

A photograph of three women standing in front of a brick building with white columns. The woman on the left is wearing a white top and striped pants. The woman in the middle is wearing a striped dress and a dark jacket. The woman on the right is wearing a teal dress. A large blue circle is overlaid on the image, containing the text 'JWJI Annual Report'.

JWJI Annual Report

2020–2021



EMORY
UNIVERSITY

The James Weldon Johnson Institute
for the Study of Race and Difference
Emory College of Arts and Sciences



2	LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR
3	2020-2021 AT A GLANCE
4	YEAR IN REVIEW: MILESTONES OF 2020-2021
7	2020-2021 FELLOWSHIP COHORT
21	COLLOQUIUM SERIES
25	2020-2021 PROGRAMMING CALENDAR
29	HOW YOU CAN HELP
30	CONTACT INFORMATION
31	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

In last year's annual report, I noted the challenging times that our nation was facing in 2020. Sadly, we are still grappling with those challenges. I said it then, and I will say it again: given the salience and pervasiveness of racial inequality, the work of JWJI could not be more relevant and more important.

Our fellows always have a lot to say about race and inequality, and this year's fellows are no different. Whether they help us to explain how we arrived at the current moment or directly address contemporary issues and provide prescriptions, their work is always relevant and timely. I am truly honored to help facilitate their work, and I am excited to share the fruit of their labors with you in this report.

This annual report is particularly special because of the challenges we faced this year. Like you, we had to figure out how to operate in the midst of a global pandemic. It was an unexpected assignment, but we adapted. And while I would have loved for this cohort of fellows to have experienced JWJI under normal conditions, they were a joy to work with and especially flexible given the challenging global conditions.

I am grateful that these fellows, like those who came before them, are now permanent members of our JWJI family.

Friends, you are also a permanent and vital part of this family. In this year of turmoil, we have been grateful for your continued support. Though our colloquium meetings had to migrate to Zoom (by necessity), you still came. You turned out to our public dialogue events online, as you attended in person before the pandemic. And you applied for our fellowships in robust numbers. We look forward to your continued support—both moral and financial—in the coming year.

Sincerely,
Andra Gillespie

2020-2021 AT A GLANCE

3

Visiting Scholars

4

Undergraduate Fellows

20+

Public Programs Hosted

500+

Total Attendance

YEAR IN REVIEW MILESTONES OF 2020-2021

August 2020: Cohort twelve arrived.



YEAR IN REVIEW MILESTONES OF 2020-2021

November 2020: JWJI hosted Public Dialogue titled “Election 2020: What Happened and Why”.

Panelists: Bernard Fraga (Emory University), Ashley Jardina (Duke University), Karthick Ramakrishnan (University of California-Riverside), and Ismail White (Princeton University)

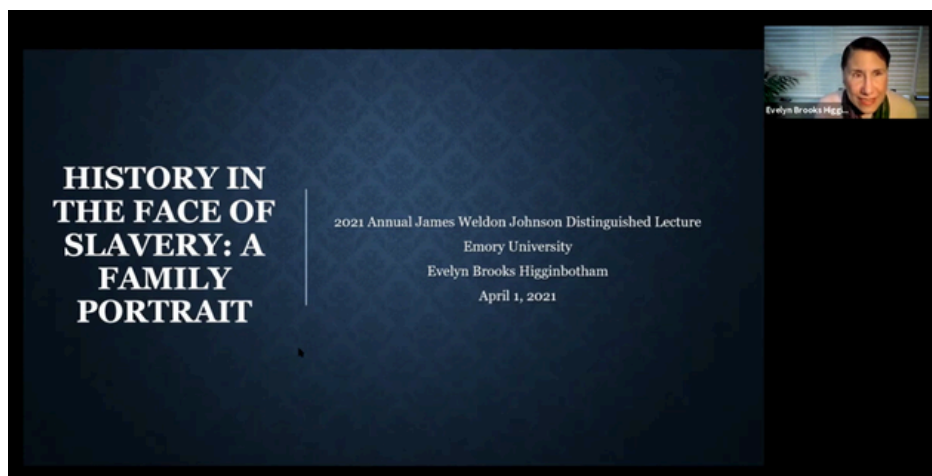
Moderator: Andra Gillespie (Emory University)



YEAR IN REVIEW

MILESTONES OF 2020-2021

April 2021: JWJI welcomed Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (Harvard University) to give the annual James Weldon Johnson Distinguished Lecture, “History in the Face of Slavery: A Family Portrait”.



2020-2021 FELLOWSHIP COHORT



**Dr. Francine LaRue
Allen-Adams**
UNCF-Mellon Fellow
Spelman College

Francine LaRue Allen-Adams wants to restore spirituality, religion and the Black church's influence into the understanding of the African American literary canon.

An associate professor of English specializing in African American literature and theology at Morehouse College, Allen-Adams spent 2020-2021 as an UNCF Mellon (United Negro College Fund) JWJI joint fellow.

"It gave me, for the first time, uninterrupted focus on ideas I had been developing for years. It enabled me to finally articulate them and develop a solid manuscript. I am very grateful. It would have taken me much longer without it," she says.

As a fellow, Allen-Adams researched and wrote her first book, tentatively titled, *Reading the Black Church Into Narrative*.

"Trying to combine theology and literature has been a challenge for me. It's made the work both difficult and rewarding and taken me a long time," she says.

The project is also personal for Allen-Adams who is a deacon at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

"As a person of faith, it is difficult to understand the world apart from my faith and recognition of the religious and the spiritual," she says. "As a literary scholar, I look at a text... and I have to give some acknowledgment of the spiritual."

For example, she points to the importance of religious understanding in teaching world literature to better understand those other cultures and conflicts.

Allen-Adams says she often feels like having one foot in the church and one in academia and understands the divide between the two.

"We want to ignore issues of faith and I can understand because sometimes religion and spirituality have been abused and used to abuse people but you can't have intellectual interest and ignore the issue of faith. And same for the church, you can't have issues of faith and ignore or downplay the intellect," she says. "When you look at the history of our country, so many of our racial conflicts have been rooted in how we think about issues of religion. Religion used to justify slavery and (now we are) using faith to shore up their humanity."

Her work aims at creating a deeper understanding of African American literature through a spiritual perspective: issues of faith and community church participation.

It is developing a methodology that shows how theological reflection can open the door to new interpretations of literary texts. The book examines the influence of the Black church during Reconstruction in the analysis of texts in the African American literary canon.

"I'm frustrated because often in my discipline we spend a lot of time talking about interpreting literature from a humanist standpoint. We should look at gender, race, politics, economics and all of that is important, but it concerns me that we aren't looking at issues of faith or theology which are so important to the African American community," Allen-Adams says.

Her mission to bridge the gap in her work between religion, literature and academia has lasted for nearly six years. It started with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 2014.

Allen-Adams, along with three other Morehouse faculty members, was awarded a NEH grant to incorporate material from Morehouse's Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection into the classroom. That project was the impetus for her book.

“I started thinking about this idea of using reflections of the Black church to understand and interpret African American literature and content,” she says. “Dr. King has a large collection and there was a lot of fiction. I began thinking about Dr. King and the Black church and how it can help us understand that literature.”

Allen-Adams knew she needed a better background in theological research and began taking classes at Emory’s Candler School of Theology while she taught full-time.

Her thesis investigates books by Reconstruction writers—African American fiction writer Charles Chestnutt and civil rights advocate Albion Tourgee who litigated the landmark US Supreme Court segregation case *Plessy V. Ferguson*.

In Chestnutt’s short story, *Dave’s Neckliss*, an enslaved man is punished by having a ham tied around his neck. She explores the religious implications that refer to a story in the Old Testament where Noah cursed his son, Ham, to justify the enslavement of Africans and their descendants.

“That little detail (in the short story) is rich with theological implications, but if you don’t understand that implication you will miss it,” she says.

The two semester JWJI fellowship was well-balanced between the much-needed isolation for research and writing and time with other fellows for support and sharing of new ideas and scholarship, she says.

Allen-Adams also took advantage of Emory’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library for additional primary research on the Reconstruction period for her book and other essays.

She also used that research for the class she taught in the Spring, “African American Studies 485: Faith, White Abolitionists, and the Black Church: The Literary Artist during Reconstruction,” which focused on close readings and archival work.

“There were really sharp students. We spent a lot of time having fruitful discussions. It was one of the best classes I’ve ever taught,” she says.

The fellowship also provided Allen-Adams additional time to work on shorter essays and academic presentations.

“But When I Became a Man: Charles Chesnutt, James Baldwin, and the Truth Needed for a Mature American Citizenry,” was a presentation as part of the Race and Difference Colloquium Series.

She served as a panelist as part of several virtual Emory programs. They included “Art Meets Activism: John C. Lewis, C.T. Vivian and The Baptism,” as part of Kenny Leon’s True Colors Theatre Company, and the Morehouse College Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection and “Reconstruction Activism,” presented by the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library and the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry.

She shared her research in a presentation, “Charles Chesnutt, Double-Consciousness, and Religious Fatalism,” to University of Georgia graduate students.

Allen-Adams, who returns to teach at Morehouse in the fall, is sending her manuscript and other essays to potential academic publishers.

“Just to be where I am now—it feels like a miracle of sorts,” Allen-Adams says. “For so long I had an idea of what I wanted to do so but I didn’t have the words to say it yet and now I have a narrative and structure for the book and it means everything.”



**DR. BARBARA
HARRIS COMBS**
UNCF Mellon Fellow
Clark Atlanta University

Barbara Harris Combs never settled for just good enough—not in her career nor in her service to society.

For about five years she was a corporate attorney and became good at her job even though success didn’t come easily. She realized her natural talent was teaching and changed careers to become her best.

She earned her second doctorate and began teaching at Clark Atlanta University where she penned her first book, *From Selma to Montgomery to Freedom: The Long March to Freedom* (NY: Routledge, 2013).

But Combs wanted to reach the next professional level: full professorship. That meant she would need to publish a second book. She already had the book's subject in mind, sparked by the election of the first Black US president Barack Obama. She needed research and writing time and wouldn't be eligible for a sabbatical until after teaching six years at CAU.

An associate professor of sociology and criminal justice, Combs was awarded a 2020-2021 visiting year-long fellowship as part of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF)-Mellon for faculty development at JWJI.

"This fellowship enabled me to devote the time to write the quality of book I wanted and engage with top notch scholars across the globe. I was able to write a very different book than I would have if I carried on my regular teaching obligations and tried to write on the side," she says. "Most definitely, this fellowship afforded me the chance to be what I call 'great.'"

During her fellowship, Combs researched and wrote the first draft of her second book tentatively titled, *Blackout: Theorizing the Continuing Assault against Black Bodies*, expected to be published fall 2021 by University of Georgia Press.

"The very image of a Black man as president of the free world was something most people, Black and White, didn't think they would see. It changed the landscape of possibilities for folks of where they were in relative position in society. I argue the rise of voter ID laws we saw happening en masse after the first election was an attempt to push Black voters back into place," Combs says.

Combs developed what she calls the "Bodies Out of Place" theory, its framework and methodology are explained in the book. The theory suggests that continuing violence against Black bodies is an attempt to reinstate Jim Crow society by pushing Black bodies back into the place of the White, Jim Crow, order. A timely example is the rise in voter identification laws and voter suppression.

The manuscript is divided into three parts. The first part makes the case for the book, sets the tenets of her theory, methodology, how the system operates and the benefits of it. A chapter is devoted to the history of the "push back," a consistent narrative about Black progress and discussions of "colorblind frames" that minimize racism.

"It shows the long history of Black advancement being met with White push back and sometimes a violent White push back and it is a pattern we have seen for 400 years and it is time to stop," Combs says.

The second section lays out five frames on how the push back works. For example, there is a historical fear factor—the idea that you don't belong here and your presence will result in something bad happening. This fear is used as justification for continuing violence and assault.

"Massah, the Master, has spoken" is another example suggesting that White people are masters and benevolent and that White people know what is best for Black people and shouldn't be questioned.

"It's that all space is White space... whatever space there is, it's subject to reclamation. Place could be both geographic, a position in society or being in relationships with others. You shouldn't be in that interracial relationship," Combs says.

The final part of the book examines the history of excuses, policy implications and where to go from here.

"It discusses the weight of being perceived as a body out of place. This hovers over our interactions and we use that to understand the continuing evil of existing systemic racism in society—manifested in anti-Blackness," Combs says. "I quote Karl Marx. The point is not just to understand the social world but to change it."

Along with research and writing time, the fellowship also offered a much-needed academic community. Even during the pandemic, Combs says the relationships, support and nurturing were better than she hoped for.

"I really wanted that community. It was a very nurturing space. I was able to make connections that helped me better understand and develop my own ideas about the social world. It was absolutely invaluable," Combs says.

She also taught a class, *Race, Place and Belonging* under the American Studies, African American Studies and Sociology departments.

The class set out to interrogate the social space of Emory University examining Black and people of color experience through Instagram posts and identifying themes. Instructional archivist Gabrielle Dudley, with the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Books Library, created a special session to prepare students for their curated photo essays.

“I absolutely loved teaching the course. They were really interested and respectful with each other and tried to come away with an understanding of shared social space,” Combs said.

The fellowship also provided the opportunity for Combs to guest lecture, write a book review, contribute to an encyclopedia, and serve as a media expert. She participated in several conferences or events, including the Association for Jewish Studies Conference in December. Her talk focused on reasons Jewish people should care about the Black Lives Matter movement. Last October, Combs also was a participant in the panel, “Lift Every Voice 2020: Defining the Black Reconstruction Archive Panel,” Emory University Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library (Zoom Presentation).

Combs was also awarded a summer 2021 fellowship into the Pardee RAND Graduate School Next Generation Initiative’s faculty leaders program, which helps scholars improve their policy, research and analysis skills.

“I had those opportunities because I had the time to devote to them with this fellowship at JWJI,” she says. “I had just a lot of great time to sit and think about the next stage of my career.”

When she returns to Clark Atlanta University, Combs is applying for full professorship.

Already, Combs is collaborating on another book with staff at Morehouse University, a photo essay collection of Black southern women, tentatively titled, *The Esther Moment For A Time Such As This*. The book will focus on moments in history—past and present—when Black women, famous and ordinary citizens—spoke in the face of peril, including Stacey Abrams, a Black Lives Matter protestor, and Georgia congresswomen Jordan Davis.



**HAYLEE CHRISTINE
HARRELL**

Laney Dissertation Fellow
Emory University

Haylee Harrell didn’t take the easy road to becoming the scholar she wanted to be.

Instead, she pushed herself creatively and probed the harder questions of her family’s interracial history as she explored the complexities of mixed race and blackness in the US.

This Spring, Harrell earned her Phd in Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies from Emory.

As a James T. Laney Dissertation Completion Fellow for 2020-2021, Harrell penned “The Monstrous Mulatta: A Feminist Genealogy of a Peculiar Invention.”

She also garnered the Delores P. Aldridge Excellence Award in African American Studies. Aldridge was the first Black woman to receive tenure at Emory in 1970.

“I feel extremely honored and feel really luck to have the support I have and those who see the potential in my work going forward,” says Harrell, who also received Emory’s Women of Excellence Award for Teaching and Pedagogy this year.

During her JWJI fellowship, she also served as the JWJI undergraduate mentor to four fellows. Each month, she planned and crafted professional workshops on networking, oral or dissertation defense, job market and interview preparation and performed one-on-one mentoring.

“All the undergraduates were exceptional, smart, funny and very vulnerable and open about their struggles and concerns for the future. They worked really hard to get to graduation and did it with grace, humor and humility and it was a joy to see,” she says.

With most of the research already completed and some writing done, Harrell spent her fellowship year writing and revising her dissertation.

“I really appreciated the support of the writing process, the professional practice of talking about my work to a large audience (of people) not in my field,” she says. “Having the other fellows and their support and advice and writing tips and tricks and checking in on me and making sure I was on track—it was really helpful and I didn’t feel isolated because I had social support.”

An office at the JWJI house helped Harrell find the space necessary to stay focused on her writing and conduct job interviews and other meetings without disruption. The fellowship also helped prepare her for the job market. That search landed her another fellowship, the Cheryl A. Wall postdoctoral fellowship in African American and African Diaspora Literary Studies at Rutgers University. During that fellowship in the fall, she will primarily write her own work, but also teach a class and mentor undergraduate and graduate students.

Harrell’s journey to academic feminist Black scholarship started in a white middle class area outside Salt Lake City, Utah. Her Black father was from North Carolina and her mother was second generation Italian American.

Growing up, she, her brother and her father were the only Black people for miles. She didn’t go to school with other Black kids until she was 13 years old.

“I have an interracial family and was raised in Black culture, the Black struggle and things about Blackness were beautiful but I found myself really struggling like other multi racial people who were finding ways to relate themselves to Blackness,” she says.

The first women’s studies class she took as a senior in college—a queer theory course—propelled her to pursue an academic career.

“My mind was just blown. I began working with that professor and she encouraged me to think about applying to graduate school,” she says.

Before coming to Emory, Harrell, a first generation minority college student, helped first generational students from underserved populations, minorities and low income students transition from high school to college.

“I decided to go into women’s studies rather than English PhD because I was really interested in how women studies had a history of bringing the intellectual and theoretical in conversation with things happening on the ground, movements and organizations, and really looking at the intersection of peoples’ identities. I wanted to be able to work with students in a way that was bringing forward their intersectional identities,” she says.

Her thesis project investigates how race is talked about, more specifically Blackness, in relation to being mixed race in the US. It delves into the many iterations of bi-racial and mixed racial, tracing the early concept of Mulatta. Through theoretical, historical and literary lenses, the thesis examines mixed race identity in Black communities, Black narratives, and Black spaces through films and novels. Harrell questions why there are so many narratives where mixed race is separated from Blackness, especially since Blackness, in terms of diaspora and slavery, has always had racial intermixture.

To better understand narratives about race, Harrell searches the creative works of four women who identify as Black from interracial families. Legal scholar Patricia Williams, Harlem Renaissance novelist Nella Larsen, conceptual artist Adrian Piper, and contemporary author Danzy Senna.

“I chose them because they all use a creative method in order to understand their racial identity and their Blackness,” she says.

A trained playwright, Harrell crafted the project in a three-act play structure. The first act compares Williams and W. E. B. Du Bois. The most archival-influenced act, the second, examines biographies of Larsen and her book, *Passing*. The third act compares the travel memories and personal histories of Piper and Senna in the context of the Black Radicalism movement. The thesis’ epilogue is a creative collection of Harrell’s poetry and monologues.

Each act also includes a monologue where Harrell provides personal insight and history.

There is a character section with biographical detail about each figure in the work. She performs a close reading of selected scenes, “a glimpse of a moment” from the work adding historical context or relevant archival information. Harrell ends each chapter with “act notes” of her reflections as if directing a play.

For example, in the first chapter, Harrell focuses on Williams, a legal scholar on critical race theory who recounts her own family history and how it affects her as a lawyer and professor at Harvard University. William wrestles with the story of her great, great grandmother who was a slave and the sexual violence that forced her then 13-year old great-grandmother to have children with her older white slave master.

“She grapples with how her family talks about this family history and that she (Patricia) is a lot like him (the slave owner)—a (property) lawyer, educated and smart...Instead of looking into him, she tries to find out more about her grandmother and asks open ended questions about this women who doesn’t have a full archive who was sexually violated and went through so much,” Harrell says. “Instead of making up a story and make the history better, Williams really sits with the violent history of her grandmother and what it means looking at herself today.”

Harrell asserts it’s essential to acknowledge the violence of the United States’ multi racial history. She says that history doesn’t start with the US Supreme Court case, *Loving v. Virginia*, legalized interracial marriage, but needs to remember all of the mixed racial narratives that originate from early sexual violence and slavery.

“All of these women are looking at the holes of their history, the unanswered questions, and those the family members they can’t find or never will be able to understand because of racial and sexual violence. They are doing the hard work, and out of the hard work, they are changing how they view themselves in the present,” she says.

Harrell didn’t take the easy way either, exploring her own personal narrative of multi-race and blackness. The project pushed her away from the “easy” history of her Italian immigrant side she knew a lot about and into her dad’s history where little information is known. In fact, her mother’s family immigrated into Ellis Island. On the other hand, she doesn’t have childhood photos of her father.

“It really forced me to question myself and my present and grapple with the same hard history that these other women (writers/artists) did. I was able to understand the gaps in my dad’s history and understand he didn’t have answers about his family either,” she says. “It brought me closer to my father who passed away a few months ago and made me cherish what he could share with me in regard to family stories and a kind of understanding of the gaps that made him and that then made me.”

Harrell acknowledges her project isn’t full of happy moments but hopes it opens the door to recognize more beyond the history of violence.

“It also made me think of the positive things identifying as a black woman. Some of those cultural things that couldn’t be taken away like food or music. I think of the black queer community and ballroom (dancing) and I think those little moments of joy that allowed for survival,” she says.



**JASON
GOODMAN**
Undergraduate Honors Fellow

For Jason Goodman, movies and TV shows aren’t just for entertainment and an excuse to eat popcorn. They are important records of the pulse of popular culture and a key to understanding history, governmental policies and the present day.

“I’m primarily interested in cultural histories—urban, African American and the intersections of popular culture and American history and how we use popular culture—movies, TV, any forms—to understand how people are feeling about certain moments in history,” Goodman says.

In May 2021, Goodman graduated from Emory with Highest Honors, a Bachelor of Science in Economics and a Bachelor of Arts in History.

As part of his JWJI undergraduate fellowship, he completed his 111-page Honors thesis, “Fear the ‘Kids in America’: How Youth Gang Films Constructed a Criminal Class, 1973-1994.”

“I wanted to look at two decades of American cultural film ideas, the narratives they perpetuated and how they framed crime that led America to a collective consciousness that was okay with harder punishment,” he says. “I wanted to connect these films to something larger than themselves.”

The fellowship’s monthly professional development meetings helped him apply for additional fellowship and conferences, Goodman says. He also took advantage of funding for archival research and office space at the JWJI house.

“It was great because I had been stuck inside (because of the pandemic) and at home at my desk and it was really nice to get out of my room. I was really grateful for that space,” he says.

Goodman also used the fellowship’s opportunity to share and discuss his project, obtaining feedback and new perspectives which helped guide his research.

A Los Angeles native, Goodman has always been a creative person who loves storytelling. He started playing music at three years old. He grew up playing piano and percussion and eventually composing music. His creativity further expanded into writing short movie scripts and scoring the music for his best friend’s movies.

When Goodman saw how well the television series, *The Watchman*, depicted the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, he saw an opportunity to explore the approach of popular culture as historical lens.

“It is one of most brutal massacres of 20th century Black Americans. It is a history not talked about but it’s amazing how a super hero show with a few scenes from the past can make it easily digestible for the public,” he says.

History, for Goodman, is no different from other forms of storytelling. It’s simply real life. To reach people, it’s important to tell the “stories of the past in engaging ways to animate people in the audience’s mind,” he says.

“The storytelling fuels the creative side of me and my academic research side of my learning too,” he says. “I realized using film and television as a primary source is also a way historically to learn about the world.”

When people think of history, they recall dates, times, events and people. Goodman says there’s more to it. The stories of our cultural history can provide insight into the factors and perceptions that shaped those historical moments.

“I enjoy watching movies in theaters and letting the emotion wash over me and think: ‘How can I incorporate them into academic stories?’” he says.

In his thesis, Goodman primarily focused on two decades that depicted crime differently in gang film narratives, the 1970s and 1980s.

“I wanted to explore what the films were saying and how they were depicting gangs in this period. How did they teach American audiences to view gangs?” he asks. “How did they view the environments where the gangs live? What did that mean for how our policy and politics tried to solve the problem of crime?”

He deconstructed the myth of black youth criminality where crime thrives in urban cities categorized as blighted, criminogenic environments.

Goodman’s thesis explores gang narratives through seven movies as a lens into the era of Black mass incarceration focusing on government policies, urban crime, economics, politics, housing and policing.

He used contemporaneous newspaper articles, speeches and other popular culture forms to provide additional context.

The first chapter sets up the current contextual history and cultural landscape. In the second chapter, Goodman examines four late 70s and early 80s films: *YoungBlood* (1978), *The Warriors* (1979), *Boulevard Nights* (1979) and *Suburbia* (1983). *Colors* (1988) and *Boyz in the Hood* (1991) are featured in the third chapter.

“The main thing I was looking at was the 1994 Crime Bill, that massive legislation, which was really the climax of this era of mass incarceration signed by President Clinton. It is often considered the beginning of what then became the mass imprisonments of people of color era in America. It’s why we are considered the prison capital of the world with more jails per capita than any other democracy,” he says.

Rather than looking at the political implications of the 1994 Crime Bill or its effects, Goodman investigated how the country—by studying its popular culture films—chose a solution—legislation that placed more police on the streets and incarcerated more people.

“Overall, the films did not question the structural disparities that communities of color in health and economic policy and what I argue is, even though they are different, the representation of Black people perpetuates the conservative solution to solving crime,” he says. “They both differently laid the groundwork culturally for the era of mass incarceration and the only idea was locking up the individual instead of taking on the structure that may have actually perpetuated the crime.”

Looking toward the future and new solutions, Goodman searches for possibility in the television show, *The Wire*, discussing its approach to the issues of media, policing, cities, gangs and crime.

“It’s a great way to look at crime in a city and gangs because it looks at it structurally. It looks not just at the economic poverty surrounding the projects but the police officers who are asked to solve the crime, newspapers, and politics and their roles,” he says.

The Wire also signals a shift in the way Americans perceive crime and provides insight into which films about crime are made.

“The stories we tell matter and the way we tell stories matter. Popular culture isn’t me going to the movies and paying a ridiculous price to sit with popcorn. It’s often denigrated as a lowly form of art and it doesn’t matter that much about policies. It’s not policy like Supreme Court decisions but it does matter because it influences the way we think about people,” Goodman says. “Cultural history says things about who we are and what we are interested in as a society.”



**DOMINIC
LAL**
Undergraduate Honors Fellow

Dominic Lal wants to help give children bright futures. Even in high school, he always “got” kids easier than adults.

“I really like helping children delve into being better human beings. It’s always been a passion,” he says.

As an adult, he’s spent a lot of his time mentoring and helping elementary, high school and college students get ahead.

Lal also leads by example. In 2021, he graduated with Highest Honors with a psychology major and a predictive health minor while pursuing a pre-medical professional track at Emory. He plans to have a career in research education, mentorship and clinical work.

While Lal grew up surrounded by loving family, he lacked a father figure and found mentors through learning Karate.

“My Karate mentors helped me get the skills I needed to achieve as a kid. They taught me the fundamentals of courtesy, perseverance, integrity, self control and having an indomitable spirit,” says Lal, a 3rd degree brown belt.

He applies what he’s learned through 15 years of Karate at a host of programs for youth at Emory and in Atlanta.

As a teaching assistant for Barack and Michelle Obama Academy, he served as the science coordinator working with first through eighth grade students. He also taught physical and mental health-based curriculum to sixth and seventh graders as part of Afterschool Allstars.

So, it was no surprise Lal chose a project for his Honor thesis focusing on children and their well-being. He wanted to find out if children’s racial basis preference varies across occupations. During the 2020-2021 academic year as an JWJI undergraduate fellow, Lal conducted his 56-page thesis project, *Racial Biases and Occupation*.

“The fellowship really motivated me to get through the year. Help framing out my thesis was really big for me,” he says.

Workshops on professional development, job interviewing skills and presentations were invaluable as well as a community of fellows going through the same process, Lal says.

JWJI’s colloquium series offered new perspectives and expert research on the areas of race and difference that provided insight for his project, Lal says.

Recently, Lal received second-place for his thesis-related presentation at the Cleveland Clinic’s aspiring physician conference. He also presented at the annual IDEAS Fellowship Da Vinci Talks and at a STEM Girl Scouts panel.

His project originated from an interest in becoming a pediatrician.

“I had been thinking for a long time about how children perceive physicians. I had wanted to become a pediatrician and I had a good relationship with mine but I knew others who didn’t have that connection,” Lal says.

As a bi-racial Indian and African American, he began thinking about issues of race and identity.

“I was curious about how identity impacted the caregiver and the patient. My lab experience opened up my blinders to really look more broadly—not just at police officers or educators—there is no research on physicians,” Lal says. “Does occupation have any impact on children’s racial basis or does it change between different occupations?”

He decided a clinical study would be best and utilized relevant theories to help ground the experimental project which ran from September 2020 to January 2021.

Thirty-eight children participated in the pilot study ranging in age from six to nine. Children who identify as black, white, mixed race, Latino, Hispanic and Asian participated but the pilot primarily focused on European Americans and African Americans.

As part of the JWJI fellowship, Lal received financial assistance for participant compensation in his thesis study. Each participant received a \$10 gift card.

“It was really nice and easier to get people to do Zoom if you provide some sort of compensation. Under normal (non-pandemic) conditions, each child would get a little toy as a gift from the lab,” Lal says.

In the seminal Clark and Clark (Kenneth and Mamie Clark) preference study, researchers approached subjects with dolls to test for the effects of segregation on Black children. That study provides some groundwork for Lal’s pilot. He examined the question from the perspective of occupations of authority including doctors, police officers and teachers, and a control person (no occupation) to see if the racial basis was different.

For Europeans, there is a group preference for Europeans across the age groups but African Americans didn’t show a self preference until later in adulthood, he says.

To start, Lal would meet with parents, go over experiment test scripts (the questions the children would be responding to) and consent release forms. The child would participate in the study alone so other peers or parents wouldn’t affect their responses. Lal would present each child with 4 trials (of varying occupations) where he would show faces of different skin tones and ask the child who they liked most.

He would randomize the corresponding faces and occupations four times until he had a full spectrum of responses from most preferred to least preferred.

Although prior research used dolls to probe for children’s racial preference, Lal used photoshop and an online database to create facial skin tone gradients.

“Parents were really interested. They would ask a bunch of questions, especially parents of minority or bi-racial identity children. They were curious and would ask extra information like ‘if my child has a teacher that looks like him or her does it have an effect?’ We don’t know but we are trying to get to that,” Lal says.

In the control condition, no occupation, Black children preferred an individual with darker skin when compared to either White or other children. However, in all the professions (doctor, teacher, police officer) children of all races demonstrated lighter skin tone preferences. This suggests that, for occupations, African American children dissociate between their own identities and occupations.

They are choosing faces that are not like them for these jobs. Children were asked about their experiences with these professions to see if they might show any connection to their preferences.

“Based on prior research, I theorized that this phenomenon has to do with positive attribute association. Studies found that European American children attribute lighter individuals with positive attributes, however African American children do not attribute darker individuals with positive attributes. This principle may explain why the African American children in my study preferred the faces that did not look like them in the occupation conditions as they may have attributed lighter faces with more positive attributes like intelligence or kindness,” he says.

Lal plans to come back to the project in medical school and further his research on the doctor-child patient interactions and how children perceive the impact of that relationship.

“How do children perceive adults in these roles and how does it shape interactions? How do they see themselves and attaining their own future?” he asks.

Lal believes the research could help shape training programs and education.

“It can broaden our understanding on relationships and communication to identify how children create the beliefs they have. This may make a bigger impact and combat disparities in the clinic, in classrooms and on the streets,” he says.

Over the summer, Lal will participate in the UNC Chapel Hill Medical Education Development program, a mock first-year medical school to help prepare both academically and professionally.

Lal accepted a fellowship and graduate school scholarship with the HIV AIDS partnership based in Washington, D.C. In the fall, Lal will begin this 11-month fellowship with AmeriCorps before attending medical school.



**LATREESE
LOVENCE**
Undergraduate Honors Fellow

Just as her final undergraduate semester began, Latreese Lovence came to a fork in the road. Should she finish the thesis she had already poured research and writing time into or change course towards the subject she really wanted to pursue?

Lovence chose to follow the new academic path on a topic with better prospects of publication in a journal or presentation at a conference.

“It was a hard decision, but this way the material didn’t have to be as limited and I could authentically pursue my interests,” Lovence says.

Amidst the challenges of finishing college during a pandemic and some unexpected personal issues, Lovence graduated on time with a double major in African American Studies and Psychology.

She also accomplished her goal. She finished the 38-page thesis she really wanted to write: “Transgenerational Trauma Among Descendants of Enslaved Individuals in the Americas” which spans from the 16th century to present day.

Lovence credits her 2021 JWJI undergraduate thesis fellowship with providing the additional resources and guidance to complete the mission.

“It was a very difficult year personally with my family and I had this project I really cared about and wanted to finish. I probably couldn’t have done it without them,” she says. “It gave me support when I really needed it.”

Above all, the mentorship opportunities meant the most, Lovence says. JWJI Graduate fellow Kaylee Harrell took Lovence under her wing. One-on-one mentoring sessions made a huge difference, including tackling the process of changing her thesis.

The undergraduates also had monthly professional mentorship meetings led by Harrell.

“One was on publishing your research which was very relevant to me,” Lovence says. “The community of other undergraduate fellows, knowing they were going through the same things with their dissertations, was beneficial.”

The Colloquium series, a weekly event where local and national speakers present academic research on issues of race and difference, provided new viewpoints, she says.

“Getting to know the other research projects and listening to different perspectives on race and being a part of an engaging and supportive community really helped,” Lovence says.

Both Harrell and Lovence’s thesis advisor, Dr. Michelle Gordon, not only brainstormed appropriate candidates for publication but also assisted in shaping her research. Lovence plans to submit her thesis to several journals within the next year.

In her thesis, Lovence examines ancestral enslaved generational trauma in North and South America, primarily focusing on the United States. She combines epigenetic research, national statistics of Black health and incarceration rates, among other factors.

The idea originated in part from learning in class about Holocaust survivors’ descendants who have adverse stress, anxiety and other epigenetic markers because of the experiences their ancestors faced.

“We see this trend from those experiences in the Trans Atlantic slave trade which is so vast and spanning so many countries. Because of the way our history is centered and erased we may not have enough research to back it up or the research is disparate. My project glued together a lot of explanations of how this (similar generational trauma) could happen,” Lovence says.

During quarantine, Lovence was influenced by social media posts about transgenerational trauma as well as personal exploration. Lovence is not African-American. Her parents immigrated from Guyana in South America.

“This gives me another perspective of how our connected histories are presenting as the Black American experience in the same oppressed disenfranchisement and are most likely the same epigenetic markers,” she says.

Centered through a literary lens, the thesis delves into ancestral generational trauma through Afro-futurist fiction novels, *Kindred* by Octavia Butler and *Stigmata* by Phyllis Alesia Perry.

Kindred’s main character is transported to the lives of her ancestors.

“I wanted to bridge these two ideas of what can be extrapolated from the fiction novel to real transgenerational trauma happening. It’s because the histories have been erased or not counted for the enslaved individuals. The literary fictions don’t have to be fiction. We can gain real meaning and history from these works,” Lovence says. “I think Octavia Butler’s story was so unique but also it exposed me to the heart-breaking nature of our history.”

In *Stigmata*, the main character is transported into waking dreams of scenes from her enslaved ancestors—her grandmother and great-grandmother.

“There is no distinction between past and present and ancestors and descendants. The perception is that as time goes on the race issue gets better but it is really staying the same and showing up in different phases. We are stuck in a loop of trauma similar to how our ancestors experienced it,” Lovence says.

Her thesis explores the “post traumatic slave syndrome” theory developed by Dr. Joy DeGruy arguing that generational trauma is experienced in many ways including difficulty with concentration and a feeling of hopelessness. High incarceration rates, high blood pressure, epigenetic marker data and other physical health statistics are evidence of this generational passed-down trauma, Lovence argues.

The first section mostly focuses on *Kindred*, water and blood motifs and the connection of water as a mode of transportation of trauma in the Trans Atlantic Slave trade. It unearths the history of how Creole culture came to America and traceable African culture elements.

The second section centers more on actual trauma and the effects in present day through the main character in *Stigmata*. Lovence combines the novel with both Western and African perspectives on dreaming and their meanings. For example, the main character has lacerations all over her body from a waking dream where her great grandmother was suffering trauma. That example is then explored in terms of epigenetic markers and the social implications of the trauma.

The third section attempts to link generational trauma to the health issues suffered by Black individuals including lower life expectancy, higher rates of diabetes, prostate cancer and other effects of post traumatic slave syndrome.

“It’s helpful to know when addressing therapy so you aren’t thinking of these problems in isolation,” she says. “So many of these problems get blamed on individuals but this is a big societal issue based in historical events.”

Lovence hopes to raise awareness of generational trauma and its connection to present day issues including physical and mental health issues, violence and other social and economic implications.

“This project is evidence that we can all do better and not be in this bubble of a post racial society. It’s important to understand that all of these issues are interconnected and it’s not an issue of poverty or housing but there is an underlying reason why Black people are so disenfranchised,” she says.

While volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, she’s preparing for graduate school. Eventually, Lovence hopes to become an advocate for marginalized communities, focusing on inequity in housing, workers rights, disability rights and labor law.

“I wanted to raise awareness and resources for understanding these issues. I hope that there will be more future research especially in the psychological realm. There is epigenetic research in Native populations but most of the research is Euro-centric. I hope we have more research to try and understand these issues and address the problems and effects,” she says.



**KASSIE
SARKAR**
Undergraduate Honors Fellow

The question of belonging might appear simple and straightforward for some.

But for JWJI undergraduate fellow Kassie Sarkar that question turned into rigorous academic inquiry sending her on a lengthy personal journey where she explored the practice and importance of self-naming and identification. Specifically, it inspired a deep dive into what it means to belong to a diverse bi-and multiracial South Asian group and the desire to build community.

Sarkar graduated with Highest Honors with a major in Interdisciplinary Studies and a minor in African American studies. In 2018, she earned an associates degree from Emory’s Oxford College.

During her spring semester JWJI fellowship, she completed her 108-page thesis, “Where Do I Fit?” Stories of Racial Identity, Resistance, and Community Belonging in Bi-and Multiracial South Asians.”

She was named first-place winner of the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library’s 2021 Rackoff Prize for undergraduate research based on the first chapter of her thesis, “Recovering the Brown Phoenix: Cedric Dover, Race, and Eurasian Experience,” which drew research from the library’s Cedric Dover Collection.

An essay based on thesis research, “Retracing South Asians through California: Where Kamala Harris, Twentieth Century Activism, and Racial Identity Collide” also garnered her the prestigious Donald B. Marron Award for Best Historical Analysis from the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress.

Monthly mentorship meetings with other undergraduate fellows led by JWJI Phd. fellow Haylee Harrell provided coaching on networking, resume and oral defense preparation and other related academic guidance.

“Because we were in the pandemic, I think it helped a lot with the community aspect— feeling there were other people in the middle of senior year and we were going through it together. We could still take time to meet and talk with our mentor about what was going on in our lives and thinking forward,” she says.

The weekly JWJI colloquium series also was key in providing other perspectives and research on race and difference.

“It was important for shaping how I was thinking about my thesis and research and refining details,” Sarkar says.

Examining her own bi-racial identity wasn’t her initial thesis subject. Originally, Sarkar studied Black Seminoles and African indigenous communities.

She was particularly interested in how the differences of race and ethnicity come together and resist white supremacy despite the oppression they experience.

During the summer months of the pandemic in 2020, Sarkar began researching decolonization methodology and anti-racism while unrest in the US was ignited by the George Floyd murder.

“I realized the real driving force behind my research. It became clear I was studying them because of my interest in multiracial and bi-South Asian people like myself,” she says. “I have this unique experience but I was very alone except for me and my siblings. The culture isn’t represented and is often repressed in pop culture or academic conversation.”

She also sought a way to incorporate her complete self into her work.

“I have three different parts of myself that I’m always trying to bring into my world—academic, creative and activist,” she says.

Her work is a combination of artist, activist and academic with the aim of dismantling the system of oppression through the “public facing side of academia,” she says. Sarkar’s thesis examines racial identity, issues of resistance and perceptions of community. Her investigation brought together historical and archival research and more creative aspects including art exhibitions and her own poetry.

She also attempted to connect the past and present histories of bi- and multiracial South Asian experience in the United States.

The thesis connects the recent election of Vice President Kamala Harris as a bi-racial figure to early South Asian leaders in the early 20th century in the US. She tracks the violence and discrimination early South Asian immigrants faced, especially in the West.

One of those key figures is Cedric Dover, an early 20th Century European and Indian mixed race person who struggled with racial depictions of himself and promoted his own self-naming identity as a way to build solidarity with other multiracial people.

“He was an interdisciplinary scholar involving arts, poetry and studying bugs and plants. It was very powerful for me as an interdisciplinary scholar to move within different disciplines to see him doing it 100 years before. It helped me frame some of the questions I was having,” she says.

The journeys of Jawala Singh, a UC Berkeley activist and Punjabi migrant who moved to the US to become one of the nation’s richest farmers and Dalip Singh Saund, the first South Asian to be elected as a US Representative are explored.

“For my thesis I didn’t want to focus only on White and South Asian. I wanted diversity. So Kamala Harris was an unexpected opportunity to think through bi-racial in a different context,” she says. “She was born in Berkeley and raised in Oakland and also thinking

about what place means historically and going back to the 1910s when the US saw increased South Asian immigration,” she says.

Sarkar examines Harris less as a political figure and more through the mixed racial lens and what she means for contemporary bi-racial representation and disrupting notions of race.

To reflect present-day perspectives, she interviewed six bi or multiracial South Asians on their experiences. The JWJI fellowship provided funding for Sarkar to compensate the participants.

“It was nice to not just take the information but be able to give back something to them,” she says.

In one interview, a participant expressed she had never before identified racially in that way and how important it was to her.

“It was an amazing feeling. It really drove home what I was trying to do with providing language and history and context to this experience that really isn’t talked about at all,” she says.

She also learned through interviews that people of similar racially mixed configurations do not necessarily share similar experiences or interpret racially identify differently, especially multiracial people.

“I went into my thesis hoping to find a racial community. I understood community doesn’t just look one way. In a country so divided along a White and Black binary, it caused a lot of confusion and uncertainty, which was more my experience,” she says. “I hope my work fills that gap.”

In the fall, Sarkar will continue researching her thesis subject while pursuing a master’s degree in the Humanities at the University of Chicago. She hopes to eventually earn her doctorate and complete a monograph on the subject and hopes more there will be more studies.

“It wasn’t just an exploration of a topic I was interested in. It helped me as a person understanding myself and literally changed the way I think about myself, my scholarship and intervention of race,” she says.

COLLOQUIUM SERIES 2020-2021

Fall 2020

Date	Speaker	Talk Title
9/14	Christopher Bonner Department of History University of Maryland	Against the Law: Forms of African American Politics
9/21	EDLIE WONG Department of English University of Maryland	Empire and the Black Pacific
9/28	Maylei Blackwell Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies University of California	Geographies of Latinx Indigeneity
10/5	Monique Moultrie Georgia State University Department of Religious Studies	Leading from the Margins: Authenticity, Authority, and Black Women's Sexual Agency
10/12	Alejandro De La Fuente Harvard University Department of African and African American Studies	Becoming Free, Becoming Black: Race, Freedom, and Law in Cuba, Virginia, and Louisiana

Date	Speaker	Talk Title
10/19	David Phoenix University of California, Irvine Department of Political Science	The Anger Gap: How Race Shapes Emotion in Politics
10/26	Gladys Mitchell-Walthour University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Department of English	Empire and the Black Pacific
11/2	Matthew Clavin University of Houston Department of History	Fugitive Slaves and the Fourth of July: Race, Resistance, and the Politics of the Enslaved
11/9	Karla Slocum University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Department of Anthropology	Black Towns, Black Futures: Enduring and Complex Attractions to Rurality, Blackness, and Place
10/12	Keith Clark George Mason University Departments of English and African and African American Studies	Becoming Free, Becoming Black: Race, Freedom, and Law in Cuba, Virginia, and Louisiana

Spring 2021

Date	Speaker	Talk Title
1/25	Leisy Abrego University of California Department of Chicana/o and Central American Studies	We Are Not Dreamers: Migrants as Experts Rather Than Objects of Study
2/8	W. Carson Byrd University of Louisville Department of Sociology	Diversity and Inclusion Counts: How Universities Reshape Racial Inequality Behind Diversity Numbers

Date	Speaker	Talk Title
2/15	Patrick McKay Temple University Department of Human Resource Management	Race-Ethnicity and the Applicant-Employer Interface
2/22	Erika Lee University of Minnesota Department of History and Asian American Studies	Xenophobia in America: How We Got Here and What's at Stake
3/1	Karen Cox UNC Charlotte Department of History	Creating Communitas: African American Doll Bloggers Animate Black Dolls as Sites of Signification
3/8	Angelica Bernal University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Political Science	Founding Sins, Presidential Violence
3/15	Elizabeth McRae Western Carolina University Department of History	Racial Segregation's Constant Gardeners: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy
3/22	S. Craig Watkins The University of Texas at Austin Department of Radio-Television-Film	Creative Futures: Redesigning Black Lives in a Post-Pandemic World
3/29	LaGina Gause University of California, San Diego Department of Political Science	The Advantage of Disadvantage: Legislative Behavior following Costly Protest
4/5	Jennifer Nash Duke University Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies	In the Room: Women of Color Birth-work in a State of Emergency

Date	Speaker	Talk Title
4/12	Francine Allen JWJI Fellow Associate Professor of English Morehouse College	But When I Became a Man: Charles Chesnutt, James Baldwin, and the Truth Needed for a Mature American Citizenry
4/19	Barbara Combs JWJI Fellow Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice Clark Atlanta University	Theorizing the Continuing Attack Against Black Bodies

PROGRAMMING CALENDAR 2020-2021

Date	Category	Topics and Speakers
Tuesday 8/11-8/12	Orientation (Zoom)	Orientation (Various speakers)
Wednesday 8/19 10 a.m.	Orientation	Extended Orientation. Meet at the JWJI House for pictures, and office move-in.
Wednesday, 9/2 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting (Zoom)	Professional Development Session
Monday, 9/14 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Christopher Bonner Department of History University of Maryland
Monday, 9/21 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Edlie Wong Department of English University of Maryland
Wednesday, 10/7 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting (Zoom)	Professional Development Session
Monday, 10/12 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Alejandro de la Fuente Departments of African American Studies and History Harvard University

Date	Category	Topics and Speakers
Monday, 10/19 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Davin Phoenix Department of Political Science University of California-Irvine
Monday, 10/26 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Gladys Mitchell-Walthour Department of Political Science University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Monday, 11/2 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Matthew Clavin Department of History University of Houston
Wednesday, 11/4 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting	Professional Development Session
Monday, 11/9 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Karla Slocum Departments of Anthropology and African American Studies University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Monday, 11/16 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Keith Clark Departments of English and African American Studies George Mason University
Thursday, 11/19 6-8 pm	Public Dialogue (Zoom)	Public Dialogue Program: Election 2020. What Happened?
Wednesday, 1/13 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting	Professional Development Session
Monday, 1/25 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Leisy Abrego Department of Chicana/o Studies University of California, Los Angeles

Date	Category	Topics and Speakers
Monday, 2/1 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Rochelle Rowe Department of Organizational Development University College, London
Wednesday, 2/3 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting (Zoom)	Professional Development Session
Monday, 2/8 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	W. Carson Byrd Department of Sociology University of Louisville
Monday, 2/15 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Patrick McKay Fox School of Business Temple University
Monday, 2/22 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Erika Lee Department of History University of Minnesota
Monday, 3/1 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Karen Cox Department of History University of North Carolina, Charlotte
Wednesday, 3/3 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting (Zoom)	Professional Development Session
Monday, 3/15 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Elizabeth McRae Department of History Western Carolina University
Monday, 3/22 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Craig Watkins Department of Radio, Television and Film University of Texas, Austin

Date	Category	Topics and Speakers
Monday, 3/29	Colloquium (Zoom)	LaGina Gause Department of Political Science University of California, San Diego
Thursday, 4/1 4:30 – 6:00pm	Public Dialogue (Zoom)	Annual James Weldon Johnson Distinguished Lecture: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham
Monday, 4/5 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Jennifer Nash Departments of African American Studies and Gender and Sexuality Studies Northwestern University
Wednesday, 4/7 10 – 11:30am	Fellows Meeting (Zoom)	Professional Development Session
Monday, 4/12 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Francine Allen JWJI Fellow Associate Professor of English Morehouse College
Monday, 4/19 12 – 1:30pm	Colloquium (Zoom)	Barbara Combs JWJI Fellow Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice Clark Atlanta University

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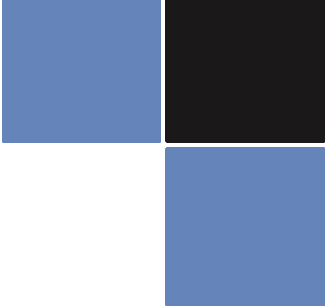
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