



EMORY UNIVERSITY

# Department of African American Studies

Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Fall 2021

Dear Friends of African American Studies,

## *Why do we do this work?*

On our 50th anniversary, as we plan our next milestone, it's not a rhetorical question. Instead, we have answered. We do it to honor and respect those who fought hard to make this department a reality. We do it for our students, each other, our community, other scholars, policymakers, and journalists seeking explanations and knowledge.

We, therefore, continue to unpack the structural inequalities that intersect through race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. We interrogate the music, literature, art, and other cultural productions that emanate from joy, anguish, captivity, spirituality, freedom, and unfreedom. We explore the harsh reality and consequences of slavery. We uncover the roots and mechanisms of the carceral state and disfranchisement. We also examine the stubborn hold of anti-Blackness on societies and the simultaneous defiance and resistance communities have mounted to establish their very right to be. To survive. To thrive.



This is why we do this work. It's our calling. It's why we are.

Sincerely,

*Carol Anderson*

Chair, African American Studies

---

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

---

*AAS Celebrates 50 Years*

2

*Congratulations Class of  
2021*

5

*AAS Faculty Award Grants, Fellowships;  
Academic Society Elections*

7

# AAS Celebrates 50 Years

On May 28, 1969, a subcommittee met to consider an important question: “What direction should an Afro-American studies department take and how should it be developed?”



*Delores P. Aldridge, left, with her first student in Black Studies, Gloria Bowden.*

*(Photo Credit: The HistoryMakers, courtesy of Delores Aldridge)*

This meeting was in response to the turmoil in society and among Emory faculty, students, and administrations in the late sixties, culminating with a list of demands by the university's Black Student Alliance. One demand charged the Curriculum Committee of Emory College to establish a department offering a degree in Afro-American studies. Initial apprehension arose that the proposed department, which would be one of only a few Black Studies degrees offered in the United States, would be developed at the expense of academic departments already established at Emory. As a way to address the students' demands on one hand and the resistance to a new department on the other, Emory opted to establish the program (not a department) in the fall of 1971. Still, this was a landmark moment. Initially founded as the Black Studies Program before its separation years later into African American and African studies, it was the first degree-granting program of its kind at a major private institution in the South.

## Promising Beginnings

At the helm of its inauguration was Dr. Delores P. Aldridge. She arrived at Emory in 1971, shortly after completing her Ph.D. in Sociology from Purdue University and serving as executive director of the Greater Lafayette Community Centers, Inc. in Indiana. Aldridge's vision for the new program was based on the major pillars of Black Studies – academic strength harnessed in service to the community. The vision for the program outlined interdisciplinary courses in the Black experience, as well as rigorous internships and practicums for students to integrate their scholarly understanding with first-hand experiences within the Black community in the greater Atlanta area. By 1974, the program had graduated its first two majors. On March 6, 1980, the Black Studies program officially became the African and African American Studies Program (AAAS).

Despite this promising beginning, the program quickly began to face challenges that limited its potential. The program constantly faced constrained financial support



*Brochure for the Afro-American and African Studies (AAAS) Program*

from the administration, hindering its ability to hire a number of outstanding full-time faculty and undermining plans for expansion. Undaunted, the program, under the stewardship of Professor Aldridge, continued toward its vision of greater academic and community impact: new goals for the program included increasing student enrollment and major declarations, increasing the number of faculty and staff for the program, and heightening the program's visibility not only on campus but on the national level as well. These goals were met within the planned five years, but support from the administration still remained insufficient.

*“So many individuals have contributed over the years and I hope as Emory now stresses diversity that it will embrace, finally, its great benchmark for diversity—African American Studies.”*

Delores P. Aldridge

### *Commitment to Change*

It was not until the 1982-83 academic year that the university's commitment began to change. The College administration decided to establish AAAS as its own entity; previously the program's faculty lines were placed under the budget of the Institute of Liberal Arts (ILA). The reorganization meant that AAAS could directly hire full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty and had finally been approved for tenure-track searches in the social sciences and humanities. The new structure also meant that AAAS would have a full-time director whose sole responsibility was to the program. The latter commitment would be a relief for Aldridge who, at the time, was not only the director of the AAAS program, but also juggled responsibilities as a faculty member under the ILA. “The development was an ongoing struggle for survival and growth. It was a really rocky road,” Aldridge says today. “So many individuals have contributed over the years and I hope as Emory now stresses diversity that it will embrace, finally, its great benchmark for diversity—African American Studies.” Aldridge contemplates that in retrospect, not having an established national model for Black Studies/Africana Studies was an incredible challenge for a freshly minted Ph.D. However, such a challenge provided the opportunity to fashion one and set a standard while leading the National Council for Black Studies as its unprecedented two term elected chair/president. Additionally, moving from a program to a department and subsequently to a Ph.D. program was a part of her long-term vision.

By the time Aldridge had stepped down as the program's director in 1992, she was the longest-serving director of an African American studies program in the nation at the time. She was succeeded by a line of equally-determined and ambitious program directors, such



*Rudolph P. Byrd, center, was African American Studies' second program director from 1992-2000*



as Mark Sanders, Rudolph Byrd, and Leslie Harris, who continued Aldridge's vision of expanding its academic and community prominence at the university-wide, local, and national level. By 2003, after a decade of expansion under Dr. Rudolph Byrd, which also boasted the expansion of the African American collections in Emory's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL; now the Stuart A. Rose Library), the program's formal designation as an academic department became effective.

## *African American Studies Today*

Today, fifty years after its inception, the department has grown considerably from its beginnings as a program. Currently, a record number of students have declared African American Studies as either a major or minor. And, as a testimony to the rigor of the degree, nearly all graduates found employment or were accepted into graduate and professional programs. The direction that the department has taken today, thus, continues to reflect its vision from the beginning: academic excellence and service to the community. Faculty have garnered a number of teaching, mentoring, and advising awards as well as research fellowships from the Ford Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Carnegie Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, Fulbright, and more. Professors Carol Anderson and Vanessa Siddle Walker were elected into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. AAS faculty have won major book and article awards, and curated outstanding exhibitions. Equally important, their scholarly work and expertise have been tapped by policymakers, journalists, community activists, and other researchers to help unpack the decisions that created systemic inequality and to delve into the vision to achieve a much more equitable future.

What began fifty years ago with student protests and the turbulence of the 1960s is delivering in the 21st century on those hopes and the needs of society.

## *AAS Leadership: Through the Years*

**Delores P. Aldridge** served as Founding Director of the Program from 1971 until 1990. For her many years of dedication, Professor Aldridge received the Thomas Jefferson Award in 1992, Emory University's highest award for service. She was subsequently awarded the Grace Towns Hamilton Chair, the first chair named for an African American woman and the first endowed chair in African American Studies in the United States. Following Professor Aldridge as Director were two interim directors: **Robert Tomlinson**, Professor of French, and **Jacqueline Jordan Irvine**, Candler Professor Education.

**Rudolph P. Byrd**, then Associate Professor of American Studies in the Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts, accepted the College's invitation to serve as the full-time Director of the Program in the summer of 1991, retaining that position until 2000, except for a year in which **Thee Smith**,

Associate Professor of Religion, served as Interim Director while Professor Byrd was on leave.

**Mark Sanders**, then Associate Professor of English, shepherded African American Studies from program to department during his tenure as Director and then Chair. Dr. Sanders served another term after Dr. Harris's tenure.

**Leslie Harris**, Associate Professor of History and African American Studies served as Chair, except for a year in which Dr. Byrd served as Interim Chair.

**Andra Gillespie** and **Dianne Stewart** both served as Interim Chairs from 2015-2016 and 2018-2019, respectively.

Currently, **Carol Anderson**, Charles Howard Candler Professor of African American Studies, is serving as Chair of African American Studies.

# 2021 Graduating Class

This past spring, the Department of African American Studies graduated eleven majors and five minors. Below are some of the achievements this year's graduating class have accomplished during their time at Emory.



## **Kamrie Anderson, Major**

Kamrie Anderson began her Emory career at Oxford College. During her time at Oxford, she served on the Black Student Alliance's executive board as the PR chair.

As a junior, she was a member of the Zuri African Dance Troupe.

## **Fantagbe Camara, Major**

Fantagbe Camara is from New York City and while attending Emory university participated in clubs such as the Muslim Student Association, the African student Association, and The Black Student Association.



## **Zakiya Collier, Major**

Zakiya Collier is a student activist from Chicago, IL and a Double Major in African American Studies and Sociology. On campus, she serves at the President of Emory's NAACP chapter, the President of the Alpha Tau chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., a MORE mentor in the Office for RACE and involved with Volunteer Emory.



## **Devon Davis, Minor**

Devon Davis, a returning student to Emory, is also a former student of the late Dr. Rudolph Byrd. She rejoined the student population amidst the pandemic

and earned her degree in Anthropology with a Minor in African American Studies. Devon is the mother of 3-year-old Jordyn and hopes to make her daughter proud.

## **Talia Evans Farkas, Major**

Talia has been involved in the African American Studies department for all four of her years at Emory where she completed her Honors Thesis, "In the Face of Death: Black Erasure, Carcerality, and Resistance in the Post-



Reconstruction South." After finishing her studies, she plans to attend law school to address the critical disparities in the healthcare field impacting Black and Brown communities. During her

time at Emory, Talia was an active member in the Young Democrats of Emory, served as an intern for candidates running for election in the Georgia House of Representatives, and volunteered with afterschool programs to assist children from Spanish-speaking homes with their coursework.

## **Emily Gardin, Major**

Emily Gardin is a sister of Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. and a member of the Emory Multicultural Greek Council. Previously, Emily was an Ethics and Servant Leadership (EASL) Forum participant, a Sophomore Advisor in Alabama Hall, and the Publicity Chair for the Emory Black Student Alliance. In Fall 2022, Emily plans to enroll in a higher education administration graduate program.



## **Brooke Hoepfl, Major**

Brooke Hoepfl is a Creative Writing and English and African American Studies double major. While at Emory, she was involved in the Emory Dance Company, AHANA dance, ballet club, Emory Reads, Volunteer Emory, RHA, and served as the Tap Club's president her senior year. Brooke is extremely passionate about education and worked as a camp counselor and eighth grade writing tutor during the summers. This year, Brooke is working as a third grade teacher and earning a Master's in Education degree through the University of Notre Dame's ACE Teaching Fellows Program.



**Alisia Moore, Major**

Alisia Moore is a graduating senior double majoring in African American Studies and English, with a concentration in African American literature. An Atlanta native,

Alisia has been involved both on and off Emory's campus through organizations like the Ngambika step team and professional opportunities such as working in Emory's Advancement and Alumni Engagement office and interning with the National Black Arts Festival. Alisia has also excelled in her academic accomplishments, which include making Dean's list.

**Vanessa Perez, Major**

Vanessa Perez is a Cuban and Mexican student from Phoenix, Arizona. Her time at Emory includes serving as a representative for the Latinx Student



Organization, an intern for the Commission on Racial and Social Justice, and one of the founders for the Afro-Latinx dance team *Alas De un Mismo Pajaro*. As a Mellon Mays Undergraduate research fellow, her research interests focus on the intersection of race and religious practices of African heritage religions.



**Michelle Salandy, Minor**

Michelle Salandy is a dual-degree Emory University student majoring in Human Health and minoring in African American

Studies. Through her acceptance into a 4+1 program, Michelle will be pursuing a Master of Arts in Bioethics degree through Emory University's Laney Graduate School following graduation. During her time at Emory, Michelle has served as a member of Emory's Atlanta Pediatric Cancer Outreach organization. After graduation from her Master's program, Michelle plans to work in public health. Obtaining a Ph.D. in Health Policy is her ultimate goal as she hopes to develop legislation that promotes healthcare equity and access to improve health outcomes for Black and minority populations in the US.

**Kassie Sarkar, Minor**

As an undergraduate at both Emory and Oxford College, Kassie has succeeded in mentorship, leadership, and organizing positions at various levels of the Emory



community. She has successfully completed her senior honors thesis and led the curation of the exhibition, "Voices from the Other Side: Artist Books from Phillips State Prison," out of Rose Library archival material. Kassie has been recognized for her work through awards, scholarships, and fellowships, such as the Rudolph Byrd Scholarship, the 100 Senior Honorary, Phi Beta Kappa Induction, the JWJI Undergraduate Honors and Halle Institute Undergraduate Fellowships, to name a few.

**Catherine Sullivan, Major**

Cat has earned a Bachelor's Degree in English and African American Studies and is graduating with a 3.9 GPA. She was a member of the Emory Pre-Law Society. She transferred from Fordham University to Emory her junior year. She plans on taking a gap year and then attending law school to pursue a career in Civil Rights litigation.



**DaQuon Wilson, Major**

DaQuon Wilson is an African-American Studies major from Columbia, South Carolina. During their time at Emory, DaQuon has served in numerous

leadership positions in extracurricular activities and student organizations including Student Programming Council, Alpha Phi Omega National Service Fraternity, Black Star Magazine, and was a Career Ambassador for the Emory Career Center. DaQuon was inducted into the 100 Senior Honorary and is also a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow where they worked on their research project titled "Translating Diaspora: Eclipsing and Imagination in Cuba Libre." After graduation, DaQuon will be moving to NYC and will be a Resident Teacher at Zeta Charter Schools.

# *AAS Faculty Awarded Grants, Fellowships; Elected to Honorary Societies*

The faculty of the Department of African Americans Studies have been recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for their research and work in their respective disciplines. The following is a recent sample of grants, fellowships and honorary society memberships awarded to our esteemed faculty.

## **Kali Gross named Andrew Carnegie Fellow**

Kali Gross, National Endowment for the Humanities Professor of African American Studies, has been named one of 26 recipients of the 2021 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship. Each fellowship award includes \$200,000 to fund significant research and writing in social sciences and the humanities that addresses important and enduring issues confronting society. Gross's fellowship project will examine capital punishment in the United States through the histories of Black women disproportionately condemned. The fellowship will support Gross's work at archives across the country to examine capital cases involving Black women.



*Kali Gross*

## ***About the Andrew Carnegie Fellowship Program***

The Carnegie Corporation launched the Andrew Carnegie Fellows Program in 2015 as an initiative that was conceived by the late Vartan Gregorian, who served as president of the philanthropic foundation from 1997 until his death on April 15, 2021. The most generous stipend of its kind, the Andrew Carnegie Fellows Program has funded a total of 216 scholars, journalists, and authors, representing an investment of \$43.2 million. It focuses on subjects such as U.S. democracy, the environment, technological and cultural evolution, and international relations. The criteria prioritize the originality and promise of the research, its potential impact on the field, and the scholar's plans for communicating the findings to a broad audience.



*Dianne Stewart*

## **Dianne Stewart awarded the Chronos Faculty Fellowship**

Dianne M. Stewart, professor of Religion and African American studies and scholar of African-heritage religious cultures in the Caribbean and the Americas, has been awarded the Chronos Faculty Fellowship in Emory College of Arts and Sciences for 2021. As the second recipient of the Chronos Faculty Fellowship in Emory College of Arts and Sciences, Stewart will have a leave of absence for the coming academic year to unearth stories for a book project, tentatively titled "Local and Transnational Legacies of African Christianity in West-Central Africa and the Black Atlantic World."



### *About the Chronos Fellowship*

The Chronos Fellowship launched last year in Emory College to support such ambitious scholarship by tenured faculty in the humanities and social sciences. It aims to support work in the post-tenure period, when time for immersive research, deep thinking and writing can be difficult to secure. Funded by a grant from the Abraham J. & Phyllis Katz Foundation, the program includes a year of leave and \$10,000 in research/travel funds, to allow for a fully immersive research experience and opportunities to develop new scholarship.



*Carol Anderson*

### **Carol Anderson inducted as fellow of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (AAPSS)**

Carol Anderson, Charles Howard Candler Professor of African American Studies, is one of five distinguished scholars being inducted as Fellows of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (AAPSS) in 2021. Anderson's work focuses on public policy, particularly on how domestic and international policies intersect through the issues of race, justice, and equality in the U.S. Her research examines how policy is made and unmade, and how racial inequality and racism affect policy processes and outcomes.

### *About the Fellows of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*

The AAPSS inducts a new cohort of Fellows each year, in recognition of contributions that advance science and deepen public understanding of human behavior and social dynamics. With the addition of the 2021 inductees, there will be 145 Fellows of the Academy in total. Most are university-based scholars responsible for research that has changed our understanding of human behavior and the world in which we live; others are public servants who have used research and evidence in institutions of government to improve the common good.

### **Vanessa Siddle Walker, Carol Anderson elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences**

Vanessa Siddle Walker, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of African American and Educational Studies, and Carol Anderson, Charles Howard Candler Professor of African American Studies, are among 252 newly-elected members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which was founded in 1780 by John Adams, John Hancock and others who believed the new republic should honor exceptionally accomplished individuals and engage them in advancing the public good. The academy's dual mission remains essentially the same 239 years later with honorees from increasingly diverse fields and with work focused on the arts, democracy, education, global affairs and science.



*Vanessa Siddle Walker*

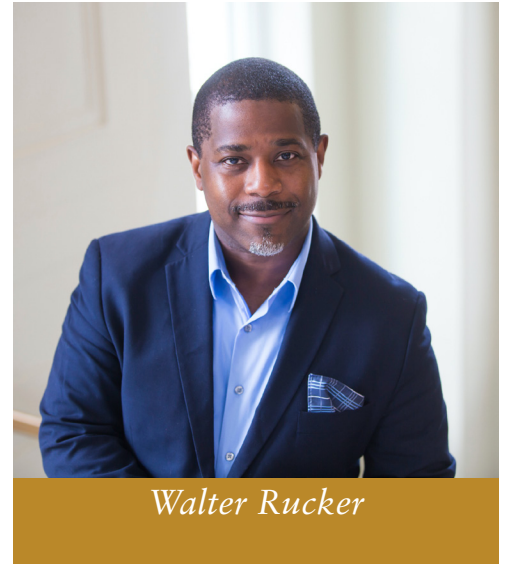


*About the Fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences was established in 1780 by the country's founders to provide guidance to a young nation that would face challenges and need expertise and excellence to emerge stronger. While the founders did not anticipate a year with a historic pandemic, overdue racial reckoning, and political strife, the purpose of electing new members is more compelling than ever. The 2021 election provides an opportunity to recognize extraordinary people who help solve the world's most urgent challenges, create meaning through art, and contribute to the common good from every field, discipline, and profession.

**Walter Rucker awarded the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminars grant**

Walter C. Rucker, professor of African American studies, has been awarded a \$225,000 grant by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support a Sawyer Seminar on the Comparative Study of Cultures entitled "Visions of Slavery: Histories, Memories, and Mobilizations of Unfreedom in the Black Atlantic". The outstanding proposal, which will be the basis for African American Studies' Center for the Study of Slavery, was helmed by Walter Rucker with his team of scholars from African American Studies (Dianne Stewart, Meina Yates-Richard), History (Mariana Candido, Adriana Chira), and Anthropology (Bayo Holsey).



*Walter Rucker*

*About the Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminars*

The Mellon Foundation's Sawyer Seminars were established in 1994 to provide support for comparative research on the historical and cultural sources of contemporary developments. The seminars, named in honor of the Foundation's long-serving third president, John E. Sawyer, have brought together faculty, foreign visitors, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students from a variety of fields mainly, but not exclusively, in the arts, humanities, and interpretive social sciences, for intensive study of subjects chosen by the participants. Foundation support aims to engage productive scholars in comparative inquiry that would (in ordinary university circumstances) be difficult to pursue, while at the same time avoiding the institutionalization of such work in new centers, departments, or programs. Sawyer Seminars are, in effect, temporary research centers.