

**Promotion and Tenure File  
Research Statement**

**Matthew C. Whitaker**

I have worked as an Assistant Professor of U.S. History and an Affiliate Faculty of African and African American Studies at ASU for four years. Since the fall of 2003 I have also worked as an Affiliate Faculty of the School of Justice and Social Inquiry. My first four years at ASU have been very productive and rewarding. I am quite fortunate at this point in my young career to have had the opportunity to work and collaborate with many intelligent, independent, creative, passionate, and forward thinking faculty and administrators. This rich intellectual, pedagogical, and service oriented environment has helped me grow as a scholar, and I have accomplished much in the way of research since I arrived at ASU as a result. All of my work and activities have kept me highly motivated and on target for tenure. In terms of research, I focus largely on the experiences of African Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. I am particularly interested in civil and human rights, critical race theory, blacks in the West, and the intersection of race, class, and gender in sports.

When I arrived at ASU for fall semester 2001, my primary goal was to recast my dissertation, "Western Resistance: Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale and the Black Freedom Struggle in the America West," into a book manuscript. I re-conceptualized many of my research findings and conducted new and original research. During the fall of 2002, I continued my research by conducting oral interviews with relatives and friends of the Ragsdales. I also conducted research in the Arizona Collection and the Arizona Historical Foundation of the Hayden Library at ASU, and the Department of Manuscripts and Archives at the Arizona State Capitol. I continued to familiarize myself with the relevant secondary literature in my field as well, so that I would be able to place my study in the proper historical context. During the spring of 2003, I completed my research, and I transformed my dissertation into a manuscript worthy of publication during the summer and fall of 2003. I submitted my manuscript to the University of Nebraska Press in January, 2004; the press issued me a contract for my forthcoming book, "*Race Work*": *The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West*.

My book examines the history and legacy of Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, two of the most influential black activists of the post World War II American West. Between 1946 and 1998, the Ragsdales stood at the vanguard of black professionalism, activism, and entrepreneurship. Their leadership during the Civil Rights Movement in Phoenix, Arizona, helped redefine black activism, and establish the precedent for legal school desegregation throughout the nation in 1953. While I emphasize local leadership, I also underscore the critical role of Western racial etiquette, black institutions, grassroots community organizations, and interracial alliances. I offer a new model of civil rights activism that stresses the importance of region and race, and the interconnectedness of professional and grassroots leadership. This model will provide scholars the opportunity to better comprehend the dynamics of insurgency at multiple levels in various regions. This study is built upon federal and state documents, private archives, organizational records, oral interviews, and relevant secondary sources. It is the first sustained analysis of black resistance in the Southwest, home of the fifth largest and one of the most urbanized cities in the U. S. "*Race Work*" was published in September of 2005.

I won the 2003-04 Bert M. Fireman Prize of the Western Historical Association, for my peer reviewed article, "'Creative Conflict': Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, Collaboration, and Community Activism in Phoenix, 1953-1965 (*Western Historical Quarterly*)."

In 2000 I published another award-winning refereed article in "The Rise of Black Phoenix: African-American Migration,

Settlement and Community Development in Maricopa County, Arizona 1868-1930 (*The Journal of Negro History*, now the *Journal of African American History*). "The Rise of Black Phoenix" won the Lorenzo J. Greene Award of Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Another article, "Shooting Down Racism": Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale and Residential Segregation in Phoenix, 1947-1953," is in the copyediting stage at *The Journal of the West*. "Shooting Down Racism" will be published during the spring of 2005. A fourth article, "Phillips v. Phoenix Union High Schools: Desegregating the 'Valley of the Sun,'" was accepted for publication by *Western Legal History*; it will be published during the summer of 2005.

I have also led and participated in other important research projects, in addition to my book and three referred articles. I published invited articles entitled "African Americans," and "African American Migrations" in Charles Scribner's Sons' *The Dictionary of American History* (2002). I wrote an invited article entitled "Legislators," for *Black Women in America: Second Edition*, published by Oxford University Press (2005), and I produced another article, "Phoenix," for the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of the Great Black Migration*, which will be published during the fall of 2005.

My future research projects include an intellectual and political biography of Muhammad Ali, a textbook on African American history since 1865, and a history of African Americans in Arizona. I am in the early stages of framing my biography of Ali. I have already begun to gather source material for this project, and I have presented a paper on this topic, "I Shook Up the World!: Muhammad Ali and the Politics of Popular Representation." I am revising and expanding this paper into article form for publication. I will submit this piece to the *Journal of African American History* during the summer of 2005. "I Shook Up the World!" exceeds the scope of my previous research, and serves as a launching point for my larger biography of Ali. Muhammad Ali declared himself "The Greatest," and for millions of people of African descent, and for millions of others across race lines, he has become just that. Ali embodies the complexity and dynamism that continues to define Black communities around the world, and his leadership is a testament to the ability of one man to rise above his limitations, and that which sought to oppress him. My current and future research on Ali will examine the extent to which his success as a boxer enabled his triumphs outside of the ring, his iconic status, systematic and unapologetic subversion of the status quo, unique and uncompromising Pan-Africanism, activism, humanitarianism, and his transformation from anathema to idol. I am the historical advisor to the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky, and I am also a member of the Center's International Advisory Council. As one of the center's advisors and consultants, I review its historical literature, am routinely exposed to the most significant and current scholarship on Ali, and have access to previously unreleased archival sources that will help form the foundation of my Ali book manuscript.

During the spring of 2004, I completed and submitted a proposal to Harlan Davidson, Inc., for a textbook on African American history since 1865. The proposed manuscript, entitled "*Over Jordan*": *African Americans in the Twentieth Century*, is now under advance contract with Harlan Davidson. "*Over Jordan*" will cast twentieth century United States history within the experiences and struggles of people of African descent in America. Beginning by underscoring African Americans' unrelenting efforts to define freedom during and after Reconstruction, not only for themselves but for the entire nation, it will then examine the extent to which black people transformed, and were transformed by, World War I, the Great Depression, and industrial and post-industrial changes during the first half of the twentieth century. The advent of World War II, and the industries which arose to support it, improved the prospect of good jobs and a freer life for African

Americans. As a result, relative large migrations ensued that increased the black population in the nation's urban centers significantly, and intensified the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s. These changes produced a dynamic new professional and grassroots black leadership, and paved the way for much of the success that people of color are experiencing in today's politics and surging interest in black self-determination *and* multiculturalism. "*Over Jordan*" will analyze this success, but it will also look critically at the intersection of race and class in the modern African American experience. It will pay close attention to the plight of poor inner city blacks, the rise in the black middle and upper classes following the Civil Rights Movement, and the new roles, wealth, and power of African Americans in sports and entertainment in an increasingly overt multi-racial society.

During the past thirty years, African American history has emerged as an established field of intellectual inquiry. "Not only is it one of the most dynamic areas in American history, containing some of the most exciting contemporary historical debates," John H. Bracy, Jr. and Manisha Sinha have argued, "but it is also changing the very way in which we view American history as a whole. African American history is not merely the addition of black people to a larger American historical narrative; it has its own issues and concerns." Like most recent studies of black history and life, "*Over Jordan*" will not be one of victimization, despite the indignities and terrors that were inflicted upon African Americans. It will be a compact chronicle of a people who dared to fight the forces that sought to dehumanize and oppress them. "*Over Jordan*" will be primarily built upon the predominant body of secondary literature in African American history, in addition to a smaller number of appropriate federal and state documents, and organizational records. "*Over Jordan*" will contribute to the ongoing effort to lay bare the history of African Americans, and to reexamine American history from a black perspective.

During the spring semester of 2004 I embarked upon a book-length project entitled "*Facing the Rising Sun*": *A History of African Americans in Arizona*." The University of Arizona Press and the University of Oklahoma Press have expressed serious interest in this project, and both publishers have offered me a contract for this book after having sent out my proposal for reviews. "*Facing the Rising Sun*" is now under advance contract with the University of Oklahoma Press. I believe that these projects will advance scholarship in U.S. history, African American history, and critical race theory, and help bridge the gap between pedagogy and practice by reaching a broad, more diverse audience. "*Facing the Rising Sun*" will refute the assumption that Arizona has little if any African American history. It will demonstrate that this inaccurate view has its roots in, among other things, a vast body of historical literature that has by accident and design, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and ignored the experiences and contributions of black people to the development of one of the most diverse and inclusive states in the U.S. This book will argue that beginning with Esteban De Dorantes in 1528, and continuing through the Reconstruction, migration, settlement and black community building experiences in Arizona to 1939, blacks wove themselves into the fabric of a complex and burgeoning region. It will also posit that World War II, and the industries which arose to support it, greatly improved the prospect of good jobs and a freer life for everyone in Arizona, particularly black people. As a result, a relative large migration ensued that increased the black Arizona population significantly, and strengthen the Arizona's own black freedom struggle during the post World War II era.

"*Facing the Rising Sun*" will emphasize the exigencies of black professionalism and grassroots community organizations, and underscore the critical role of Western racial etiquette, the intersections of region, race, class, and gender, and the prominence and interconnectedness of black institutions and interracial alliances. Its primary objective is to offer a sustained, scholarly, yet

accessible history of African Americans in Arizona, that will begin to fill the lacuna that in this field of study. It will also emphasize the agency that black Arizonans displayed in the face of white supremacy, segregation, and overwhelming socio-economic isolation. This study, like my first book, will be built upon federal and state documents, private archives, organizational records, oral interviews, and relevant secondary sources. It will be the first published study to provide a comprehensive examination of African American history in Arizona.

I have participated in myriad conferences and programs since arriving at ASU that have advanced and shared my scholarship. I was a panelist in the plenary session "Women's History in Ethnic Communities," at the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites Regional Conference, at ASU (March of 2005), a co-coordinator and moderator for the "Healing Racism Conference: 'The Color of Fear,'" at ASU (February 2005), and I delivered a paper entitled "*Phillips v. Phoenix Union High Schools: Desegregating the 'Valley of the Sun,'*" at the Western Historical Association meeting in Las Vegas (October, 2004). I organized and moderated a commemorative symposium entitled "The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Brown: The History and Legacy of a Landmark Decision," at the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center in Phoenix (May 2004), and delivered an address at Gov. Janet Napolitano and the Hazel B. Daniels [Arizona] Bar Association's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (*Brown*) Commemoration entitled "Segregation in Public Schools: Arizona's Desegregation Efforts" (May, 2004).

I also organized, chaired and presented in a session entitled "The Civil Rights Movement and Events in Arizona," at the Arizona Humanities Council 2004 History Fest (February 2004), and was a panelist on a roundtable entitled "The Relevance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Africa," at the Center for International Law, Policy, and Africa at DePaul University College of Law (February, 2004). At the Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (October, 2003), I presented a paper entitled "I Shook Up the World!: Muhammad Ali and the Politics of Popular Representation." I also organized a session entitled "Region and Race Work: Black Leaders and the Fight for Freedom in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America," for the Organization of American Historians conference, in Memphis, Tennessee (April, 2003). I presented the paper "Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, Agitation, and Protest in Phoenix, 1947-1965" at this session. In March 2002 I gave a presentation entitled "Using Oral History to Discover Black Women's Past in Arizona," at Telling Our Stories, Writing Our Lives: Using Oral History to Find Our Common Past: A Conference, Arizona Historical Society Museum at Papago Park, Central Arizona Division, Tempe, Arizona (March 2002).

I have applied for external grants that will help support my research and the overall mission of my department, college and university. In 2004 I applied for and was awarded a \$1000.00 grant from the Arizona Humanities Council, to support the "50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education" commemorative program that I organized and moderated for the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center in Phoenix, and the Department of History at Arizona State University. In 2004 I also submitted a Summer Stipend grant application to the NEH for the book-length project, "*Facing the Rising Sun*": *A History of African Americans in Arizona*." Lastly, in 2004 I also submitted an ACLS Charles A. Ryskamp Research Fellowship application, and an NEH Summer Stipend grant application, to support the research and writing associated with producing "*Facing the Rising Sun*". In 2003, with ASU Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, Molly Schoenhoff, I submitted a grant application to the Arizona Humanities Council for our research and public history project, "An Interpretive History of Carver High School in Phoenix". In 2003 I was also a co-writer of an NEH We the People Initiative [Teaching] Grant for the proposed "Teaching and Learning Resources-Materials Development Project". In 2002, with historical documentary producer Chris Stone, I applied for an Arizona Humanities Council Grant for "Eye on the Sky: A Historical Documentary of the Tuskegee Airmen," to help inform my work on the Ragsdales and "*Race Work*." I continue to pursue external funding opportunities to help defray the cost of my research and to make available supported time to help accelerate the completion of my book projects.