works of Aimé Césaire and Maryse Condé." Annie brought her sharp critical vision to offer crystalline analyses of very challenging texts in order to consider the powerful role and continuing presence of a violent history of colonization and slavery in Caribbean literature. And she does this by exploring the oft-overlooked representations of the mixed-race figure in the works of the Césaire and Condé.

Annie's devotion to her subject led her to Martinique, where she gritted her teeth and bore the heavy burden of immersing herself in tropical climes and stellar beaches during her year abroad. In truth, the majority of us in this room would have likely coasted during this time away, but Annie committed herself to soaking up the rare archives and the hard-to-reach experts

in her field of Antillean literature and, in the process, found Martinique to be a rich and complicated social landscape still negotiating the legacies of slavery and colonialism. This understanding has led, among other things, to her being a virtual resident expert on the francophone Caribbean and French race studies on campus.

I am pleased to report that Anisha will enroll as a graduate student in English at Cornell University in the fall, and Annie will be travelling and working while applying for graduate school. From the quality of their work, their passion for intellectual inquiry, it is more than evident that they each have a bright academic future ahead of them. As the advisor to both Anisha and Annie, I can say it has been a professional and personal pleasure and honor to work with both of them. To say that they have taught me over the course of the last three years is a gross understatement. And I am delighted to celebrate their accomplishments today. Please join me in congratulating Anisha and Annie.