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**THE CDSM SENTINEL**  
**COALITION OF DIASPORAN SCHOLARS MOVING – WINTER 2014**



Photo from the IABD Conference: The Board of Directors, plus this year's honorees in the center – Milton Myers and Virginia Johnson

**MISSION AND MANIFESTO**

As movement researchers and performing scholars of the African Diaspora, we have all experienced some

**Editorial Note from Brenda Dixon-Gottschild**

Dear Members,

Greetings and best wishes from Saroya, Jaamil, Lela, Leila, and me. We're pleased to bring you the winter 2014 edition of The Sentinel, and we continue to do our work as a watchdog, guardian organization.

Below are the notes compiled by a) Germaine Ingram and b) yours truly, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, following our CDSM conversation-in-the-round at the recent IABD conference. In two different styles, I believe together they give a feel for the kind of exchanges that transpired. Please feel free to email us at CDSM

form of either outright discrimination or subversive, exclusionary tactics by the academic community. CDSM is our response to millennial-style racism in our supposed post-racist era. Like those involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century, we are resolved to be proactive. Our fledgling organization is creating a database, disseminating our Mission Statement, and gathering resources (including legal counsel). We welcome new members from across the Diaspora as we extend our base. A voluntary, not-for-profit coalition of concerned dancer/scholars, we do not collect dues or elect officers. We are a service organization

#### Our Mission:

- To offer strategic advice for Diasporan scholars and movement artists in academic settings
- To maintain a database for networking and announcements
- To configure an organized process of pairing mentors and mentees in times of growth and crisis
- To serve as an accessible hub for national/international collaboration and partnering for efficient processes of sharing resources and social capital
- To serve as a medium through which members can share experiences and

with your reactions, questions, comments.

## Several Ways in Which Diasporan Scholars are Moving:

International Association of Blacks in Dance/  
Coalition of Diasporan Scholars Moving (CDSM)  
Saturday, January 18, 2014

9-10:30 a.m., Push the River or Go with the Flow:  
Diasporan Dance Scholars' Strategies for Moving On  
Convener and Moderator: Brenda DixonGottschild,  
Ph.D.

Fifteen or more people joined this early morning discussion. The session began with an introduction by Brenda DixonGottschild about the founding of the Coalition of Diasporan Scholars Moving (CDSM), and how it has evolved over the past year by becoming an initiative under the umbrella of IABD and issuing two newsletters todate. The purpose of this session was to continue to take the pulse of what's happening in academic communities for Diasporan scholars, and to generate more ideas about strategies for addressing challenging conditions in academia and for how CDSM can feasibly support the academic careers of scholars of color.

The session began with discussants Millicent Johnnie, Shani Sterling, and Germaine Ingram sharing anecdotes from their careers that represent the challenges for African American scholars working in overwhelmingly white academic environments and the lessons they have learned from their experiences.

Some of the themes that emerged in their stories include: how racially biased attitudes and motivations can be shrouded in purportedly neutral policies and

advice, discuss best practices, and offer support.

## Take Part in Moving CDSM Forward!

As we continue to grow, it's important that we continue to cultivate new steering committee members who can push the mission forward with strong leadership and innovative strategy. CDSM aims to be a support network of scholars, practitioners, and activists at various strategies in their growth. If you would like to be a part of the CDSM Steering Committee, please contact CDSM at [cdsm@iabdassociation.org](mailto:cdsm@iabdassociation.org).

### Meet the CDSM Steering Committee

#### Brenda Dixon

**Gottschild** is the author of *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*; *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era* (**winner of the 2001 Congress on Research in Dance Award for Outstanding Scholarly Dance Publication**); and *The Black Dancing Body – A Geography from Coon to Cool*. Her most recent book, *Joan Myers Brown and The Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina-A Biohistory of American*

precedents; how heads of academic departments sometimes work to undermine efforts of Diasporan scholars to pursue creative initiatives and bring new artistic resources into their academic and geographic communities; the secondary role that good teaching often plays in the value systems of academic departments, along with the ways that student evaluations can be used in arbitrary and destructive ways; and how blatant acts of hostility, humiliation and exclusion (such as shouting publicly at an AA scholar or treating a scholar as if she were not physically present) are among the behaviors being exhibited by department chairs and academic colleagues. Some of the resistive and protective strategies they suggested include: find and cultivate supporters and mentors above the departmental level; cultivate funding sources and support mechanisms outside the immediate academic arena; seek to negotiate clear contract terms to blunt efforts to control and micromanage scholars' efforts; find time through sabbaticals and other mechanisms to engage in personal healing, artistic and scholarly growth, and focusing/ refocusing; resist being drawn into reactions and responses that could be used as a basis for negative criticism or discipline; find ways to nurture spiritual, physical and mental fortitude; "plan your escape" so as to assess continually the value of the current situation to your career agenda and prepare yourself to leave devaluing and debilitating environments.

Other participants shared stories that spoke to both challenges and triumphs. Some themes that emerged were: disappointment with the actions of people who they looked to as mentors; persistence of attitudes that assume that Diasporan scholars are not appropriate candidates for certain grant opportunities, fields of study, and artistic endeavors;

*Performance*, was published in 2012. She is a freelance writer, consultant, and presenter, a former consultant and writer for *Dance Magazine*, and Professor Emerita of dance studies at Temple University. [www.bdixongottschild.com](http://www.bdixongottschild.com) and Facebook.

**Leila Anglin**, a native of Philadelphia, received her BFA in dance from Temple University. Leila is a freelance arts administrator and is experimenting with work that uses narrative to transparently explore how women experience their womanhood. Leila's passion for the preservation of art in the African Diaspora and her desire to see quality reproductive healthcare available to all women, has led her to concurrently pursue her certification as a homebirth midwife while working towards her MFA at Hollins University.

**Saroya Corbett** is a certified Dunham Technique instructor and has a Masters in Fine Arts degree in Dance from Temple University where she additionally holds a certificate in Women's Studies. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Institute for Dunham Technique Certification and is a contributing author to upcoming published book, *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches*. Currently, Saroya is a dance and teaching artist

the challenge of determining whether naming racism we experience helps or hurts opportunities for redress and resolution; the difficulty of knowing what an academic situation is really like until you're inside it; the failure of dance departments to self-assess and continually update their curricula and faculty competencies to address advancements in the field; the loneliness of Diasporan scholars in departments where there are few, if any, other Diasporan students or faculty; how turnover in department leadership can leave scholars in financial and programmatic limbo.

Despite these challenges, participants found ways "out of no way", sometimes from unexpected sources; they persisted due to a strong sense of purpose about the significance of their work; they recognized when it was time to step away from a situation that was weighing on their energy and spirit.

Concluding comments invoked the Civil Rights era and its call to heighten awareness of unfair, discriminatory, and artificial barriers, as well as the imperative to forge awareness into strategies that result in meaningful change. CDSM is raising awareness by stimulating discussions that reduce the feelings of isolation and abandonment that Diasporan scholars often feel. The question remains as to how CDSM can help to galvanize individual and collective strategies for changing the working and learning environment in higher education dance programs.

#### **Additional thoughts on the session.**

As Germaine Ingram's comprehensive notes point out, we were able once again to use this coming together to vent our frustrations and give reassurance and support to our cause—namely, finding ways to navigate and strategize for successful

and works on the staff of the Cultural Data Project.

**Lela Aisha Jones** is a native of Tallahassee, FL and resides in Philadelphia, PA. She is the founder of FlyGround [www.flygroundera.com](http://www.flygroundera.com) — her creative home with work focused in memoir, social commentary and diasporic movement practice. She is also a co-founder of The Requisite Movers—a service and presenting organization that supports the artistic work of women choreographers of African descent. Lela Aisha earned her MFA from Florida State University, is a Ph.D. candidate at Texas Woman’s University, and a visiting lecturer at Muhlenberg College.

**Jaamil Olawale Kosoko** is an independent performance curator, producer, poet, and performance artist. He is a 2012 Live Arts Brewery Fellow as a part of the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival, a 2011 Fellow at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and an inaugural graduate member of the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance (ICPP) at Wesleyan University. With his creative partner Kate Watson-Wallace, he co-directs anonymous bodies || art collective, a visual performance company that presents work internationally focusing on site base performance and

outcomes while functioning inside institutions built around systemic racism.

Again, the line of command was cited as the operative strategy in a crisis: start first with the department chair; if no satisfaction, proceed to his/her superiors; and proceed to Human Resources.

The insidiousness of departmental micro-management was also cited, especially when masked under the umbrella of “rules.” Some discussion ensued about how to deal with an “illegal” act by a division chair. In both instances the advice was to stay grounded and calm—not to descend to the level of pettiness exhibited by the person in authority and again to proceed through the line of command.

As we began to address the fact that EVERYTHING IS POLITICAL (and I capitalize this so that we continually remind ourselves, even when things seem to be going our way), discussion arose around the politics of changing deans or other changing figures of authority while or after hiring. Sometimes one is caught in the political crossfire.

The conversants emphasized the importance of reaching out, of engaging community as well as colleagues, and of looking to external funding foundations independent of those associated with one’s department.

A really important point, again in solid caps: PLAN YOUR ESCAPE, meaning be mindful of assessing when it is time to go; and planning this, even as early as when one is hired, can give you courage to leave when you need to go.

A touchy and difficult subject was discussed: the fact that time and again the Diasporan faculty of long standing (tenured and “professored” for some time) may not necessarily support you, the new kid on the block. The antidote: don’t get upset—be proactive, not reactive; don’t let others’ sickness wrap you up in it.

community building art practices. Visit [www.jaamil.com](http://www.jaamil.com) for more information.

I believe that we are strengthened with every opportunity we have to come together and restate our strengths and determination for change. We look to hearing from CDSM members: contact us with your thoughts, ideas, problems, solutions.

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You were added to this list because of your interest in movement research and performing scholars in the African Diaspora and discrimination and subversive tactics of millennial-style racism in academia.

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[cdsm@iabdassociation.org](mailto:cdsm@iabdassociation.org)

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