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Letter from the Director

Andra Gillespie  
Director, James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference

The recent presidential election and transition has uncovered deep rifts and tremendous fears about the direction of our country. As citizens of the ivory tower, it would be easy to retreat to our libraries and pretend that nothing is happening. However, scholars live in the world like everyone else, and it is impossible and unwise for us to countenance the idea that we are insulated from everyday politics.

In the spirit of courageous inquiry and the search for truth, we at the James Weldon Johnson Institute (JWJI) have pondered our role as our country enters what appears to be a very turbulent period. As a part of a nonprofit academic institution, we are nonpartisan. That is, we never have and never will endorse political candidates or engage in electioneering on behalf of any candidate or political cause. Such activity would not only jeopardize our tax status, but it would hamper our ability to provide a wide berth of programming that speaks to the ways that race and difference operate in a wide variety of social, political, and ideological contexts. We take pride in welcoming scholars and speakers representing a wide variety of disciplines, methodologies, subject matters, and ideological/political perspectives to take part in our programs, and we are happy to welcome speakers who discuss a wide variety of topics: from the role of race in pharmaceutical development, to the role of religion in evangelical Latinx political socialization, to Afro-futurism. To support such a wide variety of topics and disciplines requires a certain level of intellectual curiosity and an openness to different ideological, methodological, and disciplinary perspectives.

While JWJI maintains a politically neutral position, we are unequivocally egalitarian and empirical. We hold certain values dear: respect for all people, a commitment to telling the less-told stories of marginalized groups, and an abiding commitment to the empirical tradition. These values transcend partisanship and ideology and speak to our core mission to promote scholarship that advances civil and human rights.

Thus, we do not see it as partisan to support dialogue and research that interrogates the present state of the world. Whether we look at art and music; politics, society and economics; or science and technology, we find that people respond to their circumstances and surroundings using the tools available to them. By systematically studying these topics, whether in a historical or contemporary context, scholars have the ability to explain why people interact in certain ways; why social, political and economic institutions have particular structures and create certain policy outcomes; and why people make scientific advances to address some problems but not others.

Often this type of inquiry leads scholars to make judgment calls. They may deem a policy helpful or harmful. They may find that a new technology is beneficial or unbeneificial. They may discover that an emerging artistic form has a connection to a social movement. In any case, scholars make these judgement calls after careful and systematic study. These findings are not emotional reactions based on personal bias. Rather, scholars have a mandate to let the evidence guide them and to draw conclusions based on methodologically sound interpretations of data.

This has important implications for current and future political environments. If we are to maintain our openness to all perspectives and our political neutrality, then we have to remain intellectually transparent and report our findings honestly. Thus, if our scholarship reveals reasons to praise this or any administration’s policies, we
will follow the data where it leads us. Similarly, if the data warrants our issuing a warning or an alarm, we have a scholarly and ethical obligation to dissent.

This commitment to rigorous, truth-seeking scholarship leads us to take the following positions:

1. **We are committed to the First Amendment and the freedom it affords academics.**

   We believe that all citizens have the right to express their support for any policy, social or cultural phenomenon, or political administration and to dissent if they disagree. This includes faculty. While JWJI is formally nonpartisan, this does not preclude our staff and fellows from expressing their opinions as private citizens. While they do not speak for the organization, we support their First Amendment right to express their opinions. Most important, we believe that the First Amendment right to free speech extends to the right to research. Academic freedom is the hallmark of the American academy, and JWJI supports all measures to promote the rights of faculty to engage in all forms of empirically sound research—even if the research findings are controversial. To that end, we oppose all policies that serve to have a chilling effect on research. This includes governmental policies (federal, state, and local) that limit access to publicly available data and actions that appear to target scholars because the substance of their research runs counter to the political positions of any elected official.

2. **We support controversial and uncomfortable research.**

   Research on race and difference is inherently controversial. Scholars who dedicate themselves to studying inequality and discrimination deal with uncomfortable histories and often reveal evidence that puts people, groups, and organizations in unflattering lights. But it is this type of exposure that opens the door for reform and, hopefully, reconciliation. As such, it is in keeping with our mission to support through our research fellowships, data collection efforts, and public programming scholarship that asks tough questions and finds uncomfortable answers.

We suspect that at times, we will offend some people with our findings. As long as we have been faithful to the scientific method and have engaged in thoughtful and empirically informed research, we are willing to offend people if it moves our society closer to the truth.

3. **We support the informed use of scholarship in public policy debates.**

   Scholars create knowledge for public consumption. Whether our work is read in books, consumed in classrooms or debated on cable news, it is important to share our findings. And we hope that our findings have application in industry, public policy, or art. As we promote the dissemination of knowledge, though, we do note that there are parameters for how we should present and internalize data.

   First, while there might be alternative perspectives and new pieces of information, there are no alternative facts. Lying is unethical and scientifically indefensible. While we are open to considering new measurements and heretofore unexplored perspectives, we do not do so in a dishonest way or in a way that seeks to only score rhetorical points.

   We also value our commitment to proper measurement and interpretation. We do not endorse apples-to-oranges comparisons employed to advance a particular agenda. We support the sound interpretation of quantitative data.

   For instance, we believe that there are proper, time-honored ways to read graphs and charts, and that analysts should know the difference between the findings generated from self-selected, pop-up internet polls and real surveys with scientifically drawn samples, and judge their value accordingly.

   Finally, we also firmly believe that qualitative scholars have an obligation to fully consider all of the evidence at their disposal and should not ignore inconvenient evidence to suit a particular narrative arc.

4. **We support the academy’s goal to provide learning and professional development opportunities—without any hint of discrimination.**

   We know that people from all backgrounds, creeds, identities, and origins are gifted with the
ability to make new discoveries and advance knowledge. As such, we support the efforts of scholars of all stripes to pursue their calling to create knowledge in all fields and all subjects. Efforts to deny some scholars access to the United States on the basis of national origin or religion are not only discriminatory, but they also have the potential to slow down the advancement of knowledge. Scholars learn the most—and produce the most useful knowledge—when they have the ability to engage with colleagues from different perspectives, backgrounds, and traditions who ask different questions or bring new perspectives to the table.

In that spirit, we have made a commitment to offer programming that speaks to all aspects of race and difference—along racial lines, but also in the ways that race and ethnicity intersect with gender, religion, sexuality, national origin, citizenship status, ideology, and other identities. We welcome all people to participate in our public programming and engage in that sometimes difficult intellectual dialogue respectfully and in a safe and inclusive environment.

It is not enough, though, to welcome all people to our programming. We also want to support the production and dissemination of scholarship that speaks to the issues that are raised by the current cleavages and controversies. Thus, we welcome applications from visiting scholars seeking to explore questions that speak to contemporary racial, ethnic, and intersectional controversies, and we are committed to incorporating excellent scholarship that interrogates these contemporary questions into our regular programming.

5. **We believe in the scientific method.**

We recognize that in a free society, people are entitled to their opinions. It is the job of scholars, though, to lead their audiences to think about entrenched social problems such as race and difference in systematic, evidence-driven ways. If empirical evidence does not ground opinion, then those opinions do not portray an accurate picture of the social, cultural, or technological phenomenon they purport to explain.

The scientific method has utility across the disciplinary spectrum to put facts and emotion in their proper place. When scholars (in the humanities and the social, natural, and technical sciences) talk about being empirical or using the scientific method, we mean that we raise testable questions, develop hypotheses based on prior research, systematically gather and analyze our evidence, and leave ourselves open to the possibility of being wrong, both now and in the future. The process of research is ongoing and subject to replication, especially as new data sources, measurements, and techniques become available.

Unfortunately, too much of our public discourse discounts the orderliness and the discipline that goes into scholarly work. We do such discounting at our peril. Without systematic inquiry, we risk making ill-informed decisions that have the potential to lead to disastrous outcomes.

We firmly believe that these goals are perfectly aligned with our nonpartisan stance. Careful, thorough, empirically based work is not the province of Democrats, Republicans, or third parties. No faction can monopolize the quest for finding the truth, and no politician should stand in the way of scholars seeking to use their gifts and training to solve hard questions—even if they do not like the answers.

To that end, we hope that the work that we do contributes to the overall advancement of the public discourse. By sticking to these principles, we affirm our commitment to the idea that scholarship can be used as a form of resistance to the all too human tendency to divide and to deny people basic human and civil rights. Our goal is to promote equality through scholarship—to point out the ways that our society has historically fallen short of its democratic ideals, and to offer empirically informed prescriptions that promote opportunity, prioritize truth over rhetoric, and help solve long entrenched problems in our society. Now more than ever, scholars have a responsibility to promote civil, reasoned discourse and to share important research findings with those who are open to exploring hard truths and putting those truths into practice in protest, policymaking, and daily life.
JWJI Visiting Assistant Professor Ashley Coleman Taylor is an interdisciplinary ethnographer specializing in the lived experiences of black corporeality, black genders and sexualities, and African diaspora religious experience. Her work centers on the intersecting themes of race, class, gender, and religious experience, and she recently completed a PhD in the Graduate Division of Religion here at Emory.

In fact, Coleman Taylor’s connection to Emory stretches back to her junior year at Spelman. A psychology and religious studies major, she was a research scholar for a program sponsored by the National Institutes of Health that required her to conduct research with a mentor in the Atlanta area. While looking for a professor who combined her interests in psychology and religion, she was “lucky enough to find John Snarey at Emory, who worked on Jamesian pragmatism and moral development,” she says. “Working with him as a college junior helped me think about the ways I could get at the questions I had about black women and religious experience.”

Coleman Taylor continued her academic work at Harvard, where she earned a master of education degree in human development and psychology. When she returned to Emory for a PhD, she concentrated on person, community, and religious life, with Snarey as her adviser. Her dissertation, “Pragmatic Embodiment: Race, Class, Gender, and Religious Experience,” is an outgrowth of her family and personal history and is influenced by her ancestral legacy in Puerto Rico. “I’ve been curious about blackness, gender, and lived experience (religious and otherwise) for a long time,” she says.

Coleman Taylor says she was fortunate to study at Emory, where the resources are plentiful, and, she says, “I’m always learning about new ways that I can be aided in my teaching and research.” JWJI is a special place for her, and she served as a graduate assistant there when she was a PhD candidate. She credits Rudolph Byrd’s mission and vision for her inspiration. “In this place, my teaching, research, and programming interests around race, gender, sexuality, and lived experience can coalesce,” she says.

JWJI has proved to be fertile ground for Coleman Taylor. This year she is working on an oral history project, Atlanta as (Gay) Place: Building a Black Queer Phenomenology through Oral History Research, which she will present April 10. The project deepens the themes she has explored in her research.

“I hope to shift the conversation about the city by ‘queering Atlanta Studies.’ We cannot have a conversation about Atlanta and its role in the South
without discussing its black queer and trans populations,” she says.

Coleman Taylor is working on the project with the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship. The project includes an online component that will map significant sites for the community and a timeline that demonstrates how prominent and widespread black queer and trans organizing has been in the city.

“I am a black, gay, femme ciswoman from Atlanta. I love my community, honor and cherish its history in the city, and I have a personal commitment to making sure stories from the community are heard,” she explains. “I’ve noticed that Atlanta has a habit of erasing stories, tearing down historical remnants and buildings, and reinventing/rewriting history by using a white cis hetero elitist lens. My oral history project is my response to this erasure.”

This year, Coleman Taylor is also teaching Black, Queer, and Trans Lives in the Americas, which brings her ethnographic work in the Caribbean and US, her lived experience as a gay Southern femme, and her passion for community to the classroom. “We will explore black, queer, and trans folx across the African diaspora and learn about the ways that communities live, survive, and thrive despite oppressive forces,” she says.

Her teaching, she hopes, helps students “see a part of the world in a different way than they ever have before,” she says.
By Susan Carini

To understand what kind of scholar and teacher Erik Love has become, you need to know where he grew up — near 8 Mile in suburban Detroit. Love had Arab and Muslim American friends who were, he says, “just part of the patchwork of ethnic groups in my town.” Nothing about his associations with them seemed unusual until, in college, he realized how rare they were.

Says Love, “Race is the puzzle I never have been able to figure out. Growing up, all the adults told me that race doesn’t matter, you should just ignore it, and again and again I saw how, indeed, race does matter very much. Trying to reconcile those statements is what has motivated everything that I have tried to do in my career.”

Love is a visiting fellow at JWJI, a former visiting research scholar in sociology at Temple University, an assistant professor of sociology at Dickinson College, and past chair of Dickinson’s Middle East Studies Program (2013–2014).

After receiving a BA at Albion College and spending two years in Japan teaching English, he earned an MA in 2006 and a PhD in 2011 from the University of California–Santa Barbara, in the process addressing a troubling fact regarding racial matters. Regarding civil rights for Arab and Muslim Americans, Love states, “We thought that the laws on the books since the 1960s would protect communities like these, but they have not. The rhetoric is getting worse and the discrimination is continuing.”

It became a major focus of Love’s research to study the advocacy organizations representing Arab and Muslim Americans — groups such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and South Asian Americans Leading Together. For Islamophobia and Racism in America — his book in press, due out in May — Love spent time in these groups’ archives and interviewed their staff, volunteers, and board members.

In the process, he discovered that these organizations have tried to follow suit with the color-blind ideology that predominates in the US and was expressed most famously by Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts in 2007: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” In short, advocacy for minority populations in the latter half of the 20th century and in the 2010s could not be more different.

As part of his experience as a JWJI fellow, Love arrived at Emory in summer 2016 hopeful about educating the next generation of Emory students about Islamophobia and enlisting their aid in solving the race puzzle. The course that Love taught this past fall was a special topic in sociology.
and Middle Eastern and South Asian studies and drew from a range of disciplines and fields, including ethnic studies, sociology, anthropology, and political science. “I was really fortunate to have very engaged students, mostly juniors and seniors,” notes Love. “Some of them were Muslim Americans willing to share their experiences with us.”

The course started, says Love, by bringing students to an appreciation of how race and Islamophobia are inextricably linked, given that the latter is talked about as having mainly to do with religion. “Once it is properly connected to race,” says Love, “Islamophobia becomes less mysterious, and we can bring to bear what we know about race to confront it.” The course examined the effect of racism on many national, ethnic, and religious groups.

Moreover, it could not help but have a current events component. “I debated with myself,” Love confesses, “about the extent to which I wanted to talk about Donald Trump.” Ultimately, Trump did enter the classroom: given that he had made statements directly related to the topic, it allowed Love to highlight the tenets of the course and be able to supply context. “After all,” says Love, “while Trump is extraordinary in many ways, his stance — limiting immigration and supporting profiling and surveillance — is old. Those ideas are a throwback to the Asian exclusion acts of 100 years ago.”

During his time here, Love is pursuing a project examining the way that racial politics influences decisions about urban transportation — determining “where the highways are built or not built, where the bus stops or doesn’t stop, where the train goes.” As with his Islamophobia book, Love will be focused on advocacy organizations, asking about their strategies, op-eds, websites, and the like. The cities he will cover include Atlanta, Detroit, Baltimore, Milwaukee, and Los Angeles.

Atlanta offers a rich field of study, given that voters approved two transportation proposals this past November. The first, a .4 percent sales tax, will generate approximately $300 million over a five-year period and include money for the Atlanta BeltLine, 15 complete-streets projects, Phase 2 of the Atlanta Bike Share program, pedestrian improvements in sidewalks, and traffic signal optimization. The second measure, a .5 percent sales tax, will generate an estimated $2.5 billion over 40 years that will be spent on high-capacity rail improvements, new infill rail stations, new buses, and other services. Moreover, a lot of new ideas are on the table — the possibility of state funding as well as a new transit authority that would extend or supplant MARTA.

According to Love, the character of city centers has changed, with economic revitalization occurring in places, like Detroit, that had known hard times. Millennials — with their love of intown living and willingness to hop on transit or walk to work — also are changing the complexion of things. And corporations want good transit, for the obvious reason of being able to attract and keep top workers. Again, though, the question of who gets what, where, and when is often influenced by the racial composition of cities.

Love is preparing a conference paper and gearing up for his March 20 lecture in the JWJI Colloquium Series, “The Third Rail: Race and American Public Transportation Advocacy.”

As he conducts his research, he cannot say enough about the rich oxygen in the atmosphere at JWJI and Emory as a whole. He expresses awe at the “amazing projects” of, as he calls them, “my fellow fellows” and admiration for the “different, but equally productive, ways that we come at race.” The staff of the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship already has come to his aid in helping him run the data for a project that would analyze how an advocacy organization uses social media.

Says Love, “I thought by now that the work I do around Islamophobia and racism would be a history project. Unfortunately, it is in the news every day. It makes me feel conflicted.” But it also makes him determined — to continue to speak out for justice and to urge his students to do the same. In shining a light on disadvantaged populations, says Love, “It means a lot to me to get this right.”
When Visiting Assistant Professor Emily Pope-Obeda began her graduate research on deportation and immigration, these issues weren’t exactly the news events they are today. Several years later, after completing a PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and as she teaches Race, Immigration, and Citizenship to Emory undergraduates, her timing seems perfect.

“I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to teach this course at this moment in time and to be able to work with students as they make sense of the world around them, become informed and active members in their community, and learn how to analyze events and debates in their everyday lives,” she says.

Pope-Obeda’s interest in immigration and deportation began during her first year as a graduate student at UIUC while working on a research paper on immigrant activism against proposed immigration restrictions in the 1910s and 1920s.

“As my research progressed, I realized that I was drawn to study deportation not only because of what it can show about immigration policy,” she says, “but because of how it illuminates debates and historical developments around race, national belonging, citizenship, class, political ideology, crime and the carceral state, gender and sexuality.”

Her dissertation, “When in Doubt, Deport!: US Deportation Practice and the Local Policing of Global Migration in the 1920s,” explored these ideas further in their examination of deportation’s early formation and how it reveals the importance of local enforcement, political agendas, racial projects, and the expansion of state power and social policing in the US.

Pope-Obeda’s new research, which she is digging into this year at JWJI, focuses on African American responses to and discourses around immigration restriction and deportation during the early 20th century. She will lead a JWJI colloquium, Contesting Non-Citizenship: African-American Responses to Nativism, Immigration Restriction, and Deportation, 1903–1939, in March.

The JWJI intellectual community has given Pope-Obeda unexpected benefits. She points to the discussions around race, which consistently make her think differently about her own work and shed new light on how she conceptualizes her topic, even when centered on seemingly unrelated subjects.

“Our weekly colloquia are an incredible opportunity to hear fascinating new research from scholars across the country, and every week I learn something new that I might not have been
exposed to had I stayed within my disciplinary boundaries,” she says.

Emory and Atlanta have also opened up resources for her research and served as significant assets. “At Emory, I have been making extensive use of the digitized collections of a broad assortment of African American newspapers and other publications from the early-20th century,” she says, “and at Emory and other research institutions in the area, I am looking at the organizational archives of various civil rights and race-focused activist organizations and individuals from the period to find records of their discussions and attitudes on migration and migration control.”

It’s the opportunity to teach this semester, though, that has her the most excited, and she acknowledges that her teaching informs her research and vice versa. “The conversations I have around immigration and race in the classroom often help me to clarify and elaborate the stakes of my research and to provide further context for the narrower aspects of my own scholarship,” she says. “Student questions, discussions, and arguments often spark my curiosity about a particular facet of my subject that I might not have considered, and they push me to think about what directions my own research might go.”

As for the future, Pope-Obeda is applying and interviewing for academic jobs for next year, and she says she’s ahead of the game thanks to this year at Emory. “I can say that wherever I end up next, my time at JWJI has been a tremendous asset and really advanced my development as a scholar, researcher, and teacher.”
By Stacey Jones

Katie Schank unearthed her own professional gold mine in the collection of Emory’s Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. While conducting research for a graduate school paper, the 2016 JWJI fellow discovered the Charles Palmer papers at Emory. The collection provided an intriguing bit of intersectionality, combining her dual interests in photography and the built environment. Seizing a chance to return to the city in which she once lived, Schank came to Atlanta to review the papers. “It became clear to me on my first day that this was something huge that I really wanted to take on as my dissertation project,” she says.

As influential as he was to the nation’s history, Palmer, an Atlanta real estate developer, is little known today. That may be because the housing community he created, Techwood Homes, no longer exists. Or it may be because the historical milestone it set came to be seen by many as a dubious distinction.

One of Franklin Roosevelt’s first New Deal initiatives, the National Industrial Recovery Act set aside funds for slum clearance in American cities. With Palmer’s urging, Atlanta civic leaders targeted two neighborhoods to propose for redevelopment using federal dollars — Techwood Flats, a mostly white slum in the shadow of Georgia Tech, and another blighted neighborhood near the Atlanta University Center.

Techwood Flats was turned into Techwood Homes, the nation’s first public housing project, which opened in 1936. Federally mandated segregation meant that Techwood Homes would house white residents only until it was integrated in 1968. Palmer worked with Atlanta University President John Hope to build a second housing project, University Homes, for African Americans near the complex of historically black institutions. Both housing projects, with their modern apartments and expansive greenspace became national models for well-planned low-income communities.

And Palmer became a highly respected expert on public housing as well as the first chairman of the Atlanta Housing Authority’s board of directors.

“It was incredible to me that here was Atlanta as the first, and it also becomes the first major city to commit to knocking down its public housing, and nobody had looked to write a history,” says Schank. “There were some people who had written a chapter or two but nobody had committed to looking at the breadth of Atlanta’s role.” For Schank, the connection between the visual and the built environment is even more evident when it comes to the image of public housing.

“There are so many places we never go and visit—they can be grand cathedrals and amazing...
skyscrapers, and we don’t go to them,” Schank says. “And all we know about them is through photographs. I think this is especially true of public housing for so much of the population.” Unfortunately, what many people came to see in images of public housing and its residents was ruin, dysfunction, and criminality.

Schank sees things differently. “This is a group of people who’ve been stigmatized and a type of housing that’s been stigmatized when it really doesn’t deserve that reputation,” she says. “Yes, there were terrible things about public housing, and you could argue that the program was a total failure, but I don’t think that’s true. And so I think the subject really deserved more attention.”

Among the more common misconceptions about public housing is that the people living there are on welfare, are lazy, and are the ones responsible for the demise of the communities, Schank says. But what she saw in her research was quite the opposite. There were many residents who worked diligently to revive the programs, environment, and reputation of public housing, she contends.

Atlanta’s public housing story echoes the city’s unrelenting spirit of boosterism as well as its obsession with its image of progress and racial uplift. But some 60 years after it was created, Techwood Homes was razed to create housing for athletes attending the 1996 Olympic Games. Afterwards, it became a mixed-income housing development, Centennial Place.

Schank, who recently received her doctorate from George Washington University, defended her dissertation on Palmer and Atlanta’s public housing in spring 2016. As a JWJI fellow, she is teaching an undergraduate class on African American Urban History and Visual Culture this semester. “The idea of bringing in elements of visual culture can disrupt a lot of what we traditionally think of history,” Schank says. She hopes to demonstrate to her class a more interdisciplinary approach to history, much like the way in which she, a University of Virginia architectural history major, earned a PhD in American studies researching the history of Atlanta public housing.

“I hope that students who haven’t been exposed to interdisciplinary ways of thinking will embrace it and see how valuable it can be to learn to look more critically at popular culture,” she says. “Maybe it will take away some of the preconceived notions they had regarding what they know about Atlanta and 20th-century African American history.”

By examining images and other media with the history students find in texts, Schank hopes they’ll gain the tools they need to rethink certain historical events and their relevance to the present day.
Each spring, the Johnson Weldon Johnson Institute sponsors a major address by a distinguished race scholar and public intellectual. The 2017 speaker is Naomi Zack, professor of philosophy at the University of Oregon. The annual James Weldon Johnson Distinguished Lecture will take place on April 6, from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m., in Cannon Chapel at Emory University. For more information or to register, visit http://jamesweldonjohnson.emory.edu.


Zack’s early work focused, in her words, “on the biologicalemptiness of human racial categories and the conundrum of mixed-race identities.” Since 2010, her scholarship has turned to concrete injustice and abstract theories of injustice that extend beyond race. Recently, Zack has offered critiques of white privilege in a variety of venues, including the interview she granted PhilosophyTalk.org titled White Privilege and Racial Injustice.

The centerpiece of Zack’s talk, “Applicative Justice, Race, and Mixed Race,” will be her book Applicative Justice: A Pragmatic Empirical Approach to Racial Injustice (2016). For political philosophy and related fields, the present justice paradigm stems from John Rawls’s A Theory of Justice, published in 1971. Inspired by David Hume, Rawls presented a view of justice forged in the social contract tradition, one in which individuals would advance their ends through cooperation with others. Though his work was admired in some quarters, it also inspired intense criticism by scholars who considered his view of justice impractical, blind to the fact that just law and unjust practice coexist as a fact of political life. Zack is squarely in the latter camp, believing that “what people in reality care about is not justice as an ideal, but injustice as a correctible ill.” Her touchstone is a critical insight from Arthur Bentley’s 1908 The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures, which describes political life as a constant process of contending interest groups. “That,” notes Zack, “allows for a resolution of the contradiction between formal legal equality for US minorities and post-civil rights practical inequality.”

Zack’s term applicative justice zeroes in on the unfair application of justice and calls for “the design of effective measures to equalize such treatment.” Acknowledging in her introduction the range of injustices—including police racial profiling, vulnerable populations in disaster, the criminalization of poor blacks and homeless people, cruel and exploitative treatment of undocumented immigrants, violence against women, and substandard K–12 education in racially and ethnically segregated residential neighborhoods — Zack has chosen a primary focus on African Americans and poverty.
Even as Zack looks forward to covering the main ideas of her book in the lecture, she also is excited about going further. In the context of applicative justice, she intends to introduce injustice theory in such a way as to demonstrate contemporary relevance concerning political identities. She will use James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* to talk about mixed race and then conclude with reflections on the perils of mixed-race experience looking back on the Obama presidency.

Zack brings the unique perspective of someone who, for 20 years, chose not to work inside the academy. Indeed, in the essay “Why I Write So Many Books about Race,” she describes life as a freelance writer and independent film producer, living in various spots in the US and London. Asked about the separate contributions of the academy and social activism to the fight for justice, Zack responds, “The academy keeps the record and slowly pushes the envelope in many progressive ways. Yes, at some point these changes need to make it into the real world—and they do, bit by bit.”

Black Panther Party at 50

Last fall, activist Elaine Brown (pictured, in white), former chairperson of the Black Panther Party, sat down with Spelman College professor Beverly Guy-Sheftall for a one-on-one conversation commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Co-sponsored by the Stuart A. Rose Library and the Laney Legacy Program in Moral Leadership at Candler, the event drew a capacity crowd to Glenn Auditorium. See a recording of the evening at [jwji.emory.edu/home/special-programs/bpp-at-50.html](http://jwji.emory.edu/home/special-programs/bpp-at-50.html).
Major Programs

**Race and Difference Colloquium Series:**
*Spring Roster*
*Every Monday, from January 30 to April 17, Noon–1:30 p.m.*
*Jones Room, Woodruff Library*

This spring, JWJI will continue to deliver weekly lectures on contemporary questions of race to the Emory community. Scholars from around the nation will address a range of subjects from policing, immigration, and sex tourism to public housing and black LGBTQ advocacy. The James Weldon Johnson Institute is pleased to enjoy ongoing co-sponsorship from the Robert W. Woodruff Library and the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

**Black Politics After Obama: Public Symposium**
*February 24, 1:00–8:30 p.m.*
*National Center for Civil and Human Rights*

This half-day symposium consisted of three panels, each headlined by academics, activists, and bipartisan elected officials, which discussed the nature of black politics and racial politics as a result of the Obama presidency and in light of the transition to the Trump administration.

**Annual James Weldon Johnson Distinguished Lecture:** “Applicative Justice, Race, and Mixed Race”
*April 6, 4:00–5:30 p.m.*
*Cannon Chapel, Candler School of Theology*

Noted philosopher and professor Naomi Zack (University of Oregon) will be speaking from her 2016 book, *Applicative Justice*, in which she pioneers a new theory of racial justice starting from a correction of current injustices.