



EMORY UNIVERSITY

# Department of African American Studies

Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Winter 2017

Dear Friends of African American Studies,

Celebrating our 45th year at Emory University, the Department of African American Studies is pleased to present our spring 2017 newsletter. So much has happened this year. Our scholars continue to break new ground in the classroom, in their research, and in helping to shape public discourse around the major issues of the day. Our award-winning students are pursuing exciting careers and graduate school opportunities as well as using their knowledge in social justice activism.

The hallmark of African American Studies always has been the fusion of world-class research and teaching with a commitment to empowering the community and addressing issues that affect quality of life. That has not changed. Nevertheless, we are in a truly transformative moment—both as a society and as a department—and these changes require deliberate, intentional adaptations. African American Studies faculty and staff have been engaged for more than a year in thinking through and working on how we can better meet our mission. What does that mean in terms of excellence in faculty and course offerings? How does that affect our pedagogy; our outreach and reach-ins with the communities we serve? The growing polarization in society requires, nay, demands that we rise to the challenge. And we are doing just that!

This issue includes a spotlight on Visiting Assistant Professor Michelle Gordon and on two recent alumni, Casidy Campbell and Imani Lewis. We also highlight Dianne Stewart's course, *Black Love*, and her new sidecar course, *The Power of Black Self-Love*. Please also enjoy reading about my book, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. We will be hosting numerous scholars for lecture series this spring. If you are in the area, please join us for some of our events.

Sincerely,

*Carol Anderson*

Chair, African American Studies



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# Anderson Elevated to Named Professorship

Carol Anderson was recently named Charles Howard Candler Professor of African American Studies. The Charles Howard Candler professorships honor senior scholars who have shown outstanding teaching ability and productive scholarship in one or more fields of learning, and who have further distinguished themselves through long and substantial service to the university and in furthering the cause of higher education.

Charles Howard Candler, an 1898 Emory College alumnus, served as chair of Emory's Board of Trustees for nearly 30 years. He helped bring the university through the Great Depression and World War II. The awards are funded through an endowment established by the board and sponsored by Candler's widow, Flora Glenn Candler.

Additionally, Anderson was named a Politico 50: the thinkers, doers and visionaries transforming American politics in 2016, where she gave this advice to the current president: "Don't lose sight of the goal—an economically stronger, healthier, better-educated population across class, race, ethnicity, and religion. It is not a zero-sum game." Visit <http://www.politico.com/magazine/politico50/2016> to read more.



## *Accolades for White Rage*

Carol Anderson's book, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, was named one of the best 100 books of the year by the *Toronto Globe and Mail*.

# A New Course Probes the Depths of Black Love

Love is one of the most foundational yet enigmatic forces in the human experience. The course Black Love is rooted in longstanding social, cultural, and political realities, touching upon slavery, sharecropping, segregation, the US penal system and prison industrial complex, the development of the welfare system and its impact upon black families, and how these impediments have affected the rates of romantic coupling and marriage among blacks and, by extension, the wealth gap between blacks and whites in America. The course was originally a seminar. But responding to the obvious need in the Emory community, Dianne Stewart, associate professor of religion and African American studies, transformed this class into one that could accommodate 80 students. The response was overwhelming and positive.

Feminist scholar bell hooks has said, “The practice of love offers no place of safety,” and yet “to love well is the task in all meaningful relationships, not just romantic bonds.” Christian mystic Howard Thurman posited, “Love has no awareness of merit or demerit; it has no scale. . . . Love loves; this is its nature.” Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr considered forgiveness “the final form of love.” A Wolof proverb discerned, “If there is cause to hate someone, the cause to love has just begun.” And a Kenyan proverb advises, “Talking with one another is loving one another.” Biological anthropologist Helen Fisher defines (romantic) love as an “addiction” and, in classic African American idiom, Zora Neale Hurston’s protagonist Jaine Crawford said, “Love is lak de sea. It’s uh movin’ thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets.”



Associate Professor Dianne Stewart

Together, these quotations probe the ethics, politics, sociology, philosophy, and neurobiology of love. They summon personal experiences—some private, others public—that compel us to identify with, assume a neutral stance toward, and/or distance ourselves from their claims. Despite the range of unresolved discussions on the nature of love, the course Black Love begins from the premise that love is a grounding principle for human sociality and particularly prosocial behavior. It rests at the core of religious and humanitarian ideals and prescriptions for regulating, indeed preserving and nurturing, relationships across varied interpersonal and social contexts (courtship, family life, public welfare, etc.).

With these precedents in mind, the course invites students to explore historical and contemporary notions of love with an emphasis on love’s powerful and controversial presence/absence in the lives of black people in the North American context. Through readings of philosophical, religious, literary, social scientific, cultural and neurobiological studies that address black social activism, family life, romantic coupling, self-esteem, race, gender and sexual politics, African heritage, and much more, students reflected on love across landscapes of theology/ethics, politics, economics, and science while giving attention to analytical lenses that bridge discourses on feminism/womanism, sexuality, masculinity, popular culture, and embodiment in African American studies scholarship.

# Taking a Sidecar to Intellectual Exploration

The Power of Black Self-Love was a “sidecar” course taught by Dianne Stewart, associate professor of religion and African American studies, and Donna Troka, adjunct assistant professor in the Institute for the Liberal Arts, in fall 2016 as a part of Emory’s Interdisciplinary Exploration and Scholarship (IDEAS) program.

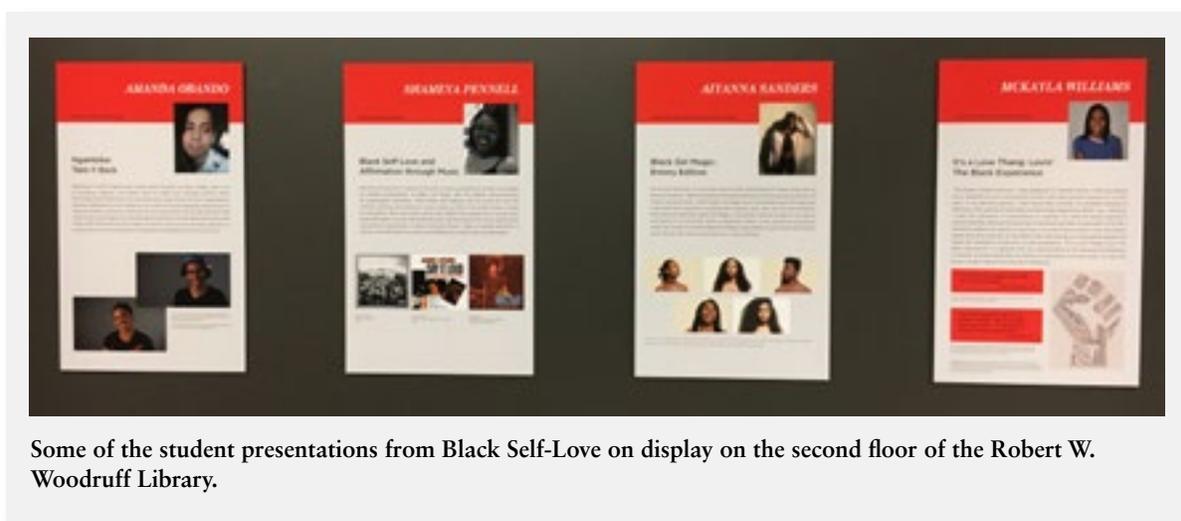
It brought together the work of Stewart’s Black Love course (Religion 270/ African American Studies 285) and Troka’s Resisting Racism course (American Studies/Interdisciplinary Studies 385). Resisting Racism: From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter juxtaposed the Black Lives Matter movement with the civil rights movement of the 1960s to investigate how racism in America has (and has not) changed over the last 60 years and to uncover the strategies black people and their allies have used to work toward liberation.

In The Power of Black Self-Love, a new one-credit course, Stewart and Troka emphasized and built on the resonances of their two courses, asking students to consider theories of black love and histories of black social movements but also to interrogate their contemporary cultural products. Student projects focused on demonstrating the ways in which black self-love is an act of resistance that has the power to transform the world.

For more on the course, see [http://news.emory.edu/stories/2016/12/er\\_power\\_of\\_black\\_self\\_love/campus.html](http://news.emory.edu/stories/2016/12/er_power_of_black_self_love/campus.html)



Donna Troka, Institute for the Liberal Arts



Some of the student presentations from Black Self-Love on display on the second floor of the Robert W. Woodruff Library.

# *Preserving Cultural Memory:* Spotlight on Visiting Assistant Professor Michelle Gordon



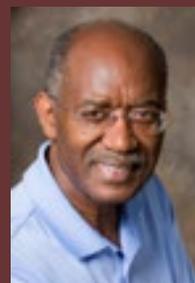
Michelle Gordon works in the areas of American literature, black studies, and cultural studies, with particular interests in the literary and cultural labors of the Left, civil rights history, black women's studies, and cultural memory. She spent the 2015–2016 academic year as a visiting fellow at the James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference here at Emory. While in residence, she focused on her monograph, “Bringing Down Babylon: The Chicago Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and African American Freedom Struggles,” and developing a related, online encyclopedia of the Black Arts Movement. “Bringing Down Babylon” offers a radical literary and cultural history of black Chicago from the Great Depression through the rise of the Black Power era and examines the relationships between African American arts and freedom struggles. While exploring the work and activism

of figures such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright and Lorraine Hansberry, this project contributes to the ongoing reconsiderations of radical American cultural history and developing civil rights studies beyond the US South.

As a James Weldon Johnson Institute Visiting Fellow, Gordon taught a course titled Literature of the New Negro Renaissance and Black Arts Movement. The course was so popular that she has chosen to teach it again this spring. The class explores the literary and cultural history of the New Negro (aka Harlem) Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, with an emphasis on print culture, performance, and protest politics. It will consider a variety of genres as well as examine the influences of these movements and their relationships to one another. Students will read works by Amira Bakara, Alaine Locke, and Jean Toomer.

## Former faculty mentioned extensively in recent *New York Times* article

Sherman James, who recently retired from the Department of African American Studies, was mentioned extensively in the *New York Times*. Read the article at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/opinion/sunday/why-succeeding-against-the-odds-can-make-you-sick.html>.



# Where Are They Now?: Imani Lewis 13C

After graduation, African American studies major Imani Lewis moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to work as a justice fellow at the Equal Justice Initiative. She left that fellowship after one year and returned to Emory for a two-year fellowship in the Business Practice Improvement (BPI) University Strategic Consulting Office, where she completed a practicum as manager of academic administration for Goizueta Business School. Afterwards, she was offered a full-time position as an instructional designer at the business school and remained there until she started working at BrightHouse, a division of Boston Consulting Group, in October 2016.

Imani will graduate in May 2017 with a master of science in instructional design and technology from Georgia State. She says that her course work in African American studies prepared her well for graduate school. “During my senior year I completed an honors thesis under the advisement of Dr. Leslie Harris (now at Northwestern University), Dr. Regine Jackson (now at Agnes Scott College), and Dr. Nagueyalti Warren. Participating in the honors program required taking graduate course work, which was excellent exposure to the lifestyle of a graduate student,” she says. “Still, the bulk of my preparedness stemmed from the rigor of the African American Studies program and the classes I had been taking since my sophomore year. The interdisciplinary approach to the pedagogy enabled me to think creatively about the issues we explored in class. I learned to find relationships between seemingly disparate sources, synthesize my findings, and craft compelling and strong arguments supported by existing and emerging research. Graduate school has been a welcome challenge, and I have the African American Studies program to thank for that.”



In her role as strategist at BrightHouse, Imani works with companies to help them define their purpose. She says this work has a very academic “feel” and follows some of the same paths as conducting research. “We start with a hypothesis and then conduct research, vet sources, take robust notes, synthesize information, and engage with thought leaders from divergent fields to gather findings that lead to a purpose area,” she explains. “I love my work because I value social responsibility and corporate social responsibility—the notion that we are changing organizations, the people that comprise them, and the communities they touch is extremely gratifying. I feel very prepared for this type of work thanks to my exposure to academic excellence in the African American Studies program. I am able to hone many of the skills that I refined in the African American Studies program on a daily basis, and I excel at what I do.”

She adds, “It’s hard to believe, but I’m only 3.5 years out from graduation. I haven’t won any major professional awards yet—I hope those will come in time. Still, what I am most proud of so far has been my ability to secure jobs that I love and move to new ones seamlessly throughout my short career. I started college in the midst of the recession, during a time when students were encouraged to choose practicality over passion or the pursuit of knowledge. I couldn’t and cannot fathom doing something that doesn’t move me, so I always followed my heart. When I declared a major in African American studies, people asked me all the time, ‘What can you do with that?’ Given my varied professional background in the fields of law, business, higher education, and technology, I can wholeheartedly say that I can do anything. I have

*continued*

*Where Are They Now* continued

never been without a job since graduating, and I have surrounded myself with a robust professional network. I have my AAS degree and the skills it taught me to thank for all these successes.”

Outside of her graduate work and professional work, Imani currently volunteers with the Junior League of Atlanta (JLA). All of its members have made a commitment to serve the Atlanta community and address issues in the areas of early childhood education, diversity, human trafficking and child sex trafficking, and poverty. “Service is a large part of who I am,” Imani says. “The service of others has afforded me a multitude of opportunities, so I love to give back in hopes of helping someone else and advancing the communities in which I live.”

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## *Postgraduate Journeys:* AAS Major Casidy Campbell 16C

“African American Studies was a formative experience for me at Emory. It was an enjoyable but also most rigorous major. I developed great relationships with most—if not all—of my professors. The classes I took armed me with the necessary knowledge to combat oppression, but the major was also a haven for me. Being a Mellon Mays Fellow also helped because it definitely shaped my postgraduate trajectory. One of my favorite classes was Black Women’s Poetry, taught by Dr. Warren. In this class I was able to expand upon my love of poetry, which has been critical to my development at Emory and as a person. That class exposed me to so many black women poets and sharpened my ability to analyze poetry. Dr. Warren’s passion and connectedness to the poetry world also shone through when we got to meet key poets such as Sonia Sanchez in her class. She also helped us access the poems in ways to make sense of who we are and our experiences as black women (and men).”

In her senior year, Casidy received recognition as a Woman of Excellence through the Center for Women at Emory and was named a 100 Senior Honorary. She is currently taking a gap year, teaching at the Howard School in Atlanta and has recently been accepted to the Department of American Culture’s PhD program at the University of Michigan.



### Other Class of 2016 AAS graduates

#### *Majors*

Jonathon Devase  
Bryan Natividad

#### *Minor*

Amiel Ilan Fields-Meyer

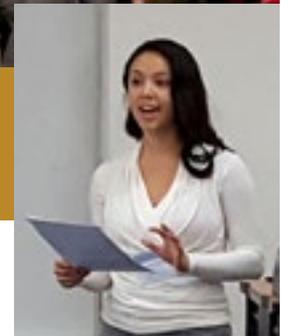
# *Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship:* Where Research Leads to Greatness

Since 2000, Emory's Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program (MMUF) has supported undergraduates who feel called to earn a doctorate and to teach at the college or university level. Administered by the Department of African American Studies, the MMUF program also creates opportunities for undergraduates to undertake research projects with Emory faculty members

who function as mentors during the two-year fellowship period. In addition to joining a national and international network of emerging scholars, Mellon fellows receive a stipend throughout the academic year, summer stipends, and the forgiveness of a percentage of undergraduate loans while earning a doctorate in a Mellon field or discipline.



*Above:* Fellows, graduate mentors, and faculty mentors at the annual research conference in April. *Right:* Current MMUF fellow Clara Perez presenting at the MMUF Southeast Regional Conference in October.



The MMUF program at Emory has recruited and retained 16 cohorts, totaling 62 students. Of this number, nine students are currently involved in the MMUF Program as Emory undergraduate juniors and seniors. Another 52 are postbaccalaureate fellows pursuing impressive scholarly and professional paths, 16 of whom are currently enrolled in PhD programs at institutions such as Harvard, the University of Chicago, the University of Georgia, NYU, and Northwestern. Five of the postbaccalaureate fellows have completed the PhD degree. Many other Emory MMUF alumni/ae have plans to enroll in PhD programs after completing terminal master's programs or service programs.

Three current fellows have recently returned from the January MMUF program in South Africa hosted by the University of Cape Town. The trip is an onsite, experiential learning program to broaden:

- understanding of the South African socioeconomic, racial, cultural, historical, and environmental landscape;
- both the American and South African perspectives of the social dynamics operating within these respective contexts through critical inquiry and debate;
- development of young academics, creating a critical awareness of their role and function in a highly complex, dynamic, and unequal society; and
- opportunities for individuals to reflect critically on their experiences, so as to create further opportunities for self-growth within academia.

# Martin Luther King Jr. Keynote



CANNON CHAPEL  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 17,  
4:00 P.M.

“The space that exists for many of us, as a young black girl, is so extremely limited, so that you really can’t go very far without being an activist, without being in defiance of something.”

—Bree Newsome (2014)

## Bree Newsome Gives MLK Jr. Day Keynote

Born with an artist’s soul and spirit, Bree Newsome has always been sensitive to the essential role art and symbols play in shaping culture and consciousness. During the funeral of the Reverend Clementa Pinkney, one of nine people murdered in the name of white supremacy at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, S.C., Newsome recognized the message being communicated clearly by the US flag and the South Carolina state flag at half-mast while the Confederate flag remained fully unfurled, rising high on the state capitol grounds. Refusing to accept the premise of this image—that white supremacy is supreme, untouchable and invincible—Newsome scaled the 30-foot flagpole in front of the South Carolina statehouse and removed the “stars and bars,” declaring, “This flag comes down today.”

The iconic picture of her on the pole, flag in hand, has become a touchstone of empowerment for disenfranchised people around the world.

Newsome gave the keynote in Winship Ballroom on Tuesday, January 17, introduced by African American Studies major Aamira Brown 17C. She spoke about gentrification, civil rights histories in America, community organization, and the Black Lives Matter movement, inspiring listeners to take action against systemic oppression. She received a standing ovation from the audience of more than 150 people.

# 2017 Events of Interest

*Note: All lectures will be held in the African American Studies Conference Room, 207 Candler Library, unless otherwise indicated.*



february 28

Herman Beavers,  
University of  
Pennsylvania

“Noises Inside  
the Race: Re[dis]  
covering Lorraine  
Hansberry’s  
‘The Sign in  
Sidney Brustein’s  
Window’”

Futures in  
African American  
Literature and  
Culture Lecture  
Series

february 21

Dagmawi Woubshet, Cornell University

Futures in African American Literature and Culture, 4:00 p.m.

As a scholar of African American literature and culture, Woubshet, an associate professor, works at two pivotal intersections, between African American and sexuality studies and between African American and African studies. These overlapping areas of inquiry inform his scholarship and research, including his book, *The Calendar of Loss: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS*. He is currently working on two new book projects: *Here Be Saints: James Baldwin’s Late-Style* and *New Flower: A Memoir*. He will give a talk titled “‘Another Time, Another Space’: James Baldwin’s Late Style.”

february 28

Herman Beavers, University of Pennsylvania

Futures in African American Literature and Culture, 4:00 p.m.

Beavers is professor of English and Africana Studies. He teaches courses in African American and American literature including courses on Southern Modernism and 20th-Century African American Poetry. He will give a talk titled “Noises Inside the Race: Re[dis]covering Lorraine Hansberry’s ‘The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window.’”

march 15

Michelle Gordon, Emory University

Dark Tower Lecture Series, Noon

Gordon is visiting assistant professor in the Department of African American Studies. She works in the areas of American literature, black studies, and cultural studies, with particular interests in the literary and cultural labors of the Left, civil rights history, black women’s studies, and cultural memory. She will give a talk titled “Towards a Cultural Economy of Domestic Labor.”

march 21

Carla Shedd, Columbia University

4:00 p.m.

Shedd is an assistant professor of sociology and African American studies. Her research and teaching interests focus on crime and criminal justice; race and ethnicity; law and society; social inequality; and urban sociology. She is the author of *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice*.

march 23

Leslie Alexander, Ohio State University

Diaspora, Gender and Identity: New Perspectives on the 18th- and 19th-Century Black Experience Lecture Series, 4:00 p.m.

Alexander, associate professor of African American and African Studies, will give a talk titled “‘The Cradle of Hope:’ The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Black Political Thought, 1816–1861.”

*continued*

# 2017 Events of Interest *continued*



march 28

Amrita Chakrabarti  
Myers, Indiana  
University

“From Out of the  
Shadows: The  
Chinn Women of  
Kentucky”

Diaspora, Gender,  
and Identity  
Lecture Series

march 28

Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, Indiana University

Diaspora, Gender and Identity: New Perspectives on the 18th- and 19th-Century Black Experience Lecture Series, 4:00 p.m.

Myers, associate professor of history and gender studies, is a historian of the black female experience in the United States. Her research interests revolve around issues of race, gender, freedom, and power, and the ways in which these constructs intersect with one another in the lives of black women in the Old South. She is the author of *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston*. Her lecture is titled “From Out of the Shadows: The Chinn Women of Kentucky.”

april 4

Walter Rucker, Rutgers University

Diaspora, Gender and Identity: New Perspectives on the 18th- and 19th-Century Black Experience Lecture Series, 4:00 p.m.

Rucker, associate professor of history, will give a talk titled “I Knew Him in Coromantee Country’: (Re)configurations of Identity in the 18th-Century Gold Coast Diaspora.”

april 11

Valerie Babb, University of Georgia

Futures in African American Literature and Culture, 4:00 p.m.

Babb is a professor of English. Her fields of expertise include African American literature and culture, transatlantic studies, and constructions of race and gender.

april 17

Daina Berry, University of Texas at Austin

Grace Towns Hamilton Lecture, 4:00 p.m.

Winship Ballroom, Dobbs University Center, Third Floor