

## 2019-20 NEWSLETTER



*Professor Marquis Bey delivers a talk at the February 2020 AfAm Salon and Social. Photo by Seth Bernstein.*

### **NOTE FROM THE CHAIR:**

I write this note during an extraordinary time when the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed our lives and institutions. Our hearts go out to members of our community who have lost loved ones during this difficult time.

We find strength in remembering that the ethic of mutual aid and the quest for social justice are core features of the Black Studies tradition. The great writer James Baldwin once issued this challenge to the nation: "There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now."

The nationwide protests against anti-black violence have given us a bright light of hope. Millions of people are taking to the streets to demand transformations in policing and against white supremacy more generally.

As we moved to virtual study and learning this spring, I have been so proud of the efforts of students, staff and colleagues to come together in the spirit of solidarity and care.

It has been a privilege to serve as chair for this year of transition after the term of former chair E. Patrick Johnson and before the term of incoming chair Mary Pattillo. Our faculty continues to produce brilliant, award-winning scholarship and our students push us to deeper levels of engagement and learning. I hope you are having a healthy and safe summer!

Sincerely,  
Dr. Martha Biondi



*AfAm Department Chair, Professor Martha Biondi*

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### DEPARTMENT NEWS:

#### ***PATILLO NAMED DEPARTMENT CHAIR, WILL SERVE 3-YEAR TERM***

The Department of African American Studies is thrilled to announce that Harold Washington Professor of Sociology and African American Studies Mary Pattillo will begin a three-year term as Department Chair on September 1, 2020.

Pattillo, who has been on leave during the current academic year, spent four months of her leave doing research in Cali, Colombia as part of a Fulbright Fellowship. She was the Director of Graduate Studies prior to her leave and has served in numerous leadership roles since joining the department in 1998, including a one-year term as Department Chair in 2001-02.

"There is an adage in academia that being Department Chair is like herding cats," Pattillo said. "The joke is that cats are notoriously independent and self-directed. They do things on their terms. Luckily, cats just happen to be my favorite animal. So, I take it as a privilege to be able to serve as Department Chair among so many brilliant, inquisitive, daring and cool cats!



*Incoming AfAm Department Chair, Professor Mary Pattillo*

Pattillo succeeds Lorraine H. Morton Professor of African American Studies and Professor of History Martha Biondi, whose one-year term as Department Chair ends on August 31, 2020.

"This department has wonderful faculty, an amazing staff and brilliant students," Biondi said. "It has been a unique and challenging year, and I am grateful to all of you."

Biondi helped steer the department through one of the most significant years in recent American history, as the Covid-19 pandemic forced all classes online and continuing police violence led to nationwide anti-racist protests.

"It is an intense time to become Department Chair," Pattillo said. "I am deeply appreciative of the leadership of Martha Biondi for keeping the department functioning at the highest levels through these difficulties. It will be enough work just to keep the proverbial trains running on time as we move forward. But I hope to also build new ways of fostering community, supporting each other's scholarship, and continuing our commitment to Black freedom on campus and beyond."



*Professor Jen Nash*

*Professor Celeste Watkins-Hayes*

#### ***FAREWELL, PROFESSORS NASH AND WATKINS-HAYES!***

The end of the 2019-20 academic year marked a bittersweet moment for the AfAm community, as two beloved professors announced they were leaving Northwestern University for exciting new career opportunities.

Associate Professor of African American Studies and Gender & Sexuality Studies Jen Nash, who arrived at Northwestern in 2016, will be joining the faculty at Duke University, where she has been named the Jean Fox O'Barr Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies. Professor of African American Studies and Sociology Celeste Watkins-Hayes, who has been a member of the department since 2002 and was also an Associate Vice President in the university's Office for Research, will hold a prestigious

Collegiate Professorship at the University of Michigan. She will have an appointment in the sociology department and the Ford School of Public Policy, and will also have the opportunity to create a center or major initiative within the Ford School.

Professors Nash and Watkins-Hayes will undoubtedly continue to accomplish great things in their new academic homes. We congratulate them and wish them the absolute best!

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### JOHNSON NAMED SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION DEAN

In early June, the Northwestern University School of Communication (SoC) named Professor E. Patrick Johnson as its next dean. Johnson, currently the Carlos Montezuma Professor of African American Studies and Performance Studies, will be the first African American dean in SoC history.

"I am truly honored and humbled to be selected as the next dean of the School of Communication," [Johnson told Northwestern now](#). "I stand on the shoulders of my grandmother and my mother, neither of whom ever stepped foot on a university campus except to celebrate my graduations and accomplishments, but from whom I learned how to be a committed scholar, artist and advocate for social justice. As I step into this new role, I carry their tenacity and determination with me."

Though Johnson—a former Department Chair—is leaving the Department of African American Studies, he will continue working with the AfAm community in his new role.



*Incoming SoC Dean E. Patrick Johnson*

"While I may not be walking down the hall on the fifth floor of Crowe as before, my heart and soul will always be with the AfAm family," Johnson said. "I am so proud of the work we accomplished while I was Department Chair and will continue to do what I can to support the department. Namely, I hope to leverage this new position as Dean to strengthen the ties between AfAm and the School of Communication even more."

Congratulations, Dean Johnson! We are absolutely thrilled for you, and we know you will be a great leader for SoC!



*Julian Glover*

*Assata Kokayi*

### GLOVER, KOKAYI SUCCESSFULLY DEFEND DISSERTATIONS

Graduate Students Julian Glover and Assata Kokayi successfully defended their dissertations this year.

Glover defended his dissertation, "To Be Real: Black and Latinx Transgender Women in the Ballroom Scene," on July 9th, while Kokayi defended hers, "On the Other Side of Babylon: Black Women and Epistemologies of Resistance," on March 13th.

The department would like to congratulate both of them on this extraordinary accomplishment, and we wish them both the best in their future endeavors!

### FOUR AFAM MAJORS AND EIGHT AFAM MINORS GRADUATE FROM NORTHWESTERN

Four AfAm majors and eight AfAm minors graduated from Northwestern during the university's June 18th virtual commencement ceremony, and the Department of African American Studies would like to congratulate each of them on this major accomplishment and milestone.

"I extend my heartfelt congratulations to our graduating seniors," said Department Chair and Professor Martha Biondi. "We are so proud of your extraordinary achievements at Northwestern, and we wish you well in all future endeavors!"

"To our Class of 2020, congratulations," said Director of Undergraduate Studies and Professor Tracy Vaughn-Manley. "You did it, and we couldn't be prouder! When you began this intellectual journey with us four years ago, it was inconceivable that our university, our nation and our world would be in the state of turmoil and uncertainty that we now face. Yet, in the midst of tenuous circumstances, you all persevered—and now, we celebrate with you!"

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The four graduating majors are Sarah Evans, Leilani Jones, Sayeed Sanchez Johnson and John "Jack" Sweeney. Each authored a senior thesis and is graduating with honors. The department's faculty also named Evans and Sanchez Johnson as co-recipients of the annual Lerone Bennett Jr. Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement.

The title of each graduating major's senior thesis is as follows:

- "What Was She Tired Of?: An Exploration of Rosa Parks's Onscreen Portrayals," by Sarah Evans
- "Black Fragility: Black Affect in the Post-Colorblind Era," by Leilani Jones
- "Interrupting Space: Black Insurgency & Humanity Through the Black Femme Sonic Aesthetic," by Sayeed Sanchez Johnson
- "What the Hell is Political Ontology?: On Black Feminism and Being," by John "Jack" Sweeney

The eight graduating minors are Noni Bell, Roderick Campbell, Ramaoud Chiaokhiao-Bowman, Larry Coleman, Kourtney Kinchen, Suzannah Kingsbury, Leana Lindsay and Ericka Woods. Woods was selected by the department's faculty as this year's recipient of the Community Service and Leadership in African American Studies Award.

"Take this time to revel in the success of a job well done and know that we, the Department of African American Studies, rejoice with you," said Vaughn-Manley. "We are confident that you will draw upon your time here at Northwestern to make our world a better place for generations to come."

### ***AFAM WELCOMES GRADUATE COHORT OF FIVE THIS FALL***

This fall, the Department of African American Studies will welcome a graduate cohort of five students: Carmen Crusoe, Charlene Carruthers, Charina Herrera, Raven Schwam-Curtis and Mustafa Siddiqui.

Please join us in extending a warm welcome to the newest members of our department!



*The Chicago skyline at sunset. Photo by Seth Bernstein.*

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**FACULTY NEWS:****Martha Biondi**

- Featured as one of *Diverse Issues in Higher Education's* [Top 35 Women in Higher Education](#).

**Marquis Bey**

- Recipient of Northwestern's Provost Faculty Grant for Research in Humanities, Social Sciences and the Arts.
- Co-editor of forthcoming special of *GLQ: A Journal of of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, "Queer Fire: Liberation and Abolition."
- Author of recently contracted book *Black Trans Feminism*, with Duke University Press.

**Christopher Paul Harris**

- His first book, tentatively titled *To Build A Black Future: Blackness and Social Movement in the Time of #BlackLivesMatter*, is forthcoming from Princeton University Press. The book draws from his dissertation that won the 2020 Hannah Arendt Prize in Politics at the New School for Social Research.

**Jonathan Holloway**

- Named the 21st President of Rutgers University on January 21, 2020; is Rutgers' first Black President.

**E. Patrick Johnson**

- Inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- His book, *Honeypot*, is a FINALIST, for the Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ Nonfiction.
- His film, *Making Sweet Tea*, has won numerous awards:
  - AARP Silver Image Award, Chicago Reeling LGBTQ Film Festival
  - Audience Choice for Best Documentary, Out on Film Festival
  - Best LGBTQ Film, San Diego Black Film Festival
  - Audience Choice Best Documentary Feature, Kansas City International Film Festival
  - Judges' Choice Documentary Film, Longleaf Film Festival



Still photo of Professor E. Patrick Johnson (left) from his movie *Making Sweet Tea*.

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### Mary Pattillo

- Inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Was one of the first two Black inductees in the sociology section, along with her co-inductee, Alondra Nelson.
- Won a Fulbright Fellowship to study the Black middle class in Cali, Colombia. Gave several lectures during her stay, including one at the Centro de Estudios Afrodiaspóricos (CEAF) at ICESI University. The Center is directed by Aurora Vergara, and includes other Colombian scholars based in Cali and abroad. Though her fellowship got cut short by more than two months due to Covid-19, Pattillo completed her proposed 20 qualitative interviews with members of the Black middle class before returning to the U.S. in March.



Professor Mary Pattillo (second from right) with colleagues in Cali, Colombia.

### kihana miraya ross

- Her article, "[Call It What It Is: Anti-Blackness](#)," was published in the *New York Times* on June 4.
- Selected to be a part of this year's [Educational Technology Teaching Fellows cohort](#) and to take part in this year's [Digital Humanities Summer Workshop](#).

### Tracy Vaughn-Manley

- Curated an exhibition of her quilts at the Skokie Public Library from February 4, 2020 through March 18, 2020. The exhibition, "Text In Textiles," opened on February 4th with Professor Vaughn-Manley offering a public lecture, "Text In Textiles: Quilting In the Black Aesthetic Tradition."

### Celeste Watkins-Hayes

- Her book, [Remaking a Life: How Women Living with HIV/AIDS Confront Inequality](#), won numerous book awards:
  - Winner, 2020 Eliot Freidson Outstanding Publication Award, Section on Medical Sociology, American Sociological Association.
  - Co-Winner, 2020 Distinguished Book Award, Section on the Sociology of Sex & Gender, American Sociological Association.
  - Finalist, 2020 PROSE Book Award, Association of American Publishers.
  - Gold Medal, Women's Issues, 2020 Independent Publisher Book Awards.



Professor Tracy Vaughn-Manley introduces Allison Davis Lecturer George Yancy. Photo by Genie Lemieux.

## GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS:

### Rikki Byrd

- Will be a Graduate Fellow at the Block Museum of Art for the 2020-21 academic year.
- Accepted into the Dissertation Development Proposal Development Program for Summer 2020.
- Published a chapter in *African American Arts, Activism, Aesthetics, and Futurity*, (Bucknell University Press, 2019).
- Joined the Black Arts Initiative as a Graduate Representative and co-founded the BAI Graduate Working Group with fellow AfAm Ph.D. student Emeka Ekwelum.
- Was a co-coordinator for the Colloquium on Ethnicity and Diaspora, which organized events with Northwestern faculty and esteemed scholars Dr. Toby Beauchamp and Dr. C. Riley Snorton.

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Graduate Students Ashley Dennis, Emeka Ekwelum, Leah Kaplan and Rikki Byrd. Photo by Genie Lemieux.

#### Ashley Dennis

- Her article, "[The black women who launched the original anti-racist reading list](#)," was published in the *Washington Post* on June 18, 2020.
- Won the 2019 Drusilla Dunjee Houston Memorial Scholarship Award from the Association of Black Women Historians.
- Her book review of Michelle Purdy's *Transforming the Elite: Black Students and the Desegregation of Private Schools* was published in *Historical Studies in Education*, Spring 2020.

#### Emeka Ekwelum

- Collaborated with Northwestern's Block Museum of Art to host a free screening of *WHOSE STREETS?*, a 2017 documentary film concerning national uprisings and community organizing in response to the murder of Michael Brown; raised \$4000 in co-sponsorships for this event.
- Moderated a post-film discussion on community organizing and critical ethnography with [Sabaah Folayan Jordan](#), the film's director, and [Kristiana Rae Colon](#) & [Damon Williams](#) of the #LetUsBreathe Collective.
- Presented "Tethering the Flag: Visual Aesthetics of Black Citizenship in the U.S." at the 2020 College Art Association conference in Chicago. This paper examines how Black contemporary artists tether the national flag of the United States to visual renderings of the colonized Black body.
- Is participating in the inaugural "Deeply Curious Virtual In-Residence" program at Blanc Gallery in Bronzeville. They are sponsoring nine Black contemporary artists in Chicago to create works in response to manifestations of anti-Black violence via the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing assault against Black life via state-sanctioned violence/control.
- Selected as the 2020-21 Research Team Graduate Assistant at Northwestern's Buffett Institute for Global Affairs.



Emeka Ekwelum moderates a post-film discussion on 2017 documentary *WHOSE STREETS?*

#### Julian Glover

- Will begin a tenure-track Assistant Professor position at VCU this fall, jointly appointed to the Dept. of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies and the Dept. of Dance & Choreography.

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**Candice Merritt**

- Organized a panel and presented two papers at the National Women's Studies Association conference in San Francisco. The first was titled, "Closer Than We Think: Bridging the Public/Private Conceptual Divide in Black and (White) Feminist Thought." The second was titled, "Labor Matters: Interrogating Black Mothering as Radical Practice in Black Life."
- Has two forthcoming academic publications. The first is a chapter anthology contribution to the anthology entitled *New Feminist Studies: Twenty-first-century Critical Interventions* (to be published by Cambridge University Press). It is titled, "Trapped in the Political Real: Imagining Black Motherhood Beyond Pathology and Protest." The second is a co-authored journal article with Dr. Celeste Watkins-Hayes and Rikki Byrd titled, "Eclipsed: Darkness, Light, and Motherhood in the Sexualized Drug Economy of Moonlight." It will be published in the *The Western Journal of Black Studies*.

**Isaac Ginsberg Miller**

- Presented a paper titled, "Jesmyn Ward and Toni Morrison's Black Feminist Gazes: Memory, Violence, and the Politics of Deviance" at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting in Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- His debut poetry chapbook *Stopgap* (winner of the *Sow's Ear Poetry Review* Chapbook Contest) was published in December 2019, with a release reading held at Young Chicago Authors.
- Awarded a Mellon Sawyer Seminar Dissertation Fellowship for 2020-2021 as part of the "Black Arts Archive: The Problem of Translation" Seminar at Northwestern.

**Jared Rodriguez**

- Gave two invited talks in November 2019 at The American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in San Diego. One was on Sylvia Wynter and the Philosophy of Religion and the other was on Neoliberalism, Demonization, and Blackness.
- Delivered a February 2020 talk at the American Philosophical Association's annual Midwest regional conference for an author meets critics session on Marquis Bey's "Them Goon Rules: Fugitive Essays on Radical Black Feminism."
- Will defend his dissertation shortly and has accepted a position as a tenure-track Assistant Professor in the Department of Gender and Race Studies at The University of Alabama.

**ALUMNI NEWS:****Dr. Frederick Staidum ('15)**

- Was named a [2020 Career Enhancement Fellow by the Mellon and Woodrow Wilson](#) foundations. The fellowship creates career development opportunities for selected Fellows with promising research projects.

**Dr. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor ('13)**

- Recently awarded three major prizes by the Organization of American Historians for her book *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. The book stemmed from her Ph.D. dissertation.

**HOW TO SUPPORT AFAM:**

To continue the great work of our students and faculty, please consider contributing directly to the department. With your generous gift, we will be able to fund student travel experiences to conduct important research; support the scholarly production and innovative teaching of our faculty; and produce outstanding programming for the campus, Evanston and Chicago communities. We could not do it without your support. Please visit our website <http://www.afam.northwestern.edu/community/how-to-support-afam.html> for instructions on how to give directly to the department.



The Northwestern University Arch.  
Photo by Seth Bernstein.