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
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; *Dis-turbed 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.

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-

“Every man and wom-an is born into the world to do something unique and something distinctive.”

— Benjamin E. Mays
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!
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.
| 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 |
| Josalyynn 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