

Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship

A Year In Revue

May 2015



A Letter from the Editors

For the past 24 years the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program at Washington University in St. Louis has strived to address the serious problem of underrepresentation and inequality in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Over the past year, events around the world, in this country, and even in this very city remind us of the continued obligation we all have to pursue this mission and to participate in other projects that call for greater social equality. As current Mellon fellows, we are in the process of exploring and forming our own academic identities at a time when our context is rapidly changing. Increasing competitiveness, lack of opportunities, and a reduction in resources devoted to the humanities and social sciences is making it increasingly more difficult to devote oneself to the pursuit of knowledge in these fields. It is in this context that we increasingly identify as “Activist Scholars,” dedicated to investigation not solely for the satisfaction of our own curiosities but to also challenge injustice, both inside and outside of the academy. This is reflected in both our individual research projects as well as in our activities outside of the fellowship. Guided by strong mentors and program leaders, this past year has been transformative for individual fellows as well as for the program, as new events and new people have facilitated the exchange and dissemination of ideas, at Washington University and beyond.

- Chelsea Whitaker and Daniel Kennedy

Senior Fellows, Class of 2015

Introducing: Dr. Jeffrey McCune

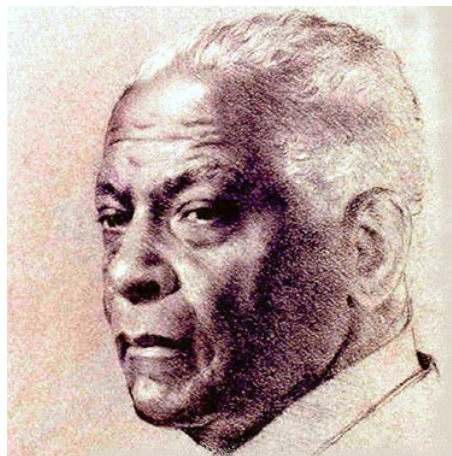


In the summer of 2014, the Mellon Mays Fellowship gained a valuable asset to our program – a new director. With just a year under his belt with dual appointments in the Performing Arts Department and Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies, Dr. Jeffrey Q. McCune was appointed to direct the Mellon Mays Program here at Washington University.

Dr. McCune earned his doctorate in Performance Studies from Northwestern University in 2007. Since then he has taught at the University of Maryland, College Park and published his first book, *Sexual Discretion: Black Masculinity and the Politics of Passing*, examining the lives of African-American men who have sex with men while main-

taining a heterosexual lifestyle in public. When he is not teaching some of the most popular courses on campus, mentoring multiple students, or working with Mellon fellows, Dr. McCune also serves as an associate editor for *Text and Performance Quarterly*, is a member on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Homosexuality and Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*. Following Mellon's goal of transdisciplinary scholarship, Dr. McCune is also an active playwright and performer, with credits including *Dancin' the Down Low* (2005), *See-Saw: An Imbalance of Identities* (2008) and *Archives of Violence* (2013).

We are excited to welcome Dr. Jeffrey McCune into the Mellon Mays Program, which can only grow from his expertise and willingness to push us to a higher level of academic excellence.



The Legacy of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays

Benjamin Elijah Mays was born in 1895 in South Carolina, and graduated from Bates College in Maine in 1920. While obtaining his master's degree and doctorate from the University of Chicago, he was ordained into the Baptist ministry. He taught at Morehouse College and at South Carolina State College. From 1934 to 1940, he served as dean of the Howard University School of Religion and then moved on to the presidency of Morehouse College, a position he distinguished for the next quarter of a century. He also served his community well, becoming the first black president of the Atlanta school board.

He spoke early and often against segregation and for education. He received nearly thirty honorary doctorates and other honors and awards including election to the Schomburg Honor Roll of Race Relations, one of a dozen major leaders so honored. He had been a model for one of his Morehouse students, Martin Luther King, Jr., and he served the young minister as an unofficial senior advisor. He gave the eulogy at King's funeral. Among his books were the first sociological study of African-American religion, *The Negro's Church*, published in 1933; *The Negro's God*, in 1938; *Disturbed About Man*, in 1969; and his autobiography *Born to Rebel*, in 1971. These books reveal a combination of sharp intellect with religious commitment and prophetic conviction.

"Every man and woman is born into the world to do something unique and something distinctive."

— Benjamin E. Mays

A Community of Scholars: New Events Facilitate the Exchange of Ideas

Mellon Mays Regional Conference at the University of Chicago

This fall semester, our fellows had the privilege of attending the Mellon Mays Midwest Regional Conference with fellows from the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Oberlin College, and Macalester College. Attending a Mellon conference was a first for both the juniors and seniors, not only meeting Mellon colleagues from the Midwest but also young Mellon alumni making strides in their fields such as

Eve Ewing hailing from Harvard and Washington U's very own, Vi Chaudhry, who is currently pursuing a PhD in anthropology at Northwestern University. The weekend's activities ranged from personal statement workshops to getting timely advice from current PhD students. Of course, our favorite part of the conference was exploring the city of Chicago at the end of the conference and the late nights spent with other Mellon fellows!



The First Annual Mellon Mays

Undergraduate Fellowship Research Symposium

Instead of the typical in-class senior final presentations, Dr. McCune raised the stakes this semester and introduced the first annual Mellon Mays Research Symposium. First, the juniors gave five to seven minute paper presentations – panel-style – with constructive criticism from Dr. McCune followed by audience Q & A. Following the juniors, the seniors were categorically paired – Daniel Kennedy & Lauren Henley and Chelsea Whitaker & Christian Gordon – and given a graduate student related to their fields as a respondent. Each senior fellow gave a fifteen minute conference-style paper presentation followed by feedback from their graduate respondent. Dale Kretz, a history doctoral candidate attended to Daniel and Lauren, while Danielle Conley, a masters student in theatre and performance studies gave constructive feedback to Christian and Chelsea. Mentors, graduate students, library staff, and fellows all found the symposium went above and beyond their expectations, impressed not only by the depth and complexity of the presentations but also by the professionalism and conference-style of the program. We cannot wait for the Second Annual MMUF Symposium next year!

MMUF at Washington University:

Program Profile

Founded: 1992

Total Fellows: 127

Cohorts: 23

PhDs: 23

PhD Candidates: 13

MFAs: 3

Tenured Alumni: 3

Tenure-Track Alumni: 6

Post-Doctoral Alumni: 3

Current Fellows: 10

The 21st MMUF Cohort Class of 2015



Christian Gordon

Major: Educational Studies

Project Title: Toughing it Out: Black Boys and the Re/Production of Success Identities

Future Plans: Christian will be traveling to Turkey next year to teach English on a Fulbright Grant.



Lauren Henley

Majors: History and African and African American Studies

Project Title: "Destined for Pregnancy, Prostitution, or Prison": Negotiating Institutionalized Black Girlhood During Progressivism

Future Plans: Lauren will be attending the University of Texas-Austin to pursue a PhD in history.



Daniel Kennedy

Majors: Anthropology and Latin American Studies

Project Title: The Service Economy of Sponsorship: Examining the Labor of Producing the Poor in Guatemala

Future Plans: Daniel will be returning to his home state of Kansas to finish prerequisites for medical school.



Chelsea Whitaker

Majors: Drama and African and African American Studies

Project Title: What's Race Got To Do With It?: David Mamet's Lynching Drama for the White Man

Future Plans: Chelsea will be moving to Madison, Wisconsin where she will work for Epic Systems Corporation.

The 22nd MMUF Cohort

Class of 2016



Fabian Barch

Majors: Educational Studies and French

Project Title: LGBT Life in Paradise: Exploring the Effects of a Progressive Legal Climate and a Homophobic Culture on the Lives of LGBT Youth in Martinique



Kisha Bwenge

Majors: International and Area Studies

Project Title: Investigating the Impact of the Development-model of Cultural Tourism on the Maasai and Hadzabe Communities in Northern Tanzania



Alex Novelli

Majors: International and Area Studies and Economics

Project Title: The Fragility of Informality: The Peruvian Economy and its Pirated Roots



Josalynn Smith

Major: English Literature

Project Title: Invisible Participants in the Blogosphere: Black Women as Readers and Cultural Consumer



Jonathan Williford

Majors: Applied Linguistics and Educational Studies

Project Title: Still Rise the Tongue Deferred: The Poetic Legacy of the African Slave Trade

Introducing: The 23rd MMUF Cohort Class of 2017



Sherri Gardner

Major: English

Project Title: Language of the Silenced: The Legacy of Zora Neale Hurston in Language and Culture



Reuben Forman

Major: Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Project Title: Complicating "Revitalization:" Understanding How Urban LGBT Communities Impact Metropolitan Neighborhoods



Andie Berry

Major: English Literature

Project Title: After the Fall: The Performance of Violence and Trauma in Post-9/11 Young Adult Dystopian Literature



Candace Borders

Major: Urban Studies

Project Title: Remembering the Forgotten: Collective Memory and Pruitt-Igoe



Jordan Victorian

Major: American Culture Studies

Project Title: Loving in Multicolor: Exploring how LGBTQ people of color promote community, activism, and justice with(in) poly-amorous spaces