

Emahunn Campbell

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On a campus as large as UMass Amherst, it's hard to stand out amongst your peers. But Emahunn Campbell, a current PhD Candidate and lecturer here at UMass, easily stands out from his 27,000 peers as a force for change in our community. Campbell has proven himself a worthy advocate for social justice not only in our community, but throughout the United States. He is passionate about promoting awareness of racial hatred in our nation's system and making a difference in society.

Emahunn, whose name is Islam for "faith," hails from Fredericksburg, Virginia. As a high school student, his passion for social activism was awakened when he and his friends were detained by police for two hours after his friend was accused of stealing money even though there wasn't any evidence supporting the accusation. This incident, along with his father's and brother's incarcerations, sparked his interest in learning more about mass incarceration in the United States, which later became useful knowledge to help his advocacy work.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English and a B.S. in Political Science from the University of Virginia. Then he earned a Master of Arts (MA) in English Language and Literature from the University of Memphis. During his undergraduate career, his plan was to play football and get drafted for the NFL while attending law school. Soon he realized this was not going to be possible. However, a teacher took Emahunn under his wing, helped him improve his academics, and pushed him to pursue a Master's degree. He enjoyed going to the University of Virginia because it was close to home, the professors were good, and it was a rural environment. When he attended the University of Memphis, at the time, it had the largest population of black students. He became involved in the English Department and became more involved in politics while reading the works of activists like Malcolm X.

He is a Research Fellow at the W.E.B. Dubois Library, where he investigates Dubois' papers, and does research for his dissertation which also requires him to do public talks on the subject. He is a Visiting Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society, which was in place before the library of Congress. The American Antiquarian Society has confessional literature in which criminals confessed the crimes they did. His dissertation focuses on the imagination and construction of the black criminal and prisons in the African American experience.

He is also a member of the fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha, Incorporated. Many prestigious people have been members of this fraternity such as Martin Luther King, W.E.B. Dubois, and Thurgood Marshall. He is also the secretary of the Mark Twain Circle and was the founder and president of the University of Virginia-Wise Black Student Union. He also is involved in a reading development program for children during summer sessions at UMass.

Emahunn helped found the Students against Mass Incarceration (SAMI) chapter at Mount Holyoke College where female students have become aware of the increasing number of incarcerated women of color and how this issue is ignored by society. Emahunn has also given speeches on racism at Mount Holyoke College such as the abrupt rise of incarcerated people and black individuals being racially profiled by officials. This was after the Troy Davis murder, in which an African American man was convicted of and executed for the murder of police officer Mark MacPhail in Savannah, Georgia. Troy

Davis maintained his innocence until his execution day. Emahunn, along with political activist Rosa Clemente and others, protested for four hours straight against this injustice in downtown Amherst.

He considers himself to be anti-capitalist, because of its exploitation; someone who is getting paid more for the labor that someone else performs. One of the primary barriers for equality is getting rid of this model.

He has great admiration for his mother who worked two jobs, and previously lost a son. He started studying Phenomenology where his Marxist professor, also the advisor for the Young Democratic Socialist group, influenced him. Emahunn is very vocal about how he feels about certain issues and his boldness is admirable. He became involved in anti-war protests; he was in a protest against mountain top removal by the Dominion Power plant which is a coal fire plant in St. Paul, Virginia. Due to his adamant work on these issues, he has received two death threats, and his car has been vandalized.

His inspirations are his mother, his niece and nephew, and W.E.B. Dubois. His motivation comes from a fear of failure and wanting to make his mother proud; constantly reminding himself that he was lucky not to be a statistic. He wants to make a name for himself, and be remembered that he worked hard and did his part in making this world a better place, and lived a decent life.