

# Department of African American Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Fall 2015

Dear Friends of African American Studies,

There is no segment of our society that has not been touched, influenced, or shaped by the presence of African Americans in the United States. Politics, law, music, art, media, religion, education, health care, foreign policy—they all reflect the historic and ongoing struggles for citizenship rights and a basic recognition of a people's humanity. The Department of African American Studies, which soon will celebrate its 45th anniversary at Emory, brings together scholars from a range of disciplines. The centrality of black people's lives and existence to every major institution in the United States drives our scholars' research questions.

For example, how has democracy been shaped by attempts to disenfranchise blacks through efforts such as grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and—in this century—requirements for government-issued voter IDs? How has our understanding of God and Christianity been influenced by the enslavement of Africans? What are the cultural means of resistance, survival, and resilience that come through in jazz, blues, gospel, and hip-hop? What are the linkages and divisions between literature and social justice movements? How do images in the media influence and shape public policy—and vice versa?

Such questions, posed by our faculty, have led to award-winning research in literature, history, religion, art, public health, and education. The books and articles written by our faculty are broad ranging, impressive; they include a *New York Times* best-seller. But the discipline of African American Studies is about more than the academy. It also is about applying that knowledge in ways that empower students, other members of the Emory community and, ultimately, the society at large.

From our teaching to our research, we have and will continue to reach beyond the academy and make our presence felt in the public domain. Our scholarship and expertise eddies out from news forums such as CNN, the

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# AAS Graduate Still Fighting for Social Justice

by Nathan McCall



Typically, when newly minted college graduates toss their caps in the air, most of them head home to chill for the summer. Some even take off for as much as a year or so to travel. Not Jovonna Jones.

After graduating from Emory in May, Jones—an African American Studies major—returned to her home-place just outside of Boston and continued doing what she had done throughout her tenure at Emory: working to change the world, one initiative at a time.

It was Jones’s commitment to social justice issues that had her finishing her undergraduate career with a splash. “JoJo,” as she is affectionately known, was awarded the 2015 Lucius Lamar McMullan Award for her dedication to leadership.

After graduation, she took maybe a week to rest on her laurels. Beyond reading and spending catch-up time with family, Jones promptly began working with a nonprofit called the Legacy Project, run by Visions, Inc.

A philosophy minor, Jones worked with teenagers, ages 14 to 20. “We taught them about social activism through the arts,” she said. “There were only three of us holding it down, but it was awesome. It was really cool learning this as I go.”

In implementing the program, Jones, who worked as a coordinator and facilitator, combined two of her passions—social activism and photography. She sent students into public places to take pictures and explore the dynamics of “street harassment.”

“Street harassment—cat-calling, police violence, attacks on trans people, etc.—hinges on entitlement,” she said. “To harass someone on the street is to try to assert your power or claim over their body, space, time, and attention. The street is a public space. Street harassment then becomes another tactic of taking up and dominating space, particularly out of fear or just plain hatred (which, arguably, also stems from fear). Street harassment is probably one of the most common forms of normalized violence in public spaces.”

Jones said the exercises forced students in the summer program to think more consciously about how people inhabit and operate in public spaces. It forced the young people to confront issues such as: “What does the space look like so that we can figure out how to transform it. I thought this would be a cool opportunity to see what happens.”

Jones continued, “What’s interesting to me is that street harassment draws out the power dynamics and oppression we assume only happens in ‘private’ spaces: homes, businesses, schools, prisons, etc. Street harassment happens in so many forms and out in the open. People can’t hide from it. People can’t act like

they don't see it. And, if they really don't see it, they have to interrogate why. If they call themselves antiviolent, they have to ask themselves why they don't see the violence that happens right on the road in front of them, day and night."

At Emory it was that kind of insight and intellectual curiosity that led members of the Emory College of Arts and Sciences to select Jones as this year's winner of the 2015 McMullan Award. The award grants \$25,000 to a college senior who demonstrates leadership and a commitment to community outreach.

Indeed, Jones demonstrated that commitment over and over in her four years as an Emory student. She worked as an intern at the Center for Women. She helped found the Black Student Union and rejuvenated the Black Student Alliance. She did all that while also researching for two fellowship programs.

Initially, upon learning that she had won the McMullan Award, which came as a total surprise, Jones said she was unclear what she would do with the \$25,000. She spent the summer figuring it out.

"I have been able to do a lot!" she said with a chuckle. First off, she sent her parents on a much-needed vacation—to Aruba. She said they had not been on a vacation in a full decade. She also invested a portion of the money, and treated herself to a new iPad.

And, not surprisingly, Jones also used a portion of the funds to help finance her penchant for social activism. When she learned that her family's church was active in trying to win the freedom of a member's son, a young black man who had been locked up for 22 years, JoJo donated money to help with that effort.

The man, Sean K. Ellis, was convicted in 1995 of murdering a Boston police detective. His defense lawyer spent several years collecting the evidence that recently led a judge to order a new trial. The judge issued a ruling, concluding that former Boston police commissioner William Bratton and then-Suffolk District Attorney Ralph C. Martin II wrongly allowed three detectives to play key roles in the murder investigation.

The judge also concluded that prosecutors did not provide Ellis's defense lawyers in the early 1990s with all of the information collected by detectives, including reports detailing how a Boston police officer said another member of the force was responsible for Mulligan's killing.

Ellis was released in June on \$50,000 cash bail, which was collected by his family and supporters such as Jones. For her, the case resonated, particularly in light of BlackLivesMatter and other movements designed to shed light on inherent biases in the nation's criminal justice system.

This fall, Jones will venture into new explorations that, she hopes, can complement her commitment to social justice. She will enter Georgia State University to begin pursuing a master of fine arts degree in photography. "They happen to have a really cool program that's able to give a lot of attention to students," she said. "And I wanted to be in a place that is nurturing."

She believes the location of Georgia State, in the heart of downtown Atlanta, will help provide a kind of urban laboratory for her to develop her photography skills and experience what she called "a courageous vulnerability when it comes to art." Part of her decision to attend there relates to an acquired affinity for Atlanta. "I just like the city," she said.

*Nathan McCall is a senior lecturer in the department and a former reporter for the Washington Post and Atlanta Journal-Constitution. His autobiography, Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America, was a New York Times bestseller. His third book, Them, was cited by Publishers Weekly as one of the best books of 2007 and nominated for several awards, including the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, the 2008 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Debut Fiction, and the 2008 Townsend Prize for Fiction.*

# Martin Luther King Jr. Keynote



CANNON CHAPEL  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 4:00 P.M.

Speaker: **Benjamin Todd Jealous**

Jealous is the former president and CEO of the NAACP. He recently joined the Silicon Valley venture capital firm Kapor Capital, where he plans to increase opportunities for minorities in the tech economy. A Rhodes Scholar, Jealous was named by both *Forbes* and *TIME* to their “Top 40 under 40” lists, and named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. Jealous’s new book, *Reach: 40 Black Men Speak on Living, Leading, and Succeeding*, features personal essays from prominent figures in the black community.

A reception will follow afterward in Brooks Commons. Jealous will be introduced by River Bunkley, an AAS major and sophomore.

## *Letter from the Chair* CONTINUED FROM P. 1

*Washington Post*, and *Foreign Policy*. We weigh in on public policy for the Centers for Disease Control, the US State Department, the United Nations, and as expert witnesses in immigration hearings. We create resources, such as the database for Civil Rights Cold Cases in Georgia, that further the cause of justice. We are represented in thehistorymakers.com, the nation’s largest African American oral history collection.

We are committed to working with the community through a number of nongovernmental human rights and civil rights organizations. We have created literacy programs for the incarcerated, engaged in struggles that have opened up access to health care and living wages for workers and the poor, and have been recognized for our efforts by the Steed Media Group and DeKalb County for our work in Atlanta.

Our students embody this excellence as well. Award-winning and publishable student research emerges year after year from our classes. Our majors and minors go on to fulfilling careers in law, business, and public service, as well as top graduate and professional degree programs throughout the nation.

Welcome to Emory University’s Department of African American Studies, where academic excellence and commitment to social justice is more than a motto. It’s a mission.

Sincerely,

*Carol Anderson*

Chair, African American Studies

# Professor Leslie Harris Earns Book Awards

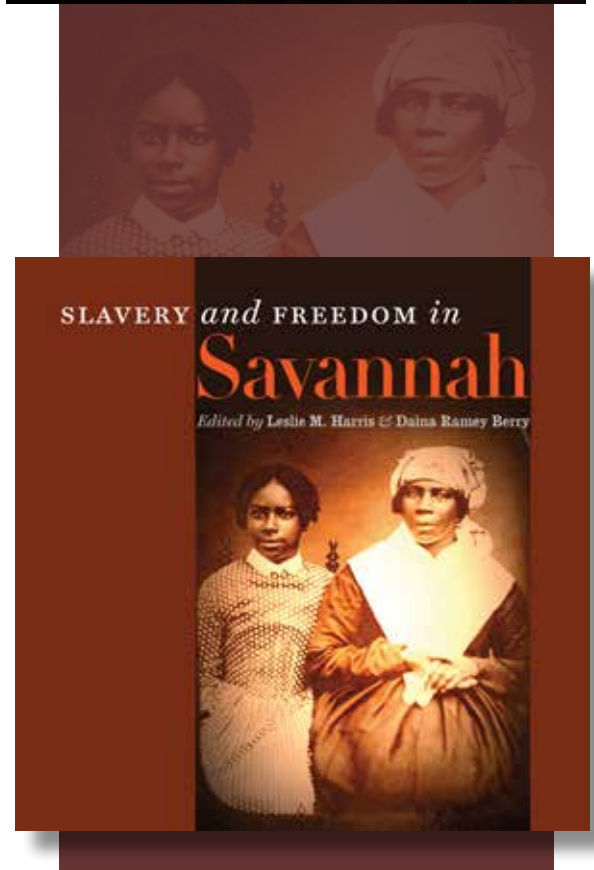
Talk about a run. Professor Leslie Harris has garnered a slew of awards for publication of her latest work, *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*, coedited with Daina Ramey Berry.

*Slavery and Freedom in Savannah* is a collection of essays by leading historians of Savannah, Georgia, and the South on slavery, emancipation, and black life in Savannah. The book covers the period from the city's founding in 1733 to the early twentieth century. It is modeled on *Slavery in New York*, a volume Harris coedited with Ira Berlin. *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah* includes a blend of stories about people, events, and places in the city.

This year Harris received the Coastal Museums Award of Excellence: Excellence in Public History for an entire project. She also garnered the Lilla M. Hawes Award from the Georgia Historical Society for the best book in Georgia local or county history published in 2014.

Those awards come on the heels of three others conferred last year for *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*. They include the following:

- *Leadership in History Award of Merit, American Association for State and Local History (the entire project consisted of the 2011 symposium, 2014 book and exhibition, and reinterpretation of the Owens-Thomas House)*
- *The Southeastern Museums Conference recognized the exhibit [need name of exhibit] in its annual competition, which focuses on the interchange of ideas, information, and cooperation.*
- *Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia's History from the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council*



# Three New Faculty Members Join Department

These faculty members reflect a range of research and academic interests.



## Sherman A. James

James is a research professor of epidemiology and African American Studies at Emory. Prior to his retirement from Duke University last year, he was the inaugural Susan B. King Professor of Public Policy in Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy from 2003 to 2014. At Duke, he also held professorships in sociology, community and family medicine, and African and African American Studies. Prior to joining Duke's faculty, he taught in the epidemiology departments at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill (1973–1989) and at the University of Michigan (1989–2003). At Michigan, he was the John P. Kirscht Collegiate Professor of Public Health, the founding director of the Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture, and

Health, chair of the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, and a senior research scientist in the Survey Research Center at the Institute for Social Research. He received his AB degree (psychology and philosophy) from Talladega College in 1964 and his PhD degree (social psychology) from Washington University in St. Louis in 1973. He is the originator of the John Henryism Hypothesis, which posits that repetitive, high-effort coping with social and economic adversity is a major contributor to the well-known excess risk among poor and working-class African Americans for hypertension and related cardiovascular diseases.



## Vanessa Siddle Walker

Siddle Walker is the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of African American and Educational Studies at Emory. For 25 years, she has explored the segregated schooling of African American children, considering sequentially the climate that permeated the schools, the network of professional collaborations that explains their similarity, and the hidden systems of advocacy that sought equality and justice. For her first single-authored book (*Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*), Walker received the prestigious Grawmeyer Award for Education (2000) and the Best New Book Award from the History Division of the American

Educational Research Association (1999). She is also author or co-author of *Facing Racism in Education*, *Racing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice*, *Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South*, and *Living the Legacy: The Historical African American Professional Network as a Model for University and School Collaborations*. Her current project, *Hidden Provocateurs: H. E. Tate and Black Educators' Secret Struggle for Justice*, is under contract. In addition, she received awards from the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools, the American Education Studies Association, and three awards from AERA Divisions, including the Best New Female Scholar Award, the Best New Book Award, and the Outstanding Book Award. Walker completed her undergraduate training in education at the University of North

Carolina–Chapel Hill; taught for four years at the desegregated Cummings High School in Burlington, North Carolina; and finished her master’s and doctorate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.



## Kimberly Wallace-Sanders

Wallace-Sanders is an associate professor in the Department of African American Studies. Her books include *Skin Deep. Spirit Strong: Critical Essays on the Black Female Body in American Culture* and *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender and Southern Memory*. She is currently working on a book titled *Safe within Her Arms: Portraits of Black Women with White Children*. In 2011 she was awarded the Piedmont Community Sustainability Grant through Spelman College. She also received a 2011 Technology Assistance Grant through Masse-Martin/NEH.

# Professor Returning from Sabbatical

by Nathan McCall

Mark Sanders has returned to the Department of African American Studies after a yearlong sabbatical pursuing national and international research projects.

Sanders, who was awarded a J. William Fulbright Scholarship, spent time in Chocó, Colombia, on two projects. Last fall, he taught at Universidad de los Andes, in Bogotá, Colombia, while researching Afro-Colombian literature. That research took him back to Quibdó, the capital of Chocó, where he researched locally known Afro-Chocoano writers, such as César E. Rivas Lara, Miguel A. Caicedo, and Manuel Rodríguez Valencia Jr.

Sanders has a national focus as well, having developed a project on Anne Spencer, a Harlem Renaissance poet from Lynchburg, Virginia. A contemporary of Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and W.E.B. Du Bois, Spencer corresponded extensively with many well-known writers and intellectuals of the New Negro Movement, while publishing her poetry in major periodicals and anthologies of her day. Sanders traveled to her home, which is now a museum, and read through her papers there as well as those in Special Collections at the University of Virginia.

