I am really excited to be writing you today. This newsletter is the capstone of a year of resurgence for the institute. Thirteen months ago, I had the honor of assuming the leadership of the James Weldon Johnson Institute. My goal has been to honor the legacy of our founder, the late Rudolph P. Byrd, by rebuilding the institute into a hub for cutting-edge, interdisciplinary scholarship on race at Emory and beyond. Although we still have many goals to achieve, I am excited about the progress we have made in a few short months. From the hiring of our wonderful staff to the selection of a first-rate class of visiting scholars to the launch of an ambitious programming schedule, we are on our way to achieving our goals.

It is our intent to use every aspect of our institute to support research and public scholarship about relevant, timely questions related to race and difference. As you read the stories in this newsletter, I hope you can see our vision in action. And if you have not had a chance to meet our visiting scholars or attend our programs, I hope that the articles here will pique your interest and draw you into further engagement.

Again, thank you so much for your support. We hope you enjoy our updates.

Sincerely,

Andra Gillespie
Director, James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference
The Second City had not one but two cultural movements that followed the better-known Harlem Renaissance. Together, the Chicago Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, which covered a period roughly spanning the Great Depression to the mid-1970s, ushered in Chicago’s preeminence as a center for black culture and art. Concurrently, they turned the city into a kind of ground-zero in the lengthy fight to end de facto segregation in America’s northern cities.

“The Chicago Renaissance identifies a period and a place—not the only place this was happening within black culture and art—but one that was important because of its size and black community,” says JWJI Visiting Scholar Michelle Gordon. The period from the early 1930s to the early 1950s “has been a traditionally overlooked set of decades,” says Gordon. “The narrative of African American literature was that you had the Harlem Renaissance and then you didn’t have much other than Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison until the 1960s.”

Chicago, however, was a main depot in the vast movement of blacks from the rural South to the industrial North, an era now called the Great Migration. “So suddenly you have this new black population that is segregated in a large city, with new encounters with modernity and urban life, and access suddenly to interesting artistic institutions and cultural endeavors,” Gordon says.

In the Second City’s black artistic renaissance, Richard Wright—author of Black Boy and Native Son—and Gwendolyn Brooks—the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize—are probably the best-known literary figures. Playwright Lorraine Hansberry might be considered the literal and figurative “daughter” of the Chicago Renaissance, bridging the gap between that cultural period and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Hansberry’s parents were active in civil rights struggles of their day—“part of its radical fervor,” says Gordon. Their efforts to desegregate Chicago housing and neighborhoods were the genesis of Hansberry’s play, A Raisin in the Sun. Their fight against restrictive housing covenants went all the way to the US Supreme Court and prevailed.

Hansberry sets A Raisin in the Sun in Chicago “sometime between 1945 and the present.” The play is first produced on Broadway in 1959, “when the Southern civil rights movement is moving in a visible way,” says Gordon. “She is
really trying to demonstrate that this has to be a national struggle.” Segregation, then, was not only a Southern problem but also one in the North that “just wears a different cloak.”

Gordon, who grew up in Marietta, Georgia, graduated from the University of Georgia in 2000, becoming one of the first students there to earn its newly minted African American studies major. She received a master of arts in Afro-American studies and a PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and went on to become assistant professor of English at the University of Southern California.

As a JWJI visiting scholar, Gordon will continue work on her monograph, *Bringing Down Babylon: The Chicago Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and African American Freedom Struggles*, as well as teach a spring semester course titled *Literature of the New Negro Renaissance and Black Arts Movement*. As part of that course, she will have her students participate in an online encyclopedia she plans to develop, which will bring better awareness of the entirety of the Black Arts Movement—not just its most famous members—to the wider public. Emory’s special collections are providing Gordon with a solid foundation for this project. She also will work with the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship to help her design the coursework that will help engage students in the project. She sees her students not only “getting in the Rose Library and digging into boxes and folders” but also helping to design and create the encyclopedia’s website.

Universities such as Emory should be especially interested in the artistic and literary figures who emerged from the Black Arts Movement, Gordon says. “Some of these people are foundationally responsible for building the discipline of black studies in universities,” she says. For this reason, she is grateful for the work of the James Weldon Johnson Institute. “Emory should be congratulated for supporting black studies in all the ways that it does by not letting these programs rest in precarious positions—as they so often do in many institutions.”
Biography of Michelle Y. Gordon

Gordon works in the arenas of American literature, black studies, and cultural studies, with particular interests in the literary and cultural labors of the Left, civil rights history, black women’s studies, and cultural memory.

Gordon was among the first students at the University of Georgia to earn a BA in African American studies; she then earned her MA in Afro-American studies and PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She went on to serve as assistant professor of English at the University of Southern California. Her scholarship on 19th- and 20th-century American literature and print culture has appeared in essay collections and journals, including *American Quarterly* and *African American Review*. She also has contributed to several documentary film projects, including *88 Days in the Mother Lode: Mark Twain Finds His Voice*. She has been awarded fellowships by the Black Metropolis Research Consortium and the Advancing Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences Initiative, and recently received the University of Southern California Mellon Mentoring Award for her work with undergraduate students.
Snapshots in Time Build a Truer Picture of Black Life

By Stacey Jones

In large urban centers, the media portrait of African American life is often a bleak one. Unwed mothers. Nonexistent fathers. Mugshots—even of victims. JWJI Visiting Scholar Nikki Brown aims to show a different picture of African American life, from civil rights-era Louisiana to post-Katrina New Orleans.

Black Americans have “one image in popular culture and another in our own communities,” says Brown, a visiting associate professor of history from the University of New Orleans. Always interested in photography, she says, “I used the money I had to buy a nice digital camera, took a class, and then informally took images of African American men that ran counter to the representation of black men as criminals.” For this multiyear project, she interviewed the New Orleans residents about their lives before and after Katrina.

Although not a native of Louisiana (she hails from Rochester, New York), Brown sees the state’s civil rights history as an untapped resource. Although there are seminal events that took place in Louisiana—it was the state where the landmark Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* was filed, and where six-year-old Ruby Bridges helped to desegregate the New Orleans public schools as a first-grader in 1960—most of the photographic record of the African American civil rights struggle focuses on places such as Alabama and Mississippi. These photographs, she wrote in her application for the JWJI fellowship, “analyze how African Americans represented and positioned themselves as key actors to end racial discrimination in Louisiana.”

Brown is the second member of her family to hold a JWJI fellowship. Her older brother, Scot Brown, who is now a faculty member at UCLA, held a fellowship in 2013–2014. “I knew that Emory had the resources—and I don’t mean just money,” she says, to make the JWJI fellowship an attractive option for pursuing her research. “Emory has one of the best libraries that I’ve been in—and I went to Yale. It has one of the best manuscript and archives collections.” As proof, she was able to finish in three months at Emory an article that she had worked on since 2009 in Louisiana and had trouble completing due to a scarcity of scholarly resources.

Brown’s spring-semester class is full—25 students will be learning about Black Power in Film and History. They will examine films that debuted between 1968 and 1974 and had an overt or covert ideology that represented key themes of the black power movement—racial uplift and pride, autonomy from the majority culture, and a burgeoning sense of advancement in wider society.

Brown’s exuberance and love of learning come through during the most cursory discussion with her, and her academic interests are expansive. Earlier scholarship looked at black women in the years before and after World War I. She initially thought she’d find these women “very poor and very uneducated, meaning they were lucky if they...
got three years of education living in rural areas in the Southern states.” Instead, she found a group of women very cognizant of what was going on in the world around them.

Another avenue of research unexpectedly cropped up when a friend encouraged Brown to travel to Turkey. It took her more than a decade to do so, but she eventually applied for a Fulbright grant to teach US history there. In Turkey, she met a black State Department employee who, during a lunch together, told Brown about the country’s Afro-Turk population. Brown had thought that they were recent immigrants from the African continent, but her lunch companion explained that, no, these Turks were descendants of the Ottoman Empire’s slave trade, which once extended from Eastern Europe to East Africa.

“Theyir stories and heritage are not unlike African Americans,” says Brown. “Many of these folks live in poverty but they survive despite the lack of resources.” She estimates that about one million Africans were enslaved in Turkey, with most eventually blending into the country’s dominant culture. However, about 20,000 currently live as a minority community within Turkey. Brown intends to pick up her lens once again to take photos and conduct interviews of the Afro-Turks, learning Turkish—a notoriously difficult written language for native English speakers—in the process.

Right now, she’s enthusiastic to be at Emory. “Getting up and going to this library and talking to the great community of scholars, I come at this fellowship with genuine excitement,” Brown says. “Being here makes the ideas just come out better. I am a better scholar here.”
The more things change, the more they stay the same.

To many, the names Oscar Grant, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Darnisha Harris, and others are the most recent manifestations of a sometimes-deadly double standard regarding criminality and black youth. For others, these young people are the unfortunate victims of rogue police officers—not a criminal justice system that is predisposed to stack the deck against minority youths. Carl Suddler, a historian who writes about race and crime from the 1930s to the 1960s, might argue that the adage gets it right at least in this aspect—the American criminal justice system has rarely been color-blind when it comes to crime and punishment.

“I write about young people. And even the term youth changes over time,” he says. In the period he covers in his research, “we see a shift in how young people are treated in the criminal justice system,” says Suddler. “There’s a shift from progressive to more punitive politics during this time, and I write about this transition, at least as it pertains to legal proceedings and how we approach juvenile delinquency.”

He became interested in the topic of race and crime in high school, after long conversations with his history teacher, who challenged him to look beyond conventional wisdom about people and events—an often one-sided view. “I didn’t know there were fancy words like criminalization when I started thinking about this,” he says, likening his scholarly interests to “writing a history of people from the other side.”

A recent PhD graduate from Indiana University in Bloomington, Suddler is in the process of turning his dissertation into a manuscript tentatively titled Young Forever: The Criminalization of Urban Youth, 1939–1964. “When considering constructions of criminality, youth is a privilege. White youths are granted the privilege of being younger longer,” he says. That’s not always the case, Suddler emphasizes, but “historical records have shown they have been often able to avoid criminal responsibility in a way that nonwhite youth have not.”

As an example, Suddler cites two white teenagers who, after World War II, get into a fight with recently returned sailors. One of the young men, Charles Vejvoda uses brass knuckles against the sailors, and both are arrested. In this case, the teenager claimed to be carrying the brass knuckles for protection; their fathers referred to the police as overzealous. The youth who did not use the brass knuckles had his case dismissed for “just accompanying” his friend, Suddler says.
Contrast their case to the Harlem Six—a group of black youth who were all jailed for the 1964 murder of a white woman, a Harlem shopkeeper who was killed “by one thrust of a knife.” All six were under the age of 18 when they were sentenced and, predating the now-common practice of sentencing juveniles as adults, served prison terms ranging from nine to 21 years. “For as long as we’ve thought about it—at least from the 1930s forward—there has been adult time for adult crimes for youth of color,” says Suddler.

Suddler will include aspects of crime and punishment in his spring semester survey course, 20th-Century African American Urban History. “A little bit of everything” will be thrown into the course, he says, which also will consider cities regionally—New York City, Chicago, New Orleans, and urban areas in California. He won’t dwell only in the past, however; he’s including a decidedly 21st-century feature in the class, arranging for several authors on the syllabus to speak to his students via Skype. “They’re not all history majors, so a big thing for me is that I want them to walk away with something tangible from the course,” Suddler says. “Feeling like they’ve left a stronger writer and a stronger reader, both of which will translate later, regardless of what they decide to do after this class.”

The JWJI fellowship is Suddler’s first job after being granted his doctorate. Growing up in an army family, Suddler moved around a lot. His parents ultimately settled in Delaware, where he attended high school and the University of Delaware, double-majoring in history and black American studies. Coming to Emory has been his first visit to the Deep South. He likes Atlanta. “It’s been a welcome surprise.”

Biography of Carl Suddler
Carl Suddler earned his PhD in history from Indiana University. His research interests focus on constructions of youth, race, and crime in the 20th-century United States. Specifically, Suddler explores how the justice systems and their associated authorities contributed to racialized constructions of youth criminality, primarily in the urban North.

Suddler’s teaching interests include 20th-century African American history; 20th-century US history; urban US history; history of crime and punishment; postwar history of youth, race, and crime.
“Confederate Heritage and Black History in Tension”
Part of the JWJI’s Public Dialogue Series on Race and Public Memory

February 25, 2016, 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.
Oxford Road Building Auditorium,
1390 Oxford Road, Atlanta

For more information or to register:
http://jamesweldonjohnson.emory.edu

Is Confederate memorabilia emblematic of pride or prejudice? The Confederacy ended more than 150 years ago, yet its symbols and seminal figures continue to exert a strong influence for some, even outside the South. For others, these Civil War symbols represent the terror and hate of the post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras up to modern times. Confederate Heritage and Black History in Tension, a symposium presented by the James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference, will feature a panel of five scholars examining the seemingly disparate yet intertwined connections among black history, Southern history, and the politics of commemoration.

“We often hear that wars don’t settle anything,” says James Roark, Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of History at Emory and one of the panelists. “In fact, the US Civil War settled two enormous issues: slavery (abolished) and the nature of the Union (permanent and indivisible).” But settling those issues created additional ones: “Left unsettled were the rights of African Americans as free people and the place of the South in the federal system.” Roark notes, “Those issues—race and federalism—are as alive today as they were in 1865.”

That became apparent last summer in South Carolina, when nine black churchgoers were murdered by a white man who had posted online pictures posing with symbols of the Confederacy and apartheid. In the aftermath of the Emanuel AME killings, the state of South Carolina was held to task across the nation for its continuing insistence on flying the Confederate battle flag on state capital grounds. Other Southern states were also forced to take stock of the many Confederate memorials in their midst. Why this particular time and not the many others that African Americans and others had protested these symbols? “Perhaps this time they were embarrassed and ashamed?” posits Leslie Harris, Emory associate professor of history.

“I have two fears about this response,” she says. “One is that it reinforces the idea that African American deaths, rather than African American reasoned arguments, are what can lead to change around issues of racism. Second, the erasure of these symbols will not lead to the erasure of racism. However, it can lead to the erasure of history. When we react so immediately to drop something, we often drop everything—both the offensive thing and the need to thoughtfully remember why it is so troubling.”

The symposium will consider the following questions: Do symbols of the Confederacy honor heritage or promote racial hatred? What is the relationship between Confederate heritage and African American history? How should the Confederacy be remembered? Along with Harris and Roark, panelists will include Catherine Clinton, president of the Southern Historical Association; Maurice J. Hobson, assistant professor of history at Georgia State and vice president for membership of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (Atlanta Branch); and Emory faculty member Joseph Crespino, Jimmy Carter Professor of History.
Stanley Thangaraj: A Player Both on the Court and in the Halls of Academe

by Susan Carini

Had Stanley Thangaraj proposed some pickup basketball following the inaugural lecture of the Race and Difference Colloquium Series, audience members might have learned even more from this former Emory student-athlete, now assistant professor of anthropology in the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership at the City College of New York. As it was, they learned a great deal without breaking a sweat.

The lecture, “South Asian American Sporting Cultures: Performing Identity with and against the Black-White Racial Logic,” set exactly the right tone for this ambitious series, which is now weekly and features local and national speakers presenting academic research on contemporary questions of race and intersecting dimensions of difference. It also was the perfect homecoming for Thangaraj, who felt honored to be asked into a conversation that perhaps can contribute to making his alma mater, as he describes it, “a site of citizenship on equal terms.”

James Weldon Johnson Institute (JWJI) Director Andra Gillespie explains the intent behind the change she made to the series. In her words, “When we relaunched the institute, it was important to expand the colloquium series to a weekly gathering. I wanted to create a campus culture where there was a frequent outlet for people to engage in deep, intellectual discussions about race and difference. Weekly colloquia allow us to invite a wider array of speakers, whose research covers a greater range of subjects and a broader spectrum of racial and ethnic minority groups. I want attendees to leave the colloquium series cognizant of the vibrancy and importance of the intellectual questions that scholars of race and ethnicity bring to the academy.”

“Stan’s talk in particular was amazing for so many reasons,” Gillespie says. “Not only is he an engaging speaker, but his work is so counter-stereotypical. That’s what we hope to do at JWJI: provide a platform for scholars doing interesting work about race to challenge us to consider the conventional and unexpected ways that social constructions of race and culture affect even the most mundane aspects of our lives.”

The respect flows both ways because Thangaraj is excited about the new leadership of the institute. “At this historical moment,” he says, “with increased violence against certain communities, there is no better embodiment of what scholarship can do than what Drs. Gillespie and JWJI Assistant Director Kali-Ahset Amen, along with
the visiting scholars, are doing at JWJI. They are bringing in a more expansive definition of race that includes gender and class. By doing that, we have the ability to talk about violence in all its ways and also to rethink how we collaborate and build coalitions that respond to violence.”

Thangaraj’s work puts him squarely in the middle of discussions about classic gendered stereotypes about Asian Americans. For instance, one persistent stereotype for South Asian males is that their athletic participation, when they manifest it at all, is limited to cricket. Film series such as *Harold & Kumar* and *National Lampoon* have helped to create an image of South Asian men as some combination of “nerd, model minority, or hyposexual,” he says. “All serve in various ways to emasculate.”

As he grew up, Thangaraj—who was born in India and lived there until age 14, when his father joined the faculty of Candler School of Theology in 1988—did not conform to the media type of the South Asian male. On the contrary, he was a serious, committed athlete and, later, coach in both volleyball and basketball. Besides, as he laughingly confesses, “in trying to play high school baseball in the US, I discovered that cricket and baseball are not the same.”

He realized that stories he had been gathering as both a player and coach since 1994—stories of both belonging and exclusion—could be put into the service of some eye-opening experiential ethnography. In journal articles since 2010, he lit up the previously closed worlds of, as it is known, ‘Indo-Pak’ basketball. In 2014 he coedited the collection *Sport and South Asian Diasporas: Playing through Space and Time*. In June 2015 came *Desi Hoop Dreams: Pickup Basketball and the Making of Asian American Masculinity*. One rich reward of the book is that it “analyzes the dilemma of belonging within South Asian America in particular and the US in general.” His newest coedited collection, *Asian American Sporting Cultures*, will be out in April 2016.

Readers of *Desi Hoop Dreams* will note that part of its astonishing originality is how it construes what “brown” means. At one point, in fact, Thangaraj planned for it to be titled *Brown Out: Man Up! Basketball, Leisure, and Making South Asian American Masculinity*. Says Thangaraj, “Within the racial logic of the US, ‘brown’ was a much more productive term for me.” As he notes, especially in the South, discussion of black and white drowns out all else. But black and white “have needed the other to make sense of themselves. By looking at these other communities, we can show the differential aftermath of racial policies on citizenship.”

Although he intentionally tried to limit its academic language, *Desi Hoop Dreams* is a scholarly study of the first order, as its numerous award nominations indicate. The book is up for the Asian American Studies Social Science Award, the Asian American Studies Popular Culture Award, the American Anthropological Society’s Bateson Prize for Best Ethnography, the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Best Sports Book of the Year, and the American Studies Association’s John Hope Franklin Book Award. Thangaraj acknowledges the challenging style, saying, “My book is its own mess in itself, right? It is talking about things from everyday life, like pickup basketball, but using academic jargon. It was a tough thing to balance. I tried to let the stories speak for themselves.”

It is precisely those stories to which the James Weldon Johnson Institute hopes to give voice through its colloquium series.
The James Weldon Johnson Institute

Spring Semester Calendar

Major Programs

**February 9, 6:00 p.m.**
Carlos Museum Reception Hall
Launch Reception
An evening celebration to introduce the Johnson Institute’s new vision, leadership, and fellows to the Emory community.

**February 25, 4:00 p.m.**
Southern History and Black History Symposium
A dialogue among historians exploring the contentious connections between Confederate heritage and African American history.

**April 14, 4:00 p.m.**
James Weldon Johnson Annual Lecture
Annual address by a distinguished race scholar and public intellectual. This year’s speaker is Aldon Morris, Leon Forrest Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at Northwestern University.

Colloquium Series

**February 1**
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Jonathan Xavier Inda
Professor and chair of Latino/Latina Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
“Racial Prescriptions: Pharmaceuticals, Difference, and the Politics of Life”

**February 8**
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Leslie Bow
Mark and Elizabeth Eccles Professor of English and Asian American Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison
“Racial Caricature, the Anthropomorphic Object, and the Culture of Cute”

**February 15**
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Allyson Hobbs
Assistant professor of history, Stanford University
“A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life”
February 22
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Stacey Sinclair
Associate professor of psychology, Princeton University
“You Are Who You Know: How Ethnic Attitudes and Interpersonal Interactions Shape One Another”

February 25
4:00–5:30 p.m.
Public Dialogues in Race and Difference
Southern History and Black History Symposium
Panelists: Catherine Clinton, Joseph Crespino, Leslie M. Harris, and James L. Roark

February 29
12:00–1:30 p.m.
K. Juree Capers
Assistant professor of public management and policy, Georgia State University

March 14
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Dania Francis
Assistant professor of economics and African American studies, University of Massachusetts–Amherst

March 21
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Muniba Saleem
Assistant professor of communication studies, University of Michigan–Ann Arbor
“Representations of Muslims in American Media”

March 28
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Nikki Brown
JWJI Visiting Scholar
“Pictures of a Demonstration: The Congress of Racial Equality and Desegregation Activism in New Orleans, 1960 to 1964”
April 4
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Carl Suddler
Visiting fellow
“The Color of Justice without Prejudice: Youth, Race, and Crime in the Case of the Harlem Six”

April 11
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Michelle Y. Gordon
Visiting fellow
“Chicago’s Black Arts Movement”

April 18
12:00–1:30 p.m.
Naomi Murakawa
Associate Professor of African American Studies, Princeton University
“The Perils of Policing Reform”