The Department of African American Studies stands in solidarity with our students, staff, faculty, and wider Atlanta community members, who have been arrested and criminalized in disregard of their constitutional rights of assembly and free speech at Emory University. We demand that no students, faculty, staff, activists, or Atlanta community members face disciplinary actions for their participation in campus demonstrations. We denounce the disgraceful decision to authorize the presence of local police and state troopers. This jeopardizes free speech and public safety, particularly for vulnerable students of color and religious minorities. We condemn all forms of state and institutional violence and repression that have contributed to dire humanitarian crises stemming from colonialism, apartheid, imperialism, and gender-based violence.
At the close of the Spring semester and the end of the tempestuous 2023–2024 academic year, we find ourselves at the intersections of multiple struggles and are compelled to consider what the role(s) of African American Studies as a department and discipline should be within them and, further still, how (our) scholars should be engaging with the issues that face us at home and the issues that are facing oppressed people of African descent globally. The events that have taken place over the Spring semester have reflected that engagement through the study, research, and organizing of faculty and students alike, and reflected through that engagement is a hope for a better tomorrow. Dr. Carol Anderson, in an interview with Amherst College President Michael Elliott, spoke to the importance of hope and optimism by explaining how history teaches us to fight: “...part of the strength that I pull from is how people fight against the abyss and how they take on the leviathans because they have a vision, they can imagine a better world.” Though these are unprecedented times, a better world is possible, freedom is possible; we must first imagine it.

This Fall, we are excited to welcome our new graduate cohort and look forward to their presence, their research, and their insights. Additionally, we look forward to Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar and Dr. Bettina Judd joining the Emory Department of African American Studies; and we greatly anticipate having them in community with the department and the insight and perspectives that they will bring to AAS and Emory.
Beverly Guy-Sheftall graced Woodruff Library, on March 29th. After an endearing and inspired introduction by Dr. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, Dr. Guy-Sheftall engaged the audience with her research on Coretta Scott King. She shared how her identity as an activist was independent of her relationship with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The lecture explored the ways she championed queer issues until the end of her life. Dr. Guy-Sheftall expounded on the intricacies of Coretta Scott King’s friendship with Bayard Rustin and her assistant Lynn Cothren, which further contextualized her as a friend to the queer community. This highlighted the personal way those friendships could influence her, amid the myriad ways her identity was informed by her upbringing, her education, and the world around her. Dr. Guy-Sheftall’s research was illuminating, timely, and deeply engaging.
Emory’s African American Studies Ph.D. students (Lizette London, Monique Wimby, Adrian Cato, Amir Curry, Cheyenne Ross, & Brenda Umutoniwase) organized a conference, "Gathering at the Threshold: Situating Our Theories and Praxes as Tools for the Contemporary Mo(ve)ment," where they communed with other students who came to share their research and study. Kicking things off on Friday April 5th in Emory University’s Convocation Hall, the keynote speaker, Dr. Shante Smalls (NYU), spoke about Black dance, particularly the queer dance move “the dip” and they contextualized it as death-defying, an act of Black queer resistance. The following day, in the Rose Library, the graduate students covered important ground with their intellectual peers, engaging with research on praxis, queerness, Indigenous relations, and so much more and in-between. The event proved a success, executed by the graduate students with the aid of graduate program coordinator Charles Jackson.
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES GRADUATE STUDENTS

LIZETTE LONDON, BRENDA UMUTONIWASE, CHEYENNE ROSS, GRADUATE PROGRAM COORDINATOR CHARLES JACKSON, MONIQUE WIMBY AND AMIR CURRY

PHOTO: KHALID JOHNSON
Monday April 8th, the day of the solar eclipse, the department held an open house for African American Studies majors and minors to meet with the faculty and discuss their trajectory and to ask Dr. Gross, Dr. Gordon, and Dr. Stewart questions about the department before being provided eclipse glasses to enjoy the eclipse. After taking in the astronomical event on the quad, filled with their peers, the students reconvened for a game of Jeopardy to test their knowledge and offer the opportunity to learn things that they were not previously aware of in a fun and low-stakes game.
Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows met before an audience of peers, family, and faculty in the Woodruff Library on Saturday, April 13th. Six students presented the culmination of years of research, engaging with a wealth of topics ranging from immigration and the effects of colonialism to oral histories and spirituality. They invited the attendees to look at the spatial geographies of Bengali New York and how colonialism is at play here (Raya Islam), the nuances of being undocumented and the ethical navigations and considerations of research concerning undocumented people (América Moreno Ruiz), what we can learn from the archival work on Latine people at Emory and the room to fill in the gaps on Latine history and culture (Arturo Contreras). Following a break for a delicious lunch, the presentations resumed, placing a lens on how Black women are structurally unprotected, the domestic violence visited upon them and how the institution of policing leaves them more vulnerable (Mckayla Morrison), exploring Frantz Fanon’s insights into decoloniality and analyzing it as a humanist framework (Amal Ali), and seeing Kendrick Lamar’s Hiiipower as a religious movement embodying a connection to Africana religions (Christian Ballard). They took pride in their research and their mentors took pride in it and them, as was apparent during their introductions of their mentees.
With guest speaker Brian Natividad, the evening, filled with food and fellowship, celebrated and commemorated the achievements of the graduating fellows. The graduates were given the space to reflect on what the fellowship has meant to them and how it supported and encouraged them while also encouraging their peers as rising MMUF seniors.
On April 25th, Emory students joined a national movement taking place at colleges and universities across the country. They organized their own encampment calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and to Stop Cop City. Emory Police, the Atlanta Police, and Georgia State Patrol deployed tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper balls, and tasers, violently arresting students, faculty, staff, and other Atlanta community members. Initial university emails labeled the demonstrators as “outside agitators,” even though 20 of the 28 people arrested were Emory students, faculty, and staff.
In solidarity with our students, many faculty and staff participated in a walkout the following Monday. Recognizing the harm calling the police visited upon our Emory and Atlanta community, they demanded that Emory and the police keep hands off our students.
Following student demonstrations and Emory administration expressing concern for campus safety, the week leading up to graduation saw on-campus activities canceled. This affected our Graduation Dinner, and we met the challenge, shifting to a virtual celebration of our graduating majors and minors. The event was beautiful and well put together, though bittersweet. In addition to this, the venue for graduation shifted from its usual place on the quad to the Gas South Arena.

To celebrate the close of the semester and an eventful academic year, the department had a Staff & Faculty Luncheon, where we were able to enjoy the food provided by C-Parks. It served as a recognition of the work of the faculty and staff in serving the department and as the campus grows silent, we can only anticipate what excitement the Fall Semester will bring as our department grows and our perspectives and knowledge with it.
SEE YOU IN THE FALL

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM COORDINATOR
ANGELIQUE ANDERSON,
DR. MICHELLE GORDON,
DR. JESSICA STEWART,
AND DR. KALI GROSS

SMILING FOR A SELFIE DURING THE ECLIPSE

PHOTO: SHAHID ORICA