Project Statement
July 12, 2016

Canada, Award #7466


Contributions to Host Institution/Professional Aspirations

My primary goal in applying for a Fulbright Grant is to teach and research in Canada in the area of Transnational Studies and North American History. This Fulbright opportunity would allow me to promote an understanding of nineteenth and early twentieth-century history of Blacks in Canada and the United States in the Canadian university system. I believe that my personal and educational background, together with my teaching, research, and administrative experience, would nicely complement the existing strengths of the host university and allow me to contribute effectively to the intellectual life. This grant represents a unique opportunity to teach in a nation that has shared one of the world’s most stable borders with the United States and has a thriving interest in its history.

The relationship between Canada and the United States has grown since the American Revolution and the War of 1812, when they viewed one another as enemies to be defeated rather than complex societies to be understood. In each of these wars, Blacks fought and demonstrated their political agency to pit the United States and British Canada against one another for freedom and social mobility. They continued to employ the national lines for instance via the Underground Railroad and the Niagara Movement in order to advance their cause. The scholarship of African Diaspora and Black Atlantic World starting in the 1960s has helped to facilitate the conversation of historic interactions that transcend national borders. Blacks in each nation have commonalities of enslavement, legal segregation, and outright bigotry and violence. While the national boundaries of physical separation do produce distinctive differences, they have also hampered the ability to see cultural similarities and overlapping systemic problems. Today, the need for transnational awareness of Blacks in Canada and America has never been greater. The two countries are each other’s largest bilateral trade partners, and immigration, movement, and interaction between the nations still characterize their relationship. Each North American nation is dealing with Black educational and economic shortfalls, disproportionate incarceration rates, just as keen social movements irrespective of country, such as Black Lives Matter, are advocating against police brutality and seeking social justice on a wealth of issues.

Learning the latest theoretical and research methods in Black American history could benefit Canadian students in understanding the long history of people, ideas, and associations that have transcended the border. I will employ historical literature that pushes away from the local and national-based context to engage the transnational and international framework. Students will be able to grasp the paradoxical character of borders, which both divide and connect and comprehend how wars, political conflicts, legal acts, and societal circumstances have prompted transnational exchange. Also, I plan to emphasize the ways in which the past historical events involving Blacks manifest in the present. Overall, my class at the host university, will deconstruct the inherent limitations of Black nationally driven studies to illustrate how they ignore fundamental bonds that tie nations and people indefinitely together. Students, for instance, will be able to contextualize Blacks that had dual national identities or shifting allegiances that do not neatly fit a singular national mold.
The Fulbright Program would also enable me to build on my knowledge by using the expertise I have gained via speaking and publishing on each side of the border. My transnational interest is best articulated by way of my forthcoming book titled *Borderland Blacks: Rochester, New York and St. Catharines, Canada West, 1800-1861*. It asserts that Black inhabitants of each city possessed transnational identities and strategically positioned themselves near the American-Canadian partition where vast cross-fertilization occurred. The study involves complex individuals who negotiated the overlapping worlds of the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, and the African Diaspora. The lives of Blacks in the borderlands of Rochester and St. Catharines were intertwined by shared newspapers, annual celebrations, religious organizations, as well as kinship and friendship ties that were reinforced by regular border crossings. In all, my research is neither uniquely an American story nor separately Canadian, but it unites the locations together to expose how Blacks negotiated space for recourse and self-assertion within the crossroads of two contrasting political realms. Learning how Blacks employed the national mediums to work towards common objectives could provide a point of departure for Canadian scholars seeking to challenge constructed borders, whether national, racial, or sexual.

As a Fulbright scholar, I will continue to conduct research on Black identity, migration, and transnationalism. I plan specifically to explore the perceptions Black Americans had of Canada prior to 1861. The majority of Blacks fleeing the U.S. found Canada to be a reasonable alternative. However, a score of them outright complained and charged Canada with comparable bigotry. These accusations have been hampered in the recent historiography due to the "promised land" discourse. I would like to carefully investigate discontent Blacks in Canadian communities to underscore their length of residency, social-economic status, political activism, to authoritatively assess the rationality of their viewpoints. This research can help to explain the unwillingness of Black transnationals to singularly commit to one nation and provide context for the post-Civil War reverse migration phenomenon. I plan to conduct research, for instance at the Library and Archives Canada and smaller local library collections, during my term in Canada and afterwards present at conferences in preparation to produce a number of peer-reviewed articles by mid-2018. In sum, this study will provide a sober and equitable analyzation of Blacks displeased with their circumstances and social mobility in Canada.

**Relevant Personal and Professional Experiences**

Throughout my life, I have actively sought fresh cultural encounters and interactions with Canada. Growing up in Rochester, New York, some 80 miles from Canada I lived a transnational lifestyle. As a youngster, I commonly crossed the international lines and visited sites like the Welland Canal and National Gallery of Canada, which ignited my interest in Public History. In those times no passport was required at the American-Canadian partition; only a valid driver’s license or birth certificate was needed. This made passage between the neighboring nations—seamless. My upbringing clearly demonstrated to me that my American experience was different than my national counterparts, based on my proximity to Canada. While attending Hofstra University, I majored in U.S. History and Africana Studies in order to better understand the impact of the past on current political trends and social problems. There, I learned about Blacks throughout the African Diaspora including those in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean, but I was disheartened that there was little mention of Canada. I wanted to change this dynamic.

Upon graduation from Hofstra, I returned to the greater Rochester area to attend SUNY Brockport for a Masters in U.S. History. In the post-9/11 years, I witnessed a rapidly evolving political climate where key changes were introduced and eventually legislated for the Canadian-American border. A passport became required at the international divide, and border control
guards asked more probing questions seeking to protect from potential terrorism. This was
blatantly different from the past disposition I had witnessed. These alterations hampered the fluid
frontier that allowed Blacks in Western New York to connect with their counterparts in Canada
for key annual events such as Toronto’s Caribana Festival and the Montreal International Jazz
Festival, which have long been a draw. My personal lived experience led me to my professional
aspiration. I attended Howard University to get a more sophisticated understanding of the
African Diaspora and transnationalism.

Overtime, my academic interests have led to short stints in Canada to conduct research
and to deliver public lectures and conference presentations. However, I now seek to become a
more seasoned Canadian traveler attuned to the nuances of the modern country. This will directly
impact my future teaching and scholarship as well as provide seamless access to primary
resources and cultural institutions. In my past travels to Canada, I have adapted quickly and
responded appropriately to new cultural experiences and changing circumstances all of which
would serve me well as a Fulbright. I would relish the opportunity to share my experiences and
training with colleagues at my host university and to deepen my existing relationships in Canada,
while cultivating new ones.

**Teaching and Administrative Experiences**

Over the past decade, I have acquired teaching experience across a broad spectrum at a
variety of institutions from a historical Black college, regional state school, and research
university. I have taught working-class African and Caribbean immigrants at Howard University,
the descendants of Asians, Native Americans, and European settlers at the University of
Pittsburgh-Johnstown, and upper-class whites and working-class Latinos and Blacks at Central
Connecticut State University. The regional, socioeconomic, and ethnic differences of my
students have taught me to adapt my teaching methods to many different situations and needs.

The diversity of my students is matched by the variety of the classes I have taught. I
firmly believe that I learn best by teaching; therefore, throughout my career, my dual desires
have been to broaden my teaching horizons to learn different cultures and to teach new courses
whenever possible. For instance, I have taught classes ranging from the History of Race &
Gender in Sports, Crime & Punishment in American History, Black Atlantic World History, to
The American Civil War, and Reconstruction & Reform, 1877-1930. In addition, I have
instructed American Labor History, The Abolitionist Movement in America & Beyond and both
sections of The History & Culture of African Americans. I have also taught graduate classes in
the emerging field of Public History including Museum Studies, Material Culture, and Local
History & Community Development. Each class has added to my breath of knowledge and
professorial skill set. A key aspect of my teaching philosophy is to build community within the
classroom and to engage students by keeping history accessible and relevant to the contemporary
world students exist in today. This transforms history from being merely events that occurred in
the past, to the record that guides the future. Colleagues and students alike have recognized my
dedication to teaching and student learning. Since coming to CCSU, I have had exceptional
scores on my teaching evaluations; on average 90 percent of my students agree that the instructor
quality was “high.”

In addition to my classroom experience, I have guided senior- and graduate-level thesis
research. I have supervised theses on topics ranging from counterculture Black comedy to the
development of museum-community relations and worked on a grant focusing on Pequot Native
Americans. My students have gone on to Ph.D. programs, became museum directors, and exhibit
curators. I would be pleased to supervise student work at my host university, and to provide advice to Canadian students on pursuing studies in American history as needed.

What I Propose to Teach

To provide examples of my teaching abilities, I have enclosed two course syllabi. The first course, which I have taught a variation of before, is titled The Abolitionist Movement in Canada & America. It will examine Black resistance to slavery and the activists that agitated power-holders to eradicate the institution of Black bondage in both nations. Abolitionists came from different backgrounds, possessed varying schools of thought, and employed an assortment of tools including: speeches, party politics, violence, narratives and pamphlets to disseminate their message. A score opposed slavery for moral and religious reasons, some saw it as a contradiction to national creeds, and others joined in the effort because it was politically expedient or simply because it did not profit them economically. Despite overwhelming odds, the abolitionists’ perseverance in Canada and America yielded the desired outcomes. Nonetheless, it is important to underscore the stages, struggles, and the successes and failures of Black leaders and organizations that contributed to the movement’s triumph and highlight the impetuses that caused change to transpire. The class approaches the Abolitionist Movement as a precursor to the Civil Rights Movement and larger human rights and decolonization movements. To promote writing skills, I require my students to submit a series of reaction papers, which they hand in first for proofreading and then again for a final grade. I also have students give in-class presentations on one of the course readings; my aim here is to stimulate critical thinking and speaking skills and to encourage classroom dialogue.

The second course I could teach at my host university is titled The Black Experience in Canada and America. The class focuses on the role of Blacks in each country from their settlement and enslavement to the beginning of the 20th century, while considering each country’s relationship to the other despite the national borders that separated them. The course will examine Black survival and resistance to enslavement, emancipation, citizenship, and the struggle for equality in Canada and America. It will also highlight the ways in which Blacks fought to preserve their humanity and to develop cultures and institutions that reflected their own values and beliefs. Special attention will be given to the successes and failures of select Black leaders and organizations that worked across the national partition. Black art, music, speeches, poems, and editorials from both countries will be evaluated as well. As with my previously listed class, this course deploys written assignments, class presentations, and class discussion to sharpen critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

In addition to the two classes listed above, I am able to offer Black history classes on a variety of topics. For example, a staple of my teaching portfolio has been an upper division course of my own design titled The History and Culture of African Americans. It provides a broad overview of political, economic, social, and cultural developments of Blacks, as well as their broader transnational and international relations from arrival on U.S. soil through the Gilded Age. Another popular class has been my Black Atlantic World course that highlights the global experience of Africans at home and abroad, from their origins to the 20th century. In all, the class emphasizes the awareness and interactions of Blacks worldwide and the sensibility and affection they possessed toward Africa.

Adapting My Materials and Presentation to Canada Culture and Language

Just as I have adapted the above courses to meet the needs of different types of students in the United States, I can adjust them to optimize learning opportunities for Canadian students. For instance, although I would deliver my lectures in English, I would employ readings and...
historical documents that are translated into French and other languages. Thereby, students can select to employ the text with which they are most comfortable. Also, I would encourage students to use English or French when addressing me. Such a bilingual approach would allow me the opportunity to improve my fledgling French skills during the semester.

In my class, I will use Power Point to give my students both a permanent written record and illustrated examples of my central lecture points. I have found that the most constructive way to promote learning in my classroom is to balance fundamental interactive lectures with an open dialogue where student input is valued. Also as a Fulbright, while exploring the Black experience in Canada and the United States, I will make sure that the conversation is plural respecting both nations to engender a sincere transnational discourse. For instance, I intend to ask students to compare newspaper articles in The North Star and The Liberator to The Voice of Fugitive and Provincial Freedman. Being a Public Historian, I like to incorporate museum visits as an accent to the core curriculum. This gets students out of the classroom to learn aspects of history at local cultural institutions in a more hands-on manner. I have found that students enjoy viewing exhibits and items reinforced by course literature. In addition, I interject music, the universal language, including labor songs, Negro Spirituals, and the Blues to ensure that the common voice is not lost in the Black historical narrative. Employing technology to accommodate the modern student such as discussion boards and books available on e-reader devices are also a key component of my syllabus construction.

Impact of a Fulbright on My Teaching and Professional Work

I hope that a semester in Canada will not only benefit my students and colleagues there, but also expand my horizons and allow me to bring back experiences to share with students at CCSU. With my time in Canada, I plan to visit as many historic sites and museums to explore the ways in which Blacks have been interpreted. Canadian and American Public Historians have shared literature and best practices for years. In fact, the National Council on Public History, based on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue, has hosted its conference in Canada on several occasions including in 2013, 2004, and 2001. I have recently helped to craft the proposal to host NCPH’s meeting in 2019 in Hartford, CT and will be instrumental in its execution. Upon returning to the United States, I will use the firsthand experiences at both my Canadian host university and cultural institutions to improve the quality of my research and teaching. One of the disadvantages of specializing in American history is that broad knowledge about other cultures is often sacrificed for an in-depth understanding of United States history. My experiences in Canada under the auspices of the Fulbright program, however, will nuance my understanding of African American history by allowing me to place it within a transnational and international context.

One clear benefit of the Fulbright program is the opportunity it provides for scholars to develop international relationships that nourish academic study. In that vein, I would also be extremely interested in helping to develop foreign study or exchange programs between Canadian and American universities. CCSU is one of the fastest-growing universities in the nation, and the school is eager to develop international contacts and programs and to host new Course Abroad and Study Abroad opportunities. Upon returning to CCSU, I will pursue such programs through negotiations with universities on both sides of the border and the securing of outside grants from philanthropic organizations. A Fulbright Grant would thus constitute a richly rewarding experience, both personally and institutionally, in a fascinating part of the world. I look forward eagerly to the possibility of such an experience. Thank you for your time and consideration.