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# Farah Jasmine Griffin

USA

## Global history of minorities

Wednesday October 16th 2013 | 4pm | The Kitchen

### The author

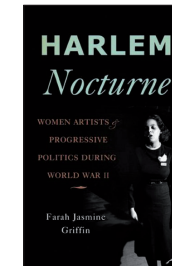
A native of South Philadelphia, **Farah Jasmine Griffin** is the William B. Ransford Professor of English and Comparative Literature and African-American Studies at Columbia University. She also serves as Program Director for The Schomburg Center's Scholars-in-Residence Program. Professor Griffin received her B.A. from Harvard, where she majored in American History and Literature and her Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale. Professor Griffin's major fields of interest are American and African American literature, music, history and politics. The recipient of numerous honors and awards for her teaching and scholarship, in 2006-2007 Professor Griffin was a fellow at the New York Public Library Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers. She is the author of *Who Set You Flowin?: The African American Migration Narrative* (Oxford, 1995), *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (Free Press, 2001) and co-author, with Salim Washington, of *Clawing At the Limits of Cool: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and the Greatest Jazz Collaboration Ever* (Thomas Dunne, 2008). She is also the editor of *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus* (Knopf, 1999).

### Bibliography

- Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II*** (Basic Books, 2013)
- Clawing at the Limits of Cool: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and the Greatest Jazz Collaboration Ever*** with Salim Washington (St. Martin's Press, 2008)
- One World: A Global Anthology of Short Stories*** (Random House Publishing Group, 2002)
- Who Set You Flowin'? : The African-American Migration Narrative*** (Oxford University Press, USA, 1996)

### Zoom

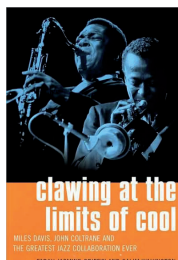
***Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II*** (Basic Books, 2013)



As World War II raged overseas, Harlem witnessed a battle of its own. Brimming with creative and political energy, the neighborhood's diverse array of artists and activists took advantage of a brief period of progressivism during the war years to launch a bold cultural offensive aimed at winning democracy for all Americans, regardless of race or gender. Ardent believers in America's promise, these men and women helped to lay the groundwork for the Civil Rights Movement before Cold War politics and anti-Communist fervor temporarily froze their dreams at the dawn of the postwar era.

In *Harlem Nocturne*, esteemed scholar Farah Jasmine Griffin tells the stories of three black female artists whose creative and political efforts fueled this historic movement for change: choreographer and dancer Pearl Primus, composer and pianist Mary Lou Williams, and novelist Ann Petry. Like many African Americans in the city at the time, these women weren't native New Yorkers, but the metropolis and its vibrant cultural scene gave them the space to flourish and the freedom to express their political concerns. Pearl Primus performed nightly at the legendary *Café Society*, the first racially integrated club in New York, where she debuted dances of social protest that drew on long-buried African traditions and the dances of former slaves in the South. Williams, meanwhile, was a major figure in the emergence of bebop, collaborating with Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Bud Powell and premiering her groundbreaking *Zodiac Suite* at the legendary performance space Town Hall. And Ann Petry conveyed the struggles of working-class black women to a national audience with her acclaimed novel *The Street*, which sold over a million copies—a first for a female African American author. A rich biography of three artists and the city that inspired them, *Harlem Nocturne* captures a period of unprecedented vitality and progress for African Americans and women, revealing a cultural movement and a historical moment whose influence endures today.

**Clawing at the Limits of Cool: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and the Greatest Jazz Collaboration Ever** with Salim Washington (St. Martin's Press, 2008)



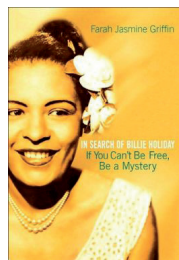
When the renowned trumpeter and bandleader Miles Davis chose the members of his quintet in 1955, he passed over well-known, respected saxophonists such as Sonny Rollins to pick out the young, still untested John Coltrane. What might have seemed like

a minor decision at the time would instead set the course not just for each of their careers but for jazz itself.

*Clawing at the Limits of Cool* is the first book to focus on Davis and Coltrane's musical interaction and its historical context, on the ways they influenced each other and the tremendous impact they've had on culture since then. It chronicles the drama of their collaboration, from their initial historic partnership to the interlude of their breakup, during which each man made tremendous progress toward his personal artistic goals. And it continues with the last leg of their journey together, a time when the Miles Davis group, featuring John Coltrane, forever changed the landscape of jazz.

Authors Farah Jasmine Griffin and Salim Washington examine the profound implications that the Davis/Coltrane collaboration would have for jazz and African American culture, drawing parallels to the changing standards of African American identity with their public personas and private difficulties. With vastly different personal and musical styles, the two men could not have been more different. One exemplified the tough, closemouthed cool of the fifties while the other made the transition during this time from unfocused junkie to a religious pilgrim who would inspire others to pursue spiritual enlightenment in the coming decade.

**One World: A Global Anthology of Short Stories** (Random House Publishing Group, 2002)



More than four decades after her death, Billie Holiday remains one of the most gifted artists of our time—and also one of the most elusive. Because of who she was and how she chose to live her life, Lady Day has been the subject of both intense adoration and wildly distorted legends.

Now at last, Farah Jasmine Griffin, a writer of intellectual authority and superb literary gifts, liberates Billie Holiday from the mythology that has obscured both her life and her art.

An intimate meditation on Holiday's place in American culture and history, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery* reveals Lady Day in all her complexity, humor and pain—a true jazz virtuoso whose passion and originality made every song she sang hers forever. Celebrated by poets, revered by recording artists from Frank Sinatra to Macy Gray, Billie Holiday is more popular and influential today than ever before. Now, thanks to this marvelous book, Holiday's many fans can finally understand the singer and the woman they love.

**Who Set You Flowin'? : The African-American Migration Narrative** (Oxford University Press, USA, 1996)



Twentieth-century America has witnessed the most widespread and sustained movement of African-Americans from the South to urban centers in the North. Griffin looks at this migration across a wide range of genres--the literary texts of Richard Wright and

Dorothy West, the paintings of Jacob Lawrence, and the music of Billie Holiday and Arrested Development, as well as photography and correspondence. She identifies the Migration Narrative as a major theme in African-American cultural production, and argues that a dominant portrayal of migration is produced by its historical and political moment.