



Ken Kahler, Store Director

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***An Evening with the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies  
at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst,  
Thursday, 21 February 2008, 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., Memorial Hall***

In celebration of African-American History Month, the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, in conjunction with the University Store, will present a multi-media program. After the event both faculty and local authors will be available to sign copies of a selection of their most recent books. The event is free and open to everyone in the Five College community and the general public. Professor John H. Bracey, Jr., longtime faculty member of Afro-American Studies Program at UMass, and Wally Swist, the General Book Manager of the University Store, collaborated in the planning of the event.

James Carroll will open the event by playing one or two jazz compositions and the King Bees will provide the coda for the evening's rich agenda by performing a few blues numbers that will precede the author signings. The King Bees, featuring Professor Steven Tracy on vocals and harmonica, were a crowd favorite two years ago when the event was last held.

Professor Amilcar Shabazz, the new Department Chair, will serve as keynote speaker for the event, and deliver a carousel of thought regarding Afro-American Studies. Following Professor Shabazz will be three graduate students from the department who will give readings from their own poetry as well as from prominent African-Americans. Jason Hendrickson, who has contributed poems to some on-line poetry sites; Keli Stewart, who has recently published a chapbook of her poems; and McKinley Melton, who will read "An Antebellum Sermon" written by Paul Laurence Dunbar; comprise the graduate student readers.

Ron Welburn, a Professor of English at UMass since 1992, who is of Gingaskin and Assateague/Cherokee/African American heritage, will read from his poetry. Welburn is the author of *Coming through Smoke and the Dreaming: Selected Poems* (Greenfield Review Press, 2000) and *Roanoke and Wampum: Topics in Native American Heritage and Literatures* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), among other titles. He is also the subject of a documentary produced by filmmaker Elizabeth Wilda, of AIMS Video Services at UMass, that was issued in *The Poets of New England* series.

Welburn, who has also published international jazz music reviews in *JazzTimes* over more than two decades, writes of his ethnic roots throughout his poems. In "Grandfather Corn"

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he refers to his origins through the metaphor of maize: "Each piece given is a story of walking back to Rome, Georgia/ all the way from Tahlequah on a path marked by tears,/ with each kernel of this white corn she gave something of/ legacy, the proud inevitable return." Also, per example, the conclusion of Welburn's poem "In the Absence of Gourds" resonates with the lines: "Though we may speak no Indian tongue,/ we hear the ghosts/ of our languages/ in what we say."

In addition to Welburn, Aracelis Girmay, of Puerto Rican and Eritrean descent, and a New York City poet and current Cave Canem fellow, will be reading from her new book, entitled *Teeth*, that was issued from Curbstone Press just last year. Girmay, who received her MFA from NYU, was gifted with a typewriter in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and claims this was an inspiration for her to pursue a career as a writer. She works as a writer in the schools in the Community—Word Project and Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

Nicholasa Mohr writes that the poems contained in *Teeth* "ring out with a burning truth . . . into the world of despair, discrimination, sorrows, triumphs, joy, and the courage it takes to flourish as a woman of color . . . with an appetite for life without fear of self-consciousness as she weaves her words into a range of potent poems." The raw power and fresh lyricism of the poetry in this first book is exemplified throughout its pages, but, perhaps, most saliently in the last verse of the title poem: "I imagine that from this mouth:/ kites,/ rain,/ ax equal to lace, the yellow & lick/ of a jar filled with/ the sweet of stinging bees."

Watercolor artist Richard Yarde will deliver a lecture regarding his painting, entitled "Ringshout." Alona H. Horn, in an article in *American Visions*, refers to Yarde's painting as "work" that "defies the concept that watercolor paintings should be small, charming renderings of landscapes or flowers." She continues in writing that "his paintings are monumental in scale, and they express poignantly personal themes, using a medium that has traditionally been described as translucent and temporal."

At the unveiling of Yarde's series of watercolors, *Mojo Hand*, in Boston in 1996, Christine Temin wrote in *The Boston Globe* that: "His handling is virtuosic, his colors dazzling. He has become one of the great American watercolorists of the twentieth century, as much master of the medium as Homer was in the nineteenth." Yarde says, in describing his aesthetic motif of *Mojo Hand*, that his general notion of it is: ". . . Some kind of charm or spell that is sometimes used for healing, sometimes for other purposes."

"It is illusive," Yarde continues, "and it is not something that can be described in a linear way. For me, it was a question of putting some things together that are random that can be put together for the purposes of healing."

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Authors and members of the Graduate Faculty of the UMass Afro-American Studies Program include: Omoniyi Afolabi; Ernest Allen, Jr.; John H. Bracey, Jr.; A. Yemisi Jimoh; Amilcar Shabazz; Manisha Sinha; James Smethurst; William Strickland; Esther M. A. Terry; Michael Thelwell; Steven C. Tracy; and Robert Paul Wolff.

The University Store is the official bookstore of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and is located in the Campus Center. Dedicated to serving the faculty, students, and alumni of the University, the bookstore provides the following hours: Monday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; Friday, 8:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; and Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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