



EMORY UNIVERSITY

Department of African American Studies

Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Winter 2020

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Dear Friends of African American Studies,

Transitions. Our lives and our department are in transition. But our North Star, which has remained constant, is a commitment to academic excellence and rigor and a determination that our work will bust out of the academy and be of service to the community. The stories that unfold in this newsletter embody those dual pillars of African American Studies and also represent our broader commitment to creating a space where students and faculty can thrive.



Students are graduating after a brilliant academic career while doing the hard work of paying it forward and giving back. Faculty are retiring after spending years creating the artwork and curating exhibitions that tell a powerful and complex story of a people. Scholars are completing major research projects and engaging with the public to lay out the eddies of the criminal justice system, forbidden black love, and how race, gender, and politics work, especially in this environment, and alums are sharing their journey from student to the world of work and community advocacy and empowerment.

In so many ways, then, it is fitting that this newsletter coincides with our celebration of the life and contributions of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and highlights the department's programming throughout this semester on what it would take to build and the challenges to this nation's "Beloved Community."

Sincerely,

Carol Anderson

Chair, African American Studies

AAS Student Arianna Murray receives Rudolph P. Byrd Scholarship

Arianna Murray is the epitome of a brilliant, determined mind with a fiery soul. Originally from Cleveland, OH, this Spring 2020 graduate took advantage of the chance to embrace the immeasurable opportunities Emory University had to offer. The people she has met and lessons learned, have helped Arianna become a young woman, with an enhanced sense of self, and assurance in



Arianna Murray 20C

her ability to innovatively impact the world around her. She knows that her experiences at Emory and as an African American Studies major have made her more confident.

The Road to AAS

Arianna's college visit to Emory University during her junior year of high school was pivotal. As a mentee in Questbridge, a nationwide program that helps high-achieving, low-income students gain admission and scholarships to the country's top-ranked colleges, Arianna overcame her initial trepidation about the size of Emory's campus and soon began to immerse herself into this new venture.

Initially, Arianna's aspirations centered around healthcare, specifically a pre-med track with a focus in Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology, which then shifted to an interest in law and political science. She credits her faculty in these courses for being phenomenal, but she knew there was more to the world's problems that wasn't being addressed or discussed. Participating in Dr. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders's Freshman Seminar on W.E.B. DuBois and the black middle class was the catalyst to a nuanced perspective that led Arianna to declare African American Studies as her primary major. Arianna's innate interest in people and how people work, led her to select Psychology as a second major, ultimately providing her with the necessary tools and resources she needed to begin her journey of service.

Arianna Murray continued

One of the most inspiring and fulfilling programs she's been apart of was actually the program that led her to Emory, Questbridge. During her junior year, she became a Questbridge mentor, as the program became more focused on creating a sense of family among first generation and low-income college students. The college experience can be extremely alienating and detrimental to a student's success. Being a Questbridge mentor was a transformative experience, as it allowed Arianna to interact with freshman whom she hadn't spoken to or really met. She was able to understand their perspectives on life, guide them, and make a true impact on their lives.

A Big Impression

Arianna admits it is difficult to pinpoint one African American Studies course as her favorite. She does hold admiration for Dr. Gordon's writing course on passing and miscegenation, Dr. Dianne Stewart's course on African heritage religions, and Dr. Anderson's civil rights course. When she graduates, Arianna will truly miss the amazing African American Studies faculty and the incredible connection they make with their students. The faculty are clearly invested in the student's academic success and overall well-being, are passionate about their work and really try to get students to engage with the material in a very complex way.

All of Arianna's academic success and community involvement have led to substantial recognition and honors. She was recently named the 2019-2020 Rudolph P. Byrd Scholarship recipient, due to her leadership in activities that address social, political, cultural, and professional issues in the African American community at Emory. Due to this accomplishment, Arianna was selected to introduce the African American Studies Department's 2020 Martin Luther King Jr. speaker, Nikole Hannah-Jones.

With graduation quickly approaching, Arianna plans on taking a gap year to obtain work experience in the healthcare field, with future hopes of having dual degree in public health and law, with Rollins School of Public Health as a top choice. Her dream career would be working as an attorney focused in public health, an emerging field focused on the new advancements in technology and the need for law expansion. As her career at Emory comes to an end, Arianna would like to share a few words of wisdom and advice for all current and prospective majors and minors: "When taking classes and trying to figure out your life, take a deep look at what interests you. Find what you're good at and it can be applied to what you do later in life. Take courses because they interest you, it will cause you to be more motivated to do well and you'll get an incredible perspective when you focus on what interests you and isn't necessarily exactly what you think your career path should be."

Expression in the Academy: Looking Back with Dr. Michael D. Harris



Dr. Michael D. Harris

Dr. Michael D. Harris, an acclaimed artist with an uncanny ability to capture what many fail to see, is an associate professor of African American Studies, who will be retiring at the end of this academic year. His initial interest in art and skill developed very early in life from drawing at the age of three on pieces of cardboard given to him by his grandfather, taking Saturday classes at the Cleveland Museum in junior high school, to writing poetry at the age of sixteen. Frequent strolls through the Cleveland Art Institute further piqued his interest, leading him to seriously consider art as a career in college. As an all-city shortstop, Dr. Harris initially went to school to play baseball; however, his love for art pulled him into a new world of expression. One of the intellectual ideas he brings to his work is something another artist told him: “Art is a verb. In the museum world and in the art world sometimes we focus on the noun, the thing of it. But art DOES something.”

Dr. Harris immersed himself in creative expression leading to his dissertation, completed at Yale University in 1996, entitled “Contemporary Yoruba Art in Ile-Ife: History, Continuum, Motive, and Transformation.” Completion of this work required him to fully delve into this African

culture, including learning the language, along with customs, ultimately catapulting him into African American Studies, a field that emerged in the late 60s and involved bringing the voice and sensibilities of our community into an intellectual environment. Working as a curator at the Harvey B. Gantt Center in Charlotte, NC for nine years, Dr. Harris was able to explore aesthetic ideas in the work, connect with the community, and become enthralled with being in an environment he had only dreamed of. Facilitating between 20 – 22 invigorating exhibitions, Dr. Harris made sure to keep in mind that “doing an exhibition is like doing an article; you have to create some kind of intellectual premise that you’ve been exploring.” In the Gantt Center, he was able to organize an exhibition based on quilts, a cultural language in our community, and a Jazz exhibition called “Rhythm-a-Ning,” named after the Thelonious Monk song.

After moving to Atlanta and joining Emory’s faculty in 2007, one of his most notable experiences was being a part of the NEH Summer Faculty Institute at Emory University. Some of the most brilliant scholars and creators were brought together to discuss Africana aesthetic expression in many disciplines, such as literature, religion, art, etc.

Michael Harris continued

Not only have his experiences and accolades been rewarding during his career, such as his book, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, winning the 2004 Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Citation from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, but some of the beautiful souls he's been able to interact with before and during his time at Emory University have been incomparable. The late Rudolph P. Byrd, was one of the most influential and instrumental people in Dr. Harris' matriculation to Atlanta and Emory in 2007. The delightful Thursday evening soires at the library, hosted by Randall Burkett, Emory's first curator for African American collections, allowed Dr. Harris to fellowship with brilliant minds from a variety of disciplines. Success in obtaining the Routledge Press contract in London for co-editing *ASHE: Poetics in Africana Expressivity* would have been a much harder feat to achieve if it had not been for his collaboration with Paul Carter Harrison and Pellom McDaniels,

curator of African American collections at Emory's Stuart A. Rose library. The connection and friendship with Dr. Dwight Andrews extends as far back as Dr. Andrews providing Dr. Harris with his first saxophone lesson in graduate school, to being his current pastor. These personal relationships have been vital to Dr. Harris, whose initial fondness for art began with his grandfather, William DeHart Hubbard. Dr. Harris has chosen to pay tribute to this relationship by embedding a photo of his grandfather into one of his recent works entitled *24 Gold*, signifying the upcoming 100-year anniversary of his grandfather becoming the first African American gold medalist in an individual event, the long jump, in the 1924 Olympics.

Although Dr. Harris will be missed in the classroom, his presence and artistic impact will still be felt throughout the many projects that are currently in the works and those that are forthcoming. Due to the help of his esteemed colleague and friend, Dr. Dianne Stewart, his latest book, *Sanctuary: Conjuring An Africana Aesthetic*, which looks at culture as an alternative to looking at race for the description and organization of African American art or Africana Art, is currently under contract with Duke University Press. Along with co-editing a book with Mr. Harrison and Dr. McDaniels, Dr. Harris is editing the *International Review of African American Art*, curating



Artwork by Dr. Harris



Artwork by Dr. Harris

an exhibition at his old alma mater, Bowling Green State University, called *Visible Man*: a look at black male subjectivity in art, and is still an active member of AfriCOBRA, a Chicago-based group of black artists whose shared aim is to develop their own aesthetic in the visual arts in order to empower black communities. Dr. Harris's ideas for his future leaves one with a sense of anticipation for his next level of innovation. As a current photographer, he aspires to create a book project of all the interviews he's done over the last 30 years, including interviews of American Poet Gil Scott-Heron, American jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp, and jazz multi-instrumentalist Yusef Lateef. There is also a goal to do a show at the David Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, due to the lack of current exhibitions on black landscape paintings.

Throughout his career, Dr. Harris has been able to interact with and learn from phenomenal students, which may be the one thing he will miss the most. One of the main goals of interacting with students is the goal of experience, learning, and discovery. He recently reconnected with one of his first graduate students from

North Carolina and found they are now the curator of African American art at the University of Georgia Art Museum in Athens. Dr. Harris continues to keep in contact with students from time to time because he genuinely cares about what's happening in their lives. Some of his most rewarding experiences are when he receives memos from students who visit some of the places discussed in class. It lets him know he is leaving a lasting impact in the lives of others.

Referencing Toni Morrison's essay "Playing in the Dark," Dr. Harris leaves a final message to current and prospective African American Studies majors and minors. "You cannot understand American literature without dealing with the Africanist presence or absence... When you root yourself in older ideas and histories, it gives you a grounding in understanding your work. It makes it richer and more holistic, you're able to look at who you are, where you came from, and how you interact within the world."

Always ready to provide a seemingly bad dad joke or pun, Dr. Harris states "you have to laugh to get through the pain of life sometimes." Very true words from an amazingly talented, artist, photographer, scholar, curator, and overall decent human being that will be cherished for years to come. Dr. Harris we wish you the very best on your retirement and want to thank you for lending yourself to Emory University and the Department of African American Studies.

Where Are They Now?: Rachel Wyley 10C

After graduating from Emory's African American Studies program in 2010, Rachel Wyley began her career in education and non-profit management. She describes African American Studies as a place that fostered her passion for social justice, music, and community building.

Rachel, who is originally from Los Angeles, began her career at Emory as a political science major with plans of becoming a civil rights lawyer. However, her experience in AAS 100 with Dr. Nagueyalti Warren gave Rachel a glimpse of the strong community within African American Studies.



Rachel Wyley 10C

Rachel's interest in music and social inequality inspired her to enroll in courses that observe and analyze the surrounding environment. The city of Atlanta also provided spaces for Rachel to deepen her understanding of the societal barriers experienced by black people outside of the classroom. She remembers using the MARTA while working with the after school program Jumpstart. Taking public transit in Atlanta and working with low income students opened her eyes to the way inequality is shaped purposefully.

Now with over 15 years as a non-profit professional, Rachel still brings these lessons learned in AAS and Atlanta into her work. She is currently the Bay Area Executive Director of the Peer Health Exchange, whose mission is to increase health equity in low-income communities by giving teenagers the resources to make informed health decisions. The organization trains college students to deliver skills-based health curricula which form the backbone of Peer Health Exchange's programming.

As Executive Director, Rachel relies heavily on the leadership and community building experiences gained during her time as an AAS major especially when navigating the challenges around being a black woman in non-profit leadership. Rachel says that despite being simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible in most professional settings, AAS empowered her to make socially conscious leadership decisions.

Rachel left Emory feeling empowered in ways that supported her personally and professionally later in life. In particular, she remembers the way AAS faculty and staff built a strong community with the students. "They took such good care of me," says Rachel, "I always felt I had a home."

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Observance Keynote

MLK Jr. Holiday Observance Keynote Speaker Nikole Hannah-Jones



Nikole Hannah-Jones

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 4 P.M.
JONES ROOM, 3RD FLOOR,
WOODRUFF LIBRARY

“Education and housing are the two most intimate areas of American life, and they’re the areas where we’ve made the least progress.”

— Nikole Hannah-Jones

Nikole Hannah-Jones was awarded a MacArthur “Genius” Grant for “reshaping national conversations around education reform.” This is but one honor in a growing list: she’s won a Peabody, a Polk, and a National Magazine Award for her story on choosing a school for her daughter in New York, a segregated city. Most recently, her *New York Times Magazine*’s The 1619 Project, on the history and legacy of American slavery, went viral and garnered her even more honors for her groundbreaking journalism.

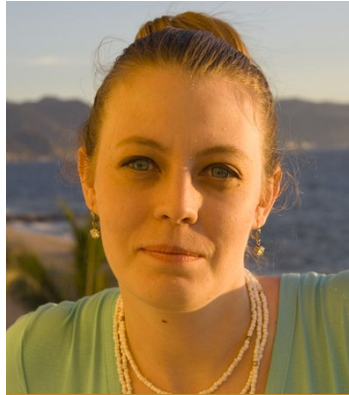
Hannah-Jones covers racial injustice for *The New York Times Magazine*, and has spent years chronicling the way official policy has created—and maintains—racial segregation in housing and schools. Her deeply personal reports on the black experience in America offer a compelling case for greater equity. Hannah-Jones is the lead writer on the New York Times’ major multimedia initiative, The 1619 Project. Named for the year the first enslaved Africans arrived in America, the project features an ongoing series of essays and art on the relationship between slavery and everything from social infrastructure and segregation, to music and sugar—all by leading scholars, authors, activists, journalists and more.

She has written extensively on the history of racism, school resegregation, and the disarray of hundreds of desegregation orders, as well as the decades-long failure of the federal government to enforce the landmark 1968 Fair Housing Act. She is currently writing a book on school segregation called *The Problem We All Live With*, to be published on the One World imprint of Penguin/Random House. In 2016, she was awarded a Peabody Award and George Polk Award for radio reporting for her *This American Life* story, “The Problem We All Live With.” She was named Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Black Journalists, and was also named to 2019’s The Root 100 as well as Essence’s Woke 100.

Events of Interest



Dyjuan Tatro



Dr. Jessica Neptune

Black History Month: Race and the Criminal Injustice System

Speakers: Dr. Jessica Neptune and Dyjuan Tatro

FEBRUARY 18-20, 2020

Location: Screenings: White Hall 208;

Panel: Jones Room, Woodruff Library

The Department of African American Studies and the Office for Racial and Cultural Engagement present a multi-day event that explores education and the criminal justice system. The event kicks off with a two-day screening of Ken Burns' PBS Documentary, *College Behind Bars*, which explores

the transformative power of education through the eyes of a dozen incarcerated men and women trying to earn college degrees from the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI), one of the country's most rigorous education programs. The event will culminate with a panel discussion on Race and the Criminal Injustice System, with Dyjuan Tatro, who was featured in the documentary and captain of the BPI debate team that beat Harvard, and Dr. Jessica Neptune, the Director of National Engagement at BPI, and Professor Alyasah Sewell of Sociology and Professor Carl Suddler of History.



Dr. Dianne Stewart

Women's History Month Special Reading: Black Women, Black Love

Speaker: Dr. Dianne Stewart

MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020 AT 4 P.M.

Location: TBD

Stewart is an associate professor of Religion and African American Studies at Emory University specializing in African heritage religious cultures in the Caribbean and the Americas. Inspired by her pedagogical investment in Black Love Studies and her widely celebrated courses, "The Power of Black Self-Love" (co-taught with Dr. Donna Troka) and "Black Love," Dr. Stewart spent three years research and writing *Black Women, Black Love: America's War on African American Marriage*, which will be published by Seal Press in 2020.



Dr. Pearl K. Dowe

Grace Towns Hamilton Lecture

Speaker: Dr. Pearl K. Dowe

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2020 AT 4 P.M.

Location: TBD

Dowe is the Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Political Science and African American Studies with a joint appointment between the university's Oxford College and Emory College of Arts and Sciences. Dowe's most recent research focuses on African American women's political ambition and public leadership. She has presented widely at professional conferences and given frequent news-media interviews about American political topics. She is a member of several committees for the American Political Science Association. She is co-editor of the *National Review of Black Politics* and is a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy* and the *Race, Gender & Class Journal*.