



EMORY UNIVERSITY

Department of African American Studies

Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Winter 2019

Dear friends and supporters of African American Studies,

As the new year and a new semester have begun, we are delighted to share with you highlights of the department's academic and public intellectual activities that reflect the efforts of our faculty, students, and alumni.

Last semester, AAS cosponsored a town hall meeting, "Reconstructing Our Democracy: A Midterm's Postmortem and Call to Action." The November 10 gathering featured top scholars from around the nation, local activists, and community leaders who engaged in a standing-room-only discussion at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum about the implications of the midterm elections. Coming off the heels of that event, we anticipate a semester energized by provocative conversations and enriched through new knowledge about pressing social, political, and cultural issues having an impact on the Emory community and wider society.

Our current issue provides information on centerpiece events designed to achieve this aim through exchanges with our Martin Luther King Week speaker, Leonard Pitts, and our Grace Towns Hamilton lecturer, April Ryan. You also will learn about our new faculty member, Walter C. Rucker, acting professor of African American Studies and history, and another of our

highly accomplished alumni, Breanna McDaniel (AAS minor), whose new children's book, *Hands Up!*, is scheduled for release with Penguin Random House this month.



To nourish your aesthetic sensibilities, don't miss the featured poems of Christell Roach (AAS/creative writing major and Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow). We also invite you to ponder our report about the experiences of, and recommendations for, African American college students from the "Official Black College Student Survival Guide," a collaborative project authored by students in Vanessa Siddle Walker's spring 2018 AAS 490 senior seminar course.

We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events, and we hope that you feel informed and inspired in new ways by the achievements of our faculty, students, and alumni.

Sincerely,

Interim Chair, African American Studies

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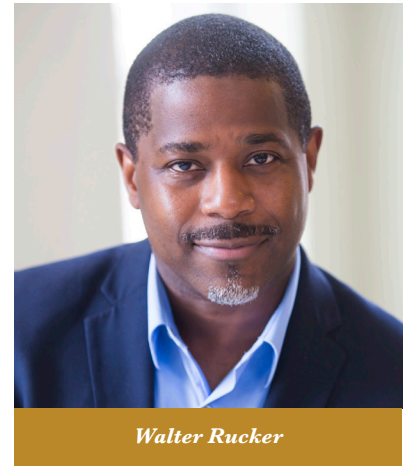
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Welcome to our newest core faculty member, Walter Rucker

Rucker is professor of African American Studies and history at Emory, having received his PhD and MA in American history from the University of California–Riverside and his BA in history from Morehouse College. Prior to coming to Emory, he was a history professor at Rutgers University and University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill.

A specialist in early Atlantic African diaspora and African American history, Rucker teaches and conducts research on the generative nexus between slaves' resistance and culture.

He is looking forward to bridging a connection between Emory and the surrounding Atlanta communities. As a youth growing up in Decatur, Georgia, Rucker understood Emory as an elite space, only to be attended by “certain” kinds of people in the area. As an undergraduate at Morehouse College, he knew of Emory's reputation for being a noninclusive space for students of color. While Rucker believes the climate has changed significantly, he still wants to foster change from the Emory of years past. His goal is to see an increase in local students of color considering Emory as an option for both undergraduate and graduate study.



Rucker was excited to see the number of students majoring in African American Studies and looks forward to teaching undergraduates and creating courses that will be of interest. One of his favorite courses to teach is a survey that begins with Reconstruction and continues to the civil rights movement. Rucker also will be creating a new course, Black Atlantic World, which frames African American history in a large geographic scope, focusing on the Caribbean, North and South America, and Europe.

He is looking forward to being an active member of the Emory community and engaging fully with the students' academic experience.

Rucker will be teaching the following courses for spring 2019:

AAS 238 History of African Americans to 1865

AAS 385 Topics in African American Studies: Black Atlantic Crosscurrents

Books by Rucker

Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture, and Power

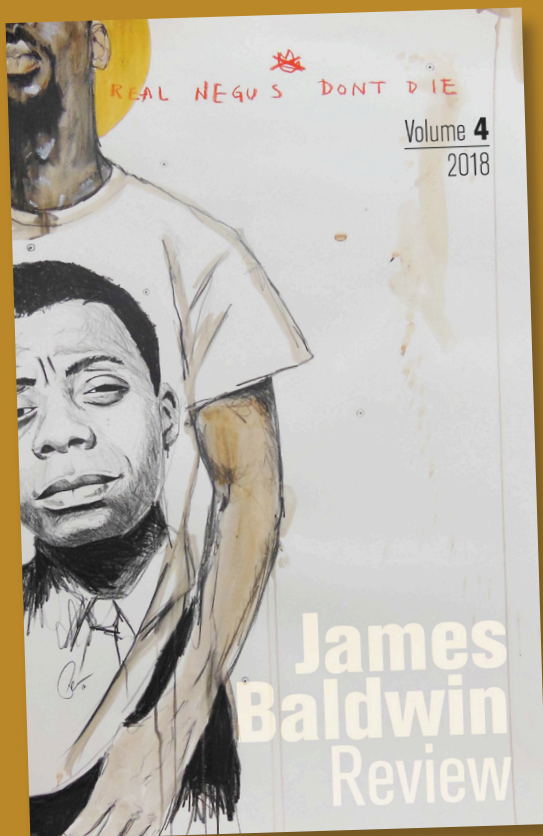
The River Flows on: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America

What would you like the Emory community to know about you?

As someone from Decatur, I have a good sense of the background of Emory students. I went to a high school that feeds into Emory. I also know a lot about what students have learned previously and what needs to be reprogrammed after they arrive at Emory—for instance, that Africa has no redeeming qualities, that nothing originating in Africa or its people has been useful or productive.

I want to help reprogram, which is the first step in the process of true education.

James Baldwin Review



Edited by Douglas Field, Justin A. Joyce, and Dwight A. McBride

James Baldwin Review (JBR) is an annual journal that brings together a wide array of peer-reviewed critical and creative work on the life, writings, and legacy of James Baldwin. In addition to these cutting-edge contributions, each issue contains a review of recent Baldwin scholarship and an award-winning graduate student essay. James Baldwin Review publishes essays that invigorate scholarship on James Baldwin; catalyze explorations of the literary, political, and cultural influence of Baldwin's writing and political activism; and deepen our understanding and appreciation of this complex and luminary figure.

You can purchase print editions of James Baldwin Review from Manchester University Press.

A Box of Old Tongues

Dear reader,

My interest in black voices is like my interest in banyan trees and mangrove roots. These are the trees of my Miami. They appear in photographs, in poems, and in memory. Thick and interwoven, these roots sit above ground like an elder. As a black woman of Caribbean descent, I grew up nursing a feeling of rootlessness. I knew nothing of my family, our history. Having claimed Miami and the trees as kin, I felt I belonged to the land as much as it belonged to me.

However, in 2008 when my parents were hit by the recession, and we moved for the first time, I realized my attachment to my home was only above-ground. This stirred a desire for rootedness in me, so I desperately sought my family's story. The story of my family's forced removal from Overtown, Miami, in the 1960s is the heart of my verse. Writing is my way of reckoning with my city, my country. I am interested in the blues as a metaphor, a house, which holds water, music, stories, and black people. Consider my poems blues poems. I am singing. You will see the music, the joy, the pain.

If joy and pain are like sunshine and rain, then the blues must be sunshowers. I wrote these poems through many sunshowers. The blues is just one of many roads that lead me back to Overtown. I inherited its stories in my bones. A history too often "obscured and omitted," this city lies at the heart of all my poems. As a child, I read like a child, and now, as a young woman, carrying my family's history, my city's history—like an accent—I write with that voice.



Christell Roach

On the end of Mango Season, and Still Falling Fruit

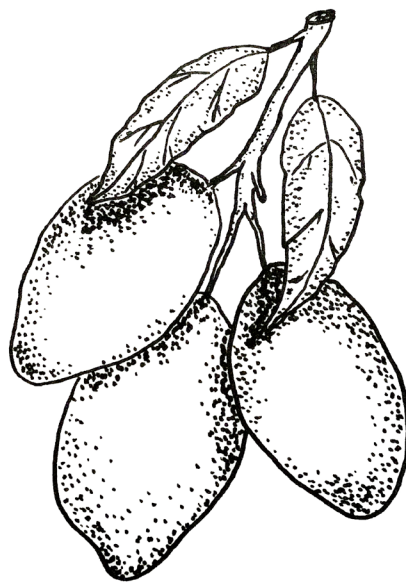
Love does not want this body
swelled as a June-split mango,
bruised as all tree fruit pre-fall,
sitting atop tufts of dead grass
and snakeskin. This body been
baked for hours in the sun, has
stung the fence and leaves sweet
and untouchable. The branches,
bare and brown, been pulled down
like the arms of hopeless mothers.

Each pulp-stained head, a shade
of summer we call red. One ripe
stone-fruit, firm on one side, half-
eaten, brown or bruised on the other.
The pulp darkened in the heat, sap
lost all color overnight, and where
the mango sat rotting, a face-like
indent marked the once-alive grass.
Three months of fruit gathered
beneath the tree, brown, bodies.

The leaves gave up their green
as witness, were blown apart
by the constant fall. The tree takes
the shape of my mother, bending
to collect a basket-full of mangoes,
each one she names. The sound
of tree-fruit, thumping to the ground,
is an ever-growing toll. Sounds
like skin hitting skin, like dead weight,
like August.

My father dragged the television out
to the patio, so he could watch the news
and wade in the pool. His stereo played
bluegrass folk from the Florida room.
I was gathering bulbs while he lay.
When the news rung out, I stilled
my hand. When daddy said not another
one, I bent down again. A brown boy
grown ripe in the sun, while a garden
snake began shedding at my feet.

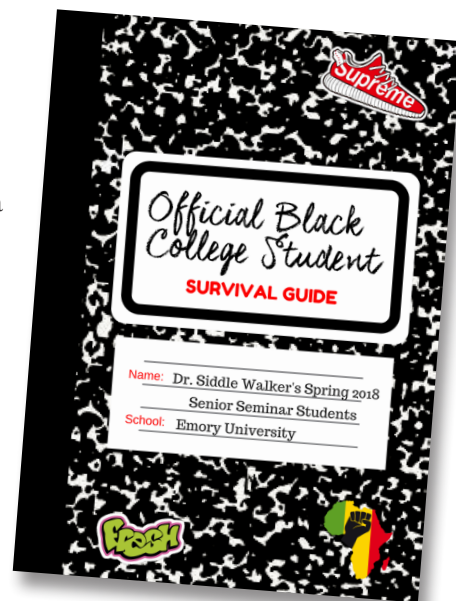
The snake wound like a tongue,
wrung itself free of the dead skin;
as I picked up a half-eaten mango
it calmed. Black, it sat, with splotches
of red, looking moist beneath a dry shell.
A black widow twitched on a leaf. It, too,
is black and red. Across the yard my father
swims laps. The television has yet to pick
up the boy on the ground. In the house,
mother is making jam, calling for my
brothers.



Official Black College Student Survival Guide

During the spring 2018 semester, 10 students enrolled in the Senior Seminar—a requirement for all graduating AAS majors. The topic of the seminar was Contemporary Issues in African American Education. Led by Vanessa Siddle Walker, the students explored a variety of issues challenging the successful engagement of African American students in educational spaces.

Combining knowledge gained from previous AAS courses and qualitative research done through the course itself, these AAS seniors collaborated on a class project. At the end of the semester, the students compiled their work in a beautiful digital presentation aptly titled, “The Official Black College Student Survival Guide.” Below you can read some points from their publication, which they believe could be influential for other black students.



The Importance of Culturally Relevant Curriculum for Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions

Compiled by: **Kristin McFadden**

This exploration came from my personal experiences in classes during my college career. I often felt that my culture was either erased or misrepresented in class. I wanted to know if other students in different disciplines shared these experiences. This led me to develop the question of how representations of black culture in academic settings affect black students at primarily white institutions. Three major themes emerged from my discussions with black students at an private, elite, predominantly white institution. Students consistently identified that, in classroom settings, they felt:

- A devaluing or erasure of their cultures
- An increased sense of personal responsibility to their community to be successful
- An increased desire to assert the importance of their cultures in classroom settings that felt exclusive and misrepresented black cultures

Survival Tips for Navigating College Curriculum

1. Connect with cultural organizations on campus that serve as safe spaces for minority students.
2. Connect with other minority students in your academic discipline and share opinions about coursework and your experiences.
3. Do research on courses and professors prior to registering to get a sense of what course material will be like.

Sick and Tired: How do the extracurricular components of life on college campuses impact African American students' wellness?

A study conducted by: **Deion Love**

The experience of black American college students is more complicated than the experience of the average American college student. Black college students' experiences can be marked by stressors such as hunger, deteriorating mental health, and poverty. The compounding stress has many implications for their wellness. Following the paradigm of a mind/body connection, it becomes incumbent upon us not to view the mental and physical health of a college student as mutually exclusive.

Considering today's racial climate and the impact of social determinants of health, especially how it is permeated on college campuses, a conversation about how the extracurricular components and social climates of college affect the physical health of the black American student becomes necessary.

Key Findings

1. Finding Balance

The daunting task of balancing the responsibilities black students are given makes finding time to prioritize health even harder.

2. External Pressure

Black students interact with various forms of external pressure such as academic and peer pressure, which can sometimes result in a loss of focus on wellness.

3. Lack of Resources

Black students note a lack of resources present on their college campuses to aid in prioritizing health, including lack of access to healthy foods, financial capital, and lack of campus athletic sites.

Ways to Survive

1. Black Mental Health Matters

Remember to prioritize your mental health as it can have a direct impact on your physical health.

2. To-Do Lists and Daily Schedules Help

Create daily to-do lists and/or schedules to make each minute of your time count. It will help you prioritize.

3. Find Sources of Positive Energy

Always be aware of the elements that are within your environment. Everyone and everything is not meant to catalyze your success, but instead may cause your downfall. Try to increase the positivity within your life.

Conversation with Breanna McDaniel



Breanna McDaniel

Major: English Literature, 20th-Century African American Women Writers

Minor: African American Studies

McDaniel 09Ox 11C is a native of Atlanta, Georgia (College Park).

Although Emory may not have been

McDaniel's first choice, when she visited the Oxford campus, she knew instantly that it would be a great fit. Having the opportunity to take advantage of the courtesy scholarship, engage other students of color with similar life experiences and goals, as well as be a part of a small, nurturing community was both validating and refreshing.

What brought McDaniel to AAS

The downside to Oxford at that time was there were very few black faculty on campus. When Nagueyalti Warren visited the campus to discuss the AAS major, McDaniel absorbed every word. Learning of a field of study dedicated to emphasizing the contributions of black people to a myriad of disciplines—e.g., taking courses on black political thought or black writers—was enlightening.

Though McDaniel originally wanted to major in AAS, most of her courses were English with a focus on African American literature. This led to an AAS minor instead.

Figuring a career path

Immediately after graduating, McDaniel received a fellowship in Emory's department of Residence Life and Housing. During that time, she maintained her relationship with Warren. Over time, Warren began to inquire about McDaniel's next steps.

Had she considered what she would do once the fellowship was over? Was she interested in attending graduate school? McDaniel admitted that she had not thought about graduate school, but did express her interest in children's literature. From there, Warren introduced her to a mentor who would help craft a new path to explore her interest.

McDaniel attended Simmons University, eventually receiving an MA in children's literature. She still kept her plan B of working in Residence Life, but as she continued her studies, she fell in love with critical theory.

After graduating, McDaniel embarked upon different career paths, but she also continued to write. During that time, she made the decision to pursue a PhD. Even though she applied to the University of Cambridge and was not ac-

cepted, she did not allow this to deter her. She made the decision to continue writing and to move on to her plan B and work in residence life at a university.

Graduate School/First Book

Although McDaniel was working and writing, she still wanted to earn her PhD. After attending a Children's Literature Association conference, she decided to reapply to the University of Cambridge. This time the outcome was different. She gained admission for fall 2017 and was awarded a full scholarship and stipend. McDaniel is currently studying to receive her PhD at their Faculty of Education with a concentration in critical approaches to children's literature; she expects to graduate in 2020. From there, she plans to apply for postdoctoral fellowships.

She finished a draft of her first picture book in 2014 and shared it with editors, but it was continuously rejected. In 2016 she sent it to a friend, an editor at one of Penguin's imprints, who saw the potential and wanted to work on developing it. They edited the manuscript for six months. In February 2017, her friend—now officially her editor—called to tell her, "You are going to be a published author!" as she offered McDaniel her first contract. That book, *Hands Up!*, will be released January 22, 2019.

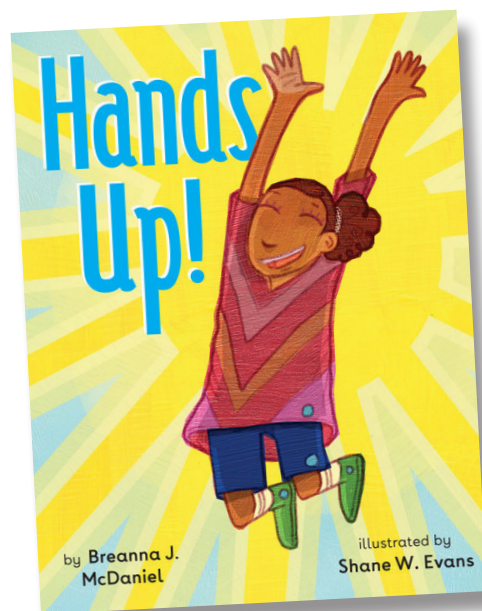
McDaniel does not want to stop there. She has two more manuscripts ready to go and hopes to receive a second book deal.

When asked what piece of advice she would give to a major/minor, she says, "Stay connected to your professors and the spaces that you are in academically. Even if academics are not what you want to pursue, the professors come into this space from multiple experiences and have advice to offer and guide you."

About Hands Up!

This triumphant picture book recasts a charged phrase as part of a black girl's everyday life—hands up for a hug, hands up in class, hands up for a high five—before culminating in a moment of resistance at a protest march.

A young black girl lifts her baby hands up to greet the sun, reaches her hands up for a book on a high shelf, and raises her hands up in praise at a church service. She stretches her hands up high like a plane's wings and whizzes down a hill so fast on her bike with her hands way up. As she grows, she lives through everyday moments of joy, love, and sadness. And when she gets a little older, she joins together with her family and her community in a protest march, where they lift their hands up together in resistance and strength.



Upcoming Events

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Observance

Keynote Speaker: **Leonard Pitts Jr.**
“**Martin Luther King Does Not Belong to
You**”

January 22, 2019

4:00 pm

Cox Hall Ballroom

Reception, book sale and signing to follow.

Grace Towns Hamilton Lecture

April Ryan

April 2, 2019

4:00 pm

Cox Hall Ballroom

Reception to follow.



Leonard Pitts Jr.

Leonard Pitts Jr.

**Nationally Syndicated
Columnist and Win-
ner of the 2004 Pulitzer
Prize for Commentary**

In a career spanning more than 35 years, Leonard Pitts Jr. has been a columnist, a college professor, a radio producer, and a lecturer. But if you ask him to define himself, he will invariably choose

one word. He is a writer, period, author of one of the most popular newspaper columns in the country and of a series of critically acclaimed books, including a novel called *Freeman*. And his lifelong devotion to the art and craft of words has yielded stellar results, chief among them the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary. His newest book, *The Last Thing You Surrender*, will be out on February 12, 2019.



April Ryan

April Ryan

**White House
Correspondent for
American Urban Radio
Networks,
Author of *The
Presidency in Black and
White* and *Under Fire***

White House Correspondent April Ryan has a unique vantage point as the only black female reporter covering urban issues from the White House—a position she has held since the Clinton era. On behalf of the American Urban Radio Networks, and through her “Fabric of America” news blog, she delivers her readership and listeners (millions of African Americans and close to 300 radio affiliates) a “unique urban and minority perspective in news.” Her position as a White House correspondent has afforded her unusual insight into the racial sensitivities, issues, and attendant political struggles of our nation’s past presidents.