

ROOTS AND ROUTES

AFRICAN HERITAGE AND THE DIASPORIC JOURNEY

**GRADUATE ASSOCIATION FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY
2026 CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 25-27, 2026
MEMPHIS, TN**

SPONSORED BY GAAAH, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY,
AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS



**Wednesday,
February 25, 2026**

WELCOME

A MESSAGE FROM THE GAAAH EXECUTIVE BOARD

On behalf of the Graduate Association for African American History, it is our pleasure to welcome you to Memphis, Tennessee, for the 2026 GAAAH Conference. We are thrilled to host colleagues and friends from across the nation and around the world in the Bluff City.

This year's conference theme, *Roots and Routes: African Heritage and the Diasporic Journey*, invites us to critically engage the complexities of memory, legacy, and movement within African American history—particularly in the wake of ongoing attacks on the study and public interpretation of African American life and culture. The narratives that shape this rich history are often multifaceted and contested, informed by diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and scholarly approaches.

As we gather in Memphis, a city deeply embedded in the Black Freedom Struggle, we encourage you to reflect, exchange ideas, and build community through meaningful dialogue and collaboration. May this conference serve as a space for rigorous scholarship, creative thinking, and renewed commitment to preserving and advancing African American history.

We are honored to have you with us and look forward to the conversations and connections that will emerge over the coming days,

The GAAAH Executive Board



(in order from left to right)

Damarius Harris, Savannah Jackson-Cornell,
Aniya Gold, and Meridian McDaniel

6:00 PM – Til

Welcome Happy Hour at RP Tracks

3547 Walker Avenue

Join us for a Happy Hour ahead of the conference beginning! Mingle with GAAAH Exec and other conference participants.



ROOTS AND ROUTES

**Thursday,
February 26, 2026**

SCHEDULE

8:30 AM–9:15 AM

REGISTRATION AND WELCOME BY GAAAH EXECUTIVE OFFICERS
Fountain View Lobby, UC 363

**Chair: Neil Sharma
Commentator: Dr. Aram Goudsouzian**

“Making Freedom in the 20th Century: Black Knowledge, Migration, and Community Power”
Fountain View Room, UC 363

Learning as Contraband: An Analysis of the Origins of Black Education in Arkansas | Matthew Easton, University of Arkansas

“Burn Their Hides with Any Weapon that Comes Handy”: Adella Bond, The Great Migration, and the Philadelphia Race Riot of 1918 | Sarah Coffman, Rutgers University- New Brunswick

A Material Analysis of Ethiopianism in Brooklyn’s Rastafari Church of Haile Selassie I | Hosaena Tilahun, University of Pennsylvania

9:30 AM– 11:00 AM

Spirited Currents of the Black Atlantic and Pacific
Shelby Room, UC 342

**Chair: Savannah Jackson-Cornell
Commentator: Dr. Eron Ackerman**

Negotiating Belonging: Afro-Brazilians’ Jubilation, Adaptation and Identity in Bahia, 1773–1945 | Adedolapo Adenike Adewuyi, University of Kansas

The Pan Africanism of Black Britain: A Robinsonian Vision of Commonwealth | Jala Grant, University of California, Irvine

Shifting “Uncle Toms”: Trans-Pacific Interactions and the Myth of Black-Asian Solidarity in the Twentieth Century | Bohan Zhang, Rice University

Spirited Currents: African-Derived Religions in Grenada | Mabel Yaa Fosua Dunyo, University of Memphis

11:15 AM–12:15 PM

WRITER’S WORKSHOP
Fountain View Room, UC 363 | Hosted by Dr. Sarah Potter & Dr. Aram Goudsouzian



ROOTS AND ROUTES

**Thursday,
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SCHEDULE

12:15 PM- 1:30 PM

Lunch On Your Own!

**Chair: Meridian McDaniel
Commentator: Dr. Terrence Tucker**

Time, Space, and Resistance in Scholarship of Black History

Fountain View Room, UC 363

Making Sense of Academic Time: Black Students' Interpretations of Graduation Timelines at PWIs and HBCUs | Mariah Wade, University of California, Davis

From Uplift to Refusal: Rethinking Respectability and Radicalism in the Historiography of 20th Century Black Women | Lorri Neal, University of Memphis

Place and Politics in the Writing on Liberian Colonisation | Ian Scott, Rutgers University

Afrocentric Class Consciousness and the Reconfiguration of the Black Radical Tradition | Tyler Williams, University of Memphis

1:30 PM- 3:00 PM

Routes of Return and Pan-African Belonging

Shelby Room, UC 342

Benin Bronzes: The Scope of Cultural Nationalism and Internationalism in the Context of African Americans' Claim | Oluwakemi Adeyemi, University of Illinois College of Law

The Role of Queen Mothers in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: The Case of the Gold Coast | Roland Amoh, Western Illinois University

The Paradox of Return: Pan-Africanism, Blackness, and Migration from the United States to post-Rawlings Ghana | Aaryan Morrison, Independent Scholar

Metaphor, Liberation, and African Unity in the Speeches of Kwame Nkrumah | Wendy Yeboah, University of Memphis

**Chair: Damarius Harris
Commentator: Dr. Dennis Laumann**



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**Thursday,
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SCHEDULE

3:00 PM- 5:00 PM

Keynote Reception

3:00 PM | Fountain View Lobby, UC 363
Join us for the announcement of the Memphis State Eight Paper Prize winners and refreshments before the keynote!

Keynote: Lessons from the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement

3:45 PM | Fountain View Room, UC 342

Robby Lockett received his BA in political science from Yale University and his PhD in history from the University of Georgia. A native Mississippian, he returned home, where he is a tenured Professor of History and Director of the Margaret Walker Center and COFO Civil Rights Education Center at Jackson State University. His books include a collection of essays, *Redefining Liberal Arts Education in the 21st Century* (2021), and a monograph, *Joe T. Patterson and the White South's Dilemma: Evolving Resistance to Black Advancement* (2015).

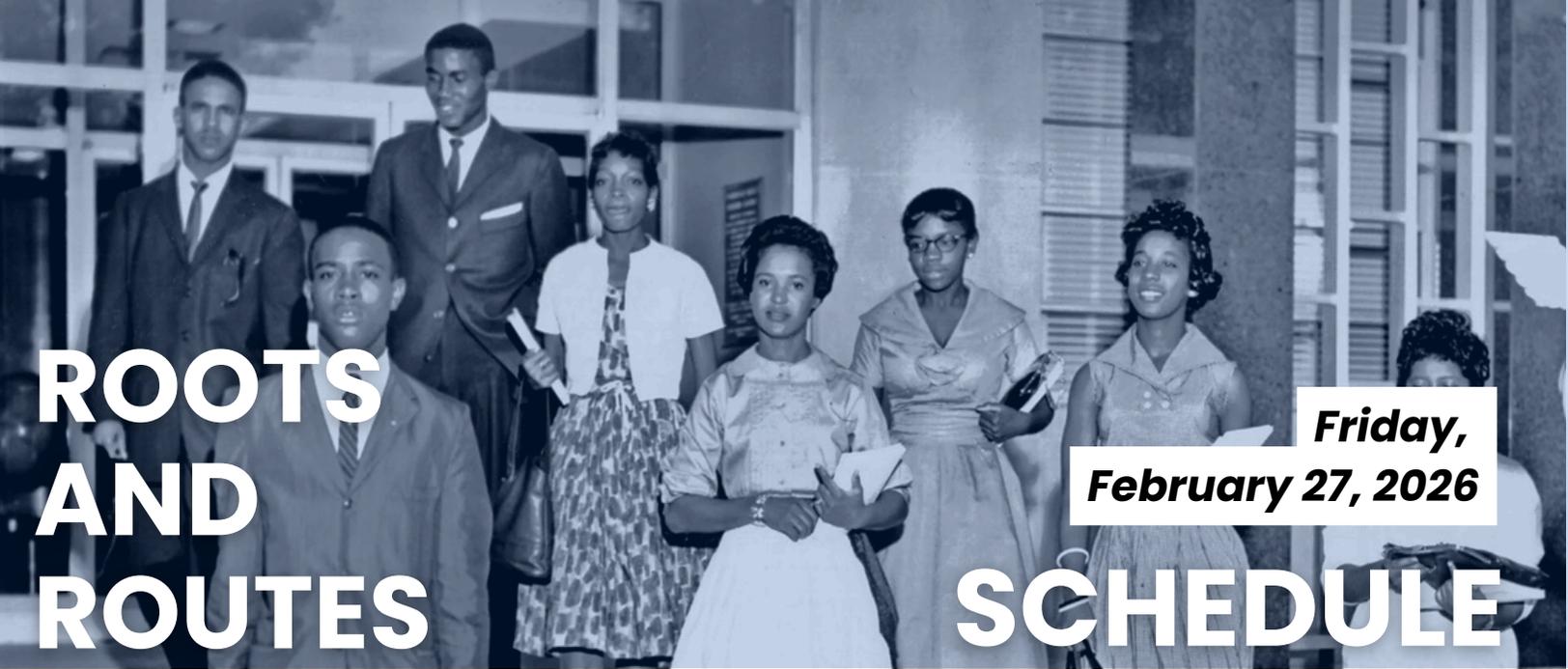


Robby is an Advisory Board member for the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Mississippi Book Festival. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Farish Street Historic District in Jackson and is a past member of the Board of Directors for the Association of African American Museums. From 2017 to 2023, he served on the Board of Trustees of the Jackson Public School District. For his work in racial equity, he was named a Kellogg Foundation Fellow. Robby has three children: Silas, Hazel, and Flip.

7:00 PM - Til

Happy Hour at RP Tracks

3547 Walker Avenue



ROOTS AND ROUTES

**Friday,
February 27, 2026**

SCHEDULE

**Chair: Aniya Gold
Commentator: Dr. Monet
Lewis-Timmons**

8:00 AM- 9:30 AM

**Chair: Savannah Jackson-
Cornell
Commentator: Dr. Sarah
Potter**

“Performance, Power, and Black Cultural Memory

Shelby Room, UC 342

Rehearsing Backlash: Tracing the Sonic Memorialization and Communal Musicality of Nina Simone and Langston Hughes’ “Backlash Blues” | Ari X, Columbia University

“They Say the Truth Hurts, So I Lied to You”: Covert Spaces, Unanswered Questions, and the Aesthetics of Quiet in Ryan Coogler’s Sinners | Gwendolyn Bellinger, Monash University

Rememory Through Music in Sinners and Sonny’s Blues | Lyric Hoover, Howard University

From Stage to Screen: The Creation and the Contemporary Persistence of Patriarchy | Monaye Johnson, Brown University

Tech, Race, and Survival in the Post-Digital Era

Memphis Room, UC 340

Mystic Vision: The Terribleness of Post-Digital Survival | Halia Benn, Howard University

Capture and Exposure: Exploring Issues of Race and Gender in Contemporary Technologies | Qaira Riley, University of Delaware

After Man: Racialized Survival and the Myth of Planetary Escape in Yinka Shonibare’s Refugee Astronaut IV | Tara Oluwafemi, Rice University





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**Friday,
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Chair: Meridian McDaniel
Commentator: Dr. Beverly
Bond

9:45 AM– 11:00 AM

Chair: Damarius Harris
Commentator: Dr. Brian
Kwoba

Bound Roots, Forced Routes: Enslavement and the Making of Black Worlds

Shelby Room, UC 342

“The River Will Make a Mighty Good Road”: Black Ecologies and Environmental Knowledge Beyond the Underground Railroad | Sidney McCall, William & Mary

The Functions of Slavery: Understanding the Spectre of Slavery in Chicago | John West, University of Illinois at Chicago

Surrogates of the Cane | Marketa Nicole McCoy, University of California, Irvine

Inherited Constraints: Incarceration, Health, and Black Life

Memphis Room, UC 340

The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Incarceration and Mortality Rates Among Formerly Incarcerated Black Males and Its Policy Implications | Ataeviya Dilworth, Morgan State University

Incarcerated Women’s Living Conditions and Resistance in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 1965–1974 | Aasha Jackson, University of Pennsylvania

11:30 AM– 1:30 AM

History in the Now, Roundtable

Shelby Room, UC 342

Join us for a roundtable to discuss the ways that Routes and Routes connect to the “History in the Now.”

- **Moderator:** Dr. Cookie Woolner, Freeburg Associate Professor | Director of Graduate Studies
- Dr. Brian Kwoba, Associate Professor | Director of African and African American Studies (AAAS), University of Memphis
- Dr. Monet Lewis-Timmons, Assistant Professor, University of Memphis
- Dr. Shatavia Wynn, Assistant Professor, Religious Studies and Africana Studies, Rhodes College



SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL WHO MADE THIS CONFERENCE POSSIBLE

Graduate Association for African American History (GAAAH)

Department of History, University of Memphis

African and African American Studies (AAAS)

Dr. Robby Lockett, Keynote Speaker

Savannah Jackson-Cornell, GAAAH President

Aniya Gold, GAAAH Executive Board

Damarius Harris, GAAAH Executive Board

Meridian McDaniel, GAAAH Executive Board

Dr. Brian Kwoba, GAAAH Faculty Advisor and Director of African and African
American Studies (AAAS)

Karen Bradley, Department of History

Dr. Erika Feleg, Department of History

Dr. Aram Goudsouzian, Commentator and Panelist

Dr. Eron Ackerman, Commentator

Dr. Terrence Tucker, Commentator

Dr. Dennis Laumann, Commentator

Dr. Monet Lewis-Timmons, Commentator and Panelist

Dr. Sarah Potter, Commentator and Panelist

Dr. Beverly Bond, Commentator

Dr. Cookie Woolner, Panel Moderator

Dr. Shatavia Wynn, Panelist

All Panelists

GAAAH Alumnae

A LOCAL'S GUIDE TO MEMPHIS

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Downtown:

Silky O'Sullivan's
183 Beale Street

B.B. King's Blues Club
143 Beale Street

Tin Roof
315 Beale Street

Central BBQ
147 E Butler Avenue

National Civil Rights Museum
450 Mulberry Street

Beale Street
(the whole street!)

East Memphis

Novel
387 Perkins Extension

Hog and Hominy
707 W Brookhaven Circle

Corky's Ribs & BBQ
5259 Poplar Avenue

Tacos Nganas
4255 Summer Avenue

Board to Beers
3482 Plaza Avenue

Memphis Museum of Science &
History (Pink Palace)
3050 Central Avenue

Cooper Young

Young Avenue Deli
2119 Young Avenue

Aldos Pizza Pies
752 Cooper Street

Bain Barbecue
993 Cooper Street

Celtic Crossing Irish Pub
903 Cooper Street

Goner Records
2152 Young Avenue

Coffee Shops:

City & State
2625 Broad Avenue

Belltower
525 S Highland Street

French Truck Coffee
395 S Highland Street

Otherlands
641 S Cooper Street

Jojo's Espresso
1730 S Germantown Road

A GUIDE TO THIS PROGRAM'S IMAGES

Four members of the Memphis State Eight, the first African American students to be admitted to Memphis State University stand at a side entrance to the Administration Building in September 1959. L-r: Marvis LaVerne Kneeland, Sammie Burnett, Eleanor Gandy, and Ralph Prater.



The "Memphis State Eight", the first African American students to be admitted to Memphis State University in September 1959 standing near West Hall on Patterson Street. From left: John Simpson, Ralph Prater, Luther McClellan, Marvis LaVerne Kneeland, Bertha Rogers, Eleanor Gandy, Rose Blakney, and Sammie Burnett.



All photos sourced from *The Commercial Appeal* collection at the University of Memphis Libraries. Follow this QR Code to access these images!

For more information on the Memphis State Eight, follow this QR code!



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The "Memphis State Eight", the first African American students to be admitted to Memphis State University in September 1959 with Dean of Men R.M. Robison. Seated from left: Sammie Burnett, Ralph Prater, Luther McClellan, Eleanor Gandy, Bertha Mae Rogers, John Simpson, Marvis LaVerne Kneeland and Rose Blakney.



The Memphis State Eight in September, 1959. (Left to right) Ralph Prater, Luther McClellan (foreground), John Simpson, Eleanor Gandy, Sammie Burnett, Bertha Mae Rogers, Marvis LaVerne Kneeland, and Rose Blakney.



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