

# 44<sup>th</sup> Annual South-Eastern Undergraduate Sociology Symposium

## *The Enduring Promise of Sociology*

February 27-28, 2026

**Sponsored by:**

Emory University Departments of Sociology and Data and Decision Sciences  
and Morehouse College Department of Sociology

**Co-organizers:** Megan Reed, Ju Hyun Park, and Arlo Pittman

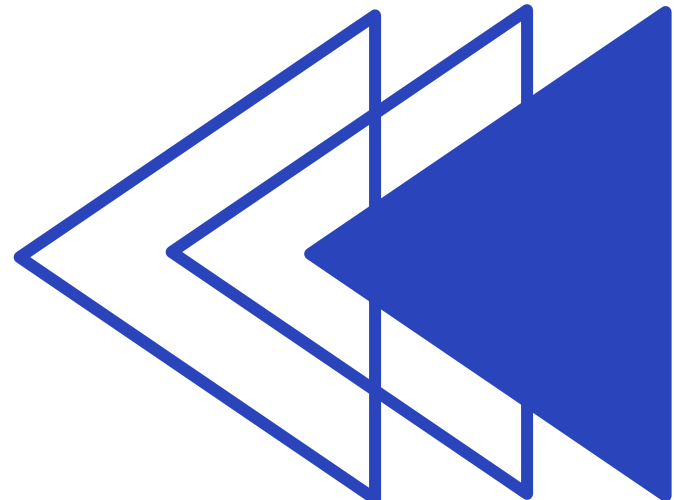
**Paper evaluation committee:** Megan Reed, Nathan Hoffman, and Ju Hyun Park



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# Schedule of Events

## Friday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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**5:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**      **Check-in**  
Convocation Hall Room 210

**6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.**      **Banquet**  
Convocation Hall Room 210

**Opening Remarks** by Dr. Megan Reed, SEUSS Co-Chair and Assistant Professor of Sociology, Emory University

**Welcome Address** by Dr. Joe Crespino, Interim Dean of Emory College of Arts and Sciences & Jimmy Carter Professor of History, Emory University

**Keynote Speaker Introduction** by Dr. Karen Hegtvedt, Professor of Sociology, Emory University

**Keynote Address** on “**The Enduring Promise of Sociology**” by Dr. Steven Foy, Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Texas Alliance for Research on Sociological Issues lab at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

## Saturday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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**8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.**      **Check-in and Morning Reception** with coffee and light breakfast  
Psychology & Interdisciplinary Sciences (PAIS) Room 230

**9:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.**      **Early Morning Sessions**  
PAIS Rooms 235 & 250

**10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.**      **Late Morning Sessions**  
PAIS Rooms 235 & 250

**11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**      **Lunch**  
PAIS Room 230

**12:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.**      **Early Afternoon Sessions**  
PAIS Rooms 235 & 250

**1:45 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.**      **Closing Reception and Awards Ceremony** with desserts  
PAIS Room 230

# Symposium Schedule

## Saturday, February 28th

### Check in and Morning Reception

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**8:30 - 9:00 am**

Coffee, tea, bagels, and muffins will be served

PAIS Room 230

### Early Morning Sessions

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**9:00 - 10:15 am**

#### Panel 1: Urban Inequality

PAIS Room 235

Session Presider: Ye Yuan

*The Transit Trade-Off: How Density, Public Transportation and Commute Times Relate to Economic Outcomes in American Cities*

Keaton Anderson, Morehouse College

*An Analysis of Redlining in Nashville, Tennessee*

Chloe Tomlinson, Virginia Tech

*Retail Theft and Community Impacts in Sullivan County, Tennessee*

Eliana Smith and Lili Dase, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

*Designing Inequality: Gender, Sexuality, and the Built Environment of Global Cities*

Lilian Carter, Vanderbilt University

#### Panel 2: College Identity Formation

PAIS Room 250

Session Presider: Ladin Toplu

*An Ambassador or Anomaly? Exploring How Black Students Negotiate their identity in Study Abroad Experiences*

DayMond Johnson, Morehouse College

*Identity of Minorities: Effects of Marginalization*

Emma Collins, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

*Not Quite Undaunted: Exploring Identity, Archetypes, and Belonging Among Students at Spelman College*

Nailah Saint-Louis, Spelman College

*You Speak so Well*

Tre'von Henderson, Morehouse College

## Late Morning Sessions

10:30 – 11:45 am

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### Panel 3: Health and Institutions

PAIS Room 235

Session Presider: Xueqian Cheng

*Structural Competency: How Immigrant Health is Discussed in Medical Education*

Margaret Wei, Georgia Tech

*Political Affiliation and its Relationship to Mental Health and Well-Being in an Era of Political Polarization: A Scoping Review*

Hera Oh, Emory University

*Contact and Criticism: How Serious Illness Shapes Perceptions of NHS Performance*

Maria Silva and Madison McConnell, Emory University

### Panel 4: Education and Inequality

PAIS Room 250

Session Presider: Ye Yuan

*The Educational Impacts of COVID-19 in the United States: How Online Instruction Affected a Generation of Students*

Eliana Scott, Columbus State University

*Tracing the Lives of Three Children from Milner, GA, through the records of the Friends School, Providence, RI, (1873-1883)*

Gabe Vu, Emory University

*From Silent Struggles to Barriers and Bridges: How Identity Shapes Perceptions of Mental Health Resources at HBCUs*

Jamie Davis, Spelman College

*Making Them Known: The Lives of Working First-Generation College Students at an Elite University*

Thien Nguyen, Emory University

## Lunch

11:45 am - 12:30 pm

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Sandwiches and salads will be served

PAIS Room 230

## Early Afternoon Sessions

12:30 – 1:45 pm

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### Panel 5: Theorizing Social Problems

PAIS Room 235

Session Presider: Xueqian Cheng

*Inspections of & Alternatives to the Bechdel-Wallace Test*  
Piper Smith, Agnes Scott College

*Drivers of Road Rage: A Social Phenomenon*  
Rachel Turner, Columbus State University

*Living in the Border: The Governance of Mobility*  
Xinyun Ma, Emory University

*Global Contradictions: Third Wave Feminism and the Limits of Western Inclusivity*  
Kennedy McNeal, Agnes Scott College

### Panel 6: Racial Identities and Inequalities

PAIS Room 250

Session Presider: Ladin Toplu

*Sanctified Whiteness: Race, Coloniality, and Christian Iconography in Cape Coast, Ghana*  
Tabitha Meadors, Rhodes College

*“Motherwork” from an “Othermother” Perspective*  
Jess Sheffield, Agnes Scott College

*Authentic Black Masculinity: An Exploration of Black Men's Perceived and Experienced Identities*  
Jackson Buckner, Morehouse College

## Closing Reception & Awards Ceremony

1:45 – 2:15 pm

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Desserts will be served

PAIS Room 230

# Paper Abstracts

## Panel 1: Urban Inequality

### *The Transit Trade-Off: How Density, Public Transportation and Commute Times Relate to Economic Outcomes in American Cities*

Keaton Anderson, Morehouse College

Faculty sponsor: Nia Reed

This study aimed to determine whether transit infrastructure, transportation access, commute times, and urban density are associated with better economic outcomes for citizens, thereby indicating a higher quality of life. The data were collected from 14 cities across America using correlational methods, including Spearman's correlation and linear regression. Despite the hypothesis, the results were mainly mixed, with some interesting findings. Higher car usage correlated with lower average incomes and home prices. Secondly, higher transit usage strongly predicted lower car ownership ( $r = -.832, p < .001$ ) and higher density predicted lower car dependency ( $r = -.758, p = .002$ ). Dense cities demonstrated significantly longer commute times ( $r = .903, p < .001$ ). High density did not show much correlation with household income or housing affordability, contradicting the proposed hypothesis ( $r = .292, p = .311$ ). Higher incomes also suggested higher housing costs, worsening affordability among city participants; in turn, housing costs often reflect local incomes and vice versa. This data suggests that, often, larger and more dense cities have a higher tax base at all levels, allowing them to afford denser, more robust transit. Secondly, cities need to implement more transit-oriented development, as transit-oriented development oftentimes increases the amount of money going towards a transit system, while simultaneously lowering the cost of living for residents as the supply goes up and demand stays the same (which means that a broader range of incomes can afford to rent an apartment or buy a condo). Transit agencies, development companies, and city governments should work together to build faster, more reliable transit while creating dense urban cores around those areas to increase housing, increase density, lower the costs of living as economic strategies to make cities more livable and increase the tax base to build more and expand for the cities tomorrow.

### *An Analysis of Redlining in Nashville, Tennessee*

Chloe Tomlinson, Virginia Tech

Faculty sponsor: Rebecca Franklin

Nashville, Tennessee was one of the urban cities that key governmental housing agencies such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) went into to distribute housing loans to its citizens. One program that was included within the New Deal, the FHA, was originally a program designed to give middle class Americans an opportunity to become homeowners. However, it was deliberately racially discriminatory toward Black Americans which resulted in White Americans being the only group able to access these housing loans. This study focuses on these inequities in Nashville, Tennessee and investigates to what extent Black Americans were excluded from governmental housing agencies. In addition, it looks into how this affected their generational access to other institutions such as education. This study was conducted as a qualitative content analysis through secondary forms of research such as newspapers, direct policy initiatives, and online forums. The content analysis revealed the explicit racial undertones surrounding housing policies in the 20th century that led to actions such as "redlining" and the resulting inequities present in other institutions because of it. Ultimately, this article finds that "redlining" was a deliberate governmental policy that created a generational inequity based on race in American neighborhoods.

### *Retail Theft and Community Impacts in Sullivan County, Tennessee*

Eliana Smith and Lili Dase, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Faculty sponsor: Kyra Martinez

Retail theft has traditionally been prosecuted under the Tennessee Code Annotated as theft of property under \$1,000 or shoplifting. When someone is accused of shoplifting at Walmart, they are issued a trespass form,

banning them from any Walmart property. If they are accused of shoplifting from Walmart again, they can be charged with trespassing. In 2020, the Tennessee Supreme Court ruled that the burglary statute could also be applied to anyone accused of shoplifting while trespassing at Walmart. Burglary is a class D felony with the potential for a 12 year prison sentence. After analyzing 119 Walmart retail theft cases from Kingsport, TN, we found that most charged persons were deemed indigent, the most frequently prosecuted group were women aged 35-49, and the median merchandise value of items in each case was \$92.84 compared to the median total fees and costs assessed per case of \$588. These findings and our interviews of law enforcement and public defenders expose the criminalization of poverty in Tennessee. We find that the burglary statute is being used to threaten charged persons into pleading guilty, and that costs and community harms from these prosecutions are substantial.

### ***Designing Inequality: Gender, Sexuality, and the Built Environment of Global Cities***

Lilian Carter, Vanderbilt University

Faculty sponsor: Shatema Threadcraft

This research examines how global cities reproduce gendered and queer exclusion through ostensibly neutral infrastructure and planning practices. Drawing on feminist urbanism, queer theory, and spatial justice frameworks, the paper argues that public space is a political and human rights arena shaped by historical assumptions about gender, sexuality, labor, and citizenship. Through analysis of mobility systems, housing policy, public space governance, and institutional planning models, it demonstrates that exclusion is infrastructural rather than incidental. The paper concludes by outlining principles for just urban design that center care, embodied difference, and the right to appear as foundational to equitable urban futures.

## **Panel 2: College Identity Formation**

### ***An Ambassador or Anomaly? Exploring How Black Students Negotiate their identity in Study Abroad Experiences***

DayMond Johnson, Morehouse College

Faculty sponsor: Marisela Martinez-Cola

A substantial body of research on global study abroad experiences emphasizes their role in fostering intercultural competence and personal development. While this scholarship provides valuable insights, it largely overlooks the unique challenges faced by Black Male American students, specifically those attending HBCUs. Through a survey of HBCU students, the author examines how Black Male students negotiate identity, navigate racial and national perceptions, and reconcile global and domestic understandings of self. Using a framework grounded in Double Consciousness, Intersectionality, and Framing Theory, the study argues that these experiences produce complex forms of self-understanding that extend beyond traditional U.S.-centric models of identity.

### ***Identity of Minorities: Effects of Marginalization***

Emma Collins, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Faculty Sponsor: Christina Ergas

Discrimination is a long-standing, normative behavior in American society, and directly leads to adverse effects in marginalized individuals such as poor mental health, self-image issues, and ongoing resentment (Schmitt et al., 2020, p. 216). The modern prevalence of discrimination only continues this trend and exacerbates these effects. According to health psychology researchers at the University of Mannheim, “Discrimination, beyond its overt manifestation in unfair treatment based on social identity, is intrinsically tied to societal structures, cultural prejudice, and power dynamics” (Emmer, Dorn, & Mata, 2024). The marginalization of minority-identifying individuals has become a common occurrence in modern America and presents itself in several ways – all of which detrimental to those experiencing it. This spans across nearly every minority and works its way into the common-day lives of their relative individuals. Particularly, while speaking on the effects that repetitive marginalization has on individuals, a group of social science psychologists assert that the

“mistreatment and disadvantages resulting from different types of discrimination represent a threat to the fundamental human rights of equality and psychological well-being... Being treated with less courtesy and respect than other people or being treated as less intelligent or less trustworthy can also cause harm,” (Schmitt et al., 2014, p. 216). Discrimination has long lasting effects on the minds of those experiencing it. Groups that are deemed a “minority” or “marginalized” are subject to innumerable forms of discrimination – such as stereotypes and prejudice – resulting in feelings of invalidation, loss of emotions, etc. Several studies have been done to show how being part of a minority can affect someone's overall mental health, but few have identified the specific effects and their connection with their respective forms of discrimination. This study is intended to advance knowledge into these intricacies, and find answers to the research question: how does being a member of minority groups affect a college-level individual’s lifestyle, mindset, and identity?

### ***Not Quite Undaunted: Exploring Identity, Archetypes, and Belonging Among Students at Spelman College***

Nailah Saint-Louis, Spelman College

Faculty sponsor: Celeste Lee

"Not Quite Undaunted: Exploring Identity, Archetypes, and Belonging Among Students at Spelman College" seeks to understand how students at Spelman College disidentify with—exist on and against—the Spelman Woman archetype (Muñoz 2009). Further, this research is interested in how the cultural valuation of an institutional ideal paired with a student’s relationship to the archetype impacts students’ sense of belonging. The Spelman Woman archetype is a cultural keystone of Spelman College that encompasses the (expectation of) excellence from current students and alumnae alike. While the archetype’s definition varies across time and between individuals, this research stresses the ideological implications that respectability politics casts upon racialized and gendered expectations within the Spelman Woman archetype. This research employs both semi-structured interviews with current Spelman Students and a year-long autoethnographic project, placing the experiences of multiple Spelman students in conversation with one another. The findings of this research suggest that students sometimes embody the archetype as a tool of empowerment but often feel that their entire selves cannot fit within the mold due to their class status, appearance, or sexuality. Additionally, while students expressed that they belonged to the pocket of Spelman they’ve built for themselves, they did not feel like they belonged to Spelman as an institution due to their ‘failure’ to measure-up to the Spelman Woman ideal. Through its analysis, Not Quite Undaunted investigates the impacts of the Spelman Woman archetype in hopes of probing more questions about the expectations Black women face at elite institutions—even the ones constructed with only their best interest in mind.

### ***You Speak so Well***

Tre’von Henderson, Morehouse College

Faculty sponsor: Marisela Martinez-Cola

This study examines how Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) navigate identity through the learned practice of code-switching. Drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness, Elijah Anderson’s work on racial navigation, and Erving Goffman’s theory of performance, and Frantz Fanon’s Black impression management, I analyze how code-switching functions not only in predominantly white spaces but also within Black collegiate environments. For this project, code-switching is defined as a learned behavioral strategy acquired in adolescence through repeated exposure to social expectations that enables Black students to modify speech, appearance, and demeanor to appease the norms of whiteness. While often understood as a survival tactic in majority-white settings, I argue that code-switching persists at HBCUs, shaping how students present themselves to peers, faculty, and institutional structures. By centering Black college students’ voices, this research explores the tension between authenticity and performance, revealing how code-switching can simultaneously affirm belonging and reproduce constraints rooted in white cultural dominance. Ultimately, this work contributes to broader sociological conversations on identity performance, racialized socialization, and the complexity of negotiating Blackness in higher education.

## **Panel 3: Health and Institutions**

### ***Structural Competency: How Immigrant Health is Discussed in Medical Education***

Margaret Wei, Georgia Tech

Faculty sponsor: Allen Hyde

Immigrants and their U.S.-born children comprise over a quarter of the U.S. population and experience health disparities compared to their native-born counterparts. While sociological and public health scholarship emphasize structural explanations for these disparities, less is known about how such explanations are taught in the curriculum of medical schools, despite a growing body of literature emphasizing a general need for structural competency in medical training in order for clinicians to address stigma-related health inequalities (Metzl and Hansen 2014). This study takes a look at how structural competency frameworks are incorporated into the experiences of medical students in regards to understanding the health of immigrant populations. Drawing on seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews with medical students and a first-year resident physician across six U.S. medical schools, this qualitative analysis explores participants' exposure to immigrant health in their medical school curricula, their interpretations of barriers to care, and their views on the physician's role in addressing structural determinants of health. Findings reveal wide variability in curricular attention to immigrant health and a near absence of explicit structural competency training. Despite this, participants consistently identified structural factors, such as insurance exclusion and immigration enforcement, as central to immigrant health outcomes. These results suggest that while structural ways of thinking are intuitive to many trainees, medical education often fails to provide standardized frameworks to translate this awareness into practice. The study highlights critical gaps in medical training and underscores the need for more consistent, structurally informed approaches to preparing physicians to care for immigrant populations.

### ***Political Affiliation and its Relationship to Mental Health and Well-Being in an Era of Political Polarization: A Scoping Review***

Hera Oh, Emory University

Faculty sponsor: Ju Hyun Park

There is a growing partisan difference in mental health and well-being in the United States, with liberals often reporting worse outcomes than conservatives. However, the sources of these differences remain unclear. This scoping review examines how political affiliation is associated with mental health and well-being outcomes in the United States and assesses how mediating factors shape these associations. Included studies were peer-reviewed, focused on U.S. populations, examined political affiliation or ideology in relation to mental health or well-being outcomes, and were published between 2010 and 2025. Studies were excluded if they did not measure mental health outcomes, focused on non-U.S. samples, or assessed well-being narrowly (e.g., happiness alone). Six peer-reviewed studies were identified through database searches and cited reference searching. These studies drew on national survey datasets and included measures of political ideology, mental health symptoms, well-being indicators, stigma, and psychological traits. Key study characteristics and findings were extracted, including health and political variables, study design, data sources, measures, covariates, analytic method, and key findings. Findings were synthesized to identify patterns across studies. Across studies, political ideology was indirectly associated with mental health and well-being. Higher distress among liberals was mediated by greater mental health awareness and political engagement, while conservatives' higher well-being was explained by psychological traits rather than ideology alone. Right-wing authoritarianism strongly predicted mental health stigma, while ideological differences were also sensitive to question wording and measurement framing. Observed partisan differences in mental health and well-being appear to be shaped primarily by mediating factors rather than political ideology alone. Future research should account for these mediating factors and the broader political climate when interpreting mental health differences across partisan groups.

### ***Contact and Criticism: How Serious Illness Shapes Perceptions of NHS Performance***

Maria Silva and Madison McConnell, Emory University

Faculty sponsor: Karen Hegtvedt

Evaluations of healthcare systems are often shaped by personal encounters, particularly during times of serious illness when individuals interact the most with medical systems. This study examines how personal or familial serious illness experience influences perceptions of the National Health Service (NHS) overall performance, and whether or not this relationship varies by age cohort. Using data from a class wide public opinion survey of 338 permanent UK residents in central London, this paper analyzes the association between serious illness experience and overall NHS performance evaluations. Bivariate and stratified analysis show a statistically significant relationship between illness experience and NHS evaluations in the broader sample, primarily carried by respondents under age 50. Among younger adults, those with serious illness experience were less likely to rate the NHS as “very good” or “excellent” and more likely to provide more critical evaluations. However no significant relationship was observed among respondents aged 50 and over. These findings suggest that serious illness exposure keeps perceptions in a more moderate area, avoiding overly enthusiastic or dissatisfactory perceptions, particularly among younger cohorts. This paper contributes to sociological understandings of institutional trust by highlighting how repeated system contact and generational expectations shape assessments of healthcare performance in a universal, publicly accountable system like the NHS.

## **Panel 4: Education and Inequality**

### ***The Educational Impacts of COVID-19 in the United States: How Online Instruction Affected a Generation of Students***

Eliana Scott, Columbus State University

Faculty sponsor: Brennan Gonzalez

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an unprecedented disruption to the United States education system, forcing a rapid shift from in-person instruction to online learning across K–12 schooling. This paper examines how this sudden transformation affected both the academic and social functions of education and considers the broader societal implications of these disruptions. Using a structural functionalist framework, the study analyzes education as a central social institution responsible not only for knowledge transmission but also for socialization, moral development, and the maintenance of social cohesion. Drawing on the theoretical work of Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert K. Merton, this paper argues that the pandemic undermined both the manifest and latent functions of education. This argument is supported by empirical research that documents declines in standardized test scores, widened socioeconomic achievement gaps, and increased mental health challenges among youth. The analysis demonstrates that the rapid and unplanned transition to online instruction destabilized the equilibrium between education and other social institutions, particularly the family, while simultaneously weakening peer socialization during formative developmental periods. The paper contributes to sociological research on education by integrating classical structural functionalist theory with contemporary evidence on pandemic-era schooling. It advances the argument that COVID-19-related educational disruptions represent not only short-term learning loss but a broader social and developmental challenge with potential long-term consequences for social integration, workforce preparedness, and societal stability.

### ***Tracing the Lives of Three Children from Milner, GA, through the records of the Friends School, Providence, RI, (1873-1883)***

Gabe Vu, Emory University

Faculty sponsor: Roberto Franzosi

From 1873 – 1883, Andrew Jackson White’s three children – Edward William White, Lenora White, and Sarah Adelaide (“Addie”) White – attended the Friends School, a Quaker boarding school in Providence, Rhode Island. The grade books, cash books, and ledger books obtained from the school (today Moses Brown School) provide invaluable insight into the daily lives of the White children. These original handwritten documents were scanned and transcribed into Excel, allowing for analysis of each child’s academic performance and spending

habits over the duration of their attendance at the Friends School. The reconstruction of these entries produced clearer depictions of each of the White siblings. Sarah Adelaide (“Addie”) White was a top student in her classes, with over 27.22% of her monthly placements ranked No. 1 compared to her siblings, according to the grade books. Her sister, Lenora (“Nora”) White, followed a curriculum composed of over 28.79% language courses throughout her enrollment, including Latin, German, and Greek. Ledger records indicate that the White sisters participated in art and elocution lessons outside the formal curriculum, and Nora White additionally attended lectures led by the American photographer John Lawson Stoddard. Edward William White’s records reflect different interests; he held a subscription to *Scientific American* and made expenditures distinct from those of his sisters. Cash books further reveal that the White sisters frequently pursued activities together, jointly withdrawing a recorded total of \$1,167.72, while Edward William White individually withdrew \$1,021.48. This work demonstrates how individual archival pieces can be transcribed and organized to reconstruct legible timelines for historical analysis.

***From Silent Struggles to Barriers and Bridges: How Identity Shapes Perceptions of Mental Health Resources at HBCUs***

Jamie Davis, Emory University

Faculty sponsor: Celeste Lee

This senior thesis examines how intersecting identities- race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status- shape Spelman College students’ perceptions of campus mental health resources. Centered on the main research question, “How do intersecting identities influence HBCU students’ perception of the accessibility, quality, and usefulness of campus mental health resources?”, this study uses a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews. Findings show that while most students are aware of available resources, perceptions of access, quality, and cultural responsiveness vary significantly. Students who reported identity-based barriers were more likely to feel uncertain about seeking support and unsure about how helpful services would be. Interview data further highlight concerns about transparency within the Counseling Center, limited clarity about counselor backgrounds and approaches, and the emotional labor involved in navigating support systems shaped by identity and stigma. Overall, these results reveal that although resources exist, students’ comfort, trust, and willingness to engage are profoundly shaped by identity and campus climate. The primary implication is that improving mental health engagement on HBCU campuses requires greater transparency, culturally responsive counseling practices, and support models that affirm the students’ diverse identities and experiences.

***Making Them Known: The Lives of Working First-Generation College Students at an Elite University***

Thien Nguyen, Emory University

Faculty sponsor: Karida Brown

Working during college is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon. As a result, students may experience work-school conflict, characterized as the difficulty of simultaneously balancing work and school responsibilities. This research project examines how first-generation college students (FGCS), who are more likely to be employed than their continuing-generation peers during college, experience and navigate work and its resulting impacts on their mental health. The study draws from oral history interviews with 14 undergraduates at an elite, private university in the South, paying close attention to how their lived experiences shape their work-school conflict, in an effort to humanize and cement their stories within institutional memory. Preliminary findings suggest that working FGCS place an internal pressure on themselves to become financially independent, alleviating their parents from the burden of support. Work-school conflict, then, becomes a manageable endeavor, even if it severely impedes their academics, social life, and health. Therefore, as the population of FGCS in higher education increases, it is imperative to understand the structural barriers facing these students once they matriculate into the university. Targeted support must be provided through an asset-based framework, rather than a deficit-based one.

## **Panel 5: Theorizing Social Problems**

### ***Inspections of & Alternatives to the Bechdel-Wallace Test***

Piper Smith, Agnes Scott College

Faculty sponsor: Yvonne Newsome

The Bechdel test is among the most important and notable elements of feminist filmmaking. First properly defined by comic artist Alison Bechdel, the test is routinely taken as a measure of agency for a movie's female characters and has had lasting impacts on popular culture and filmmaking since its creation in 1985. However, the test itself is a surface-level interpretation of the treatment of women in film, and its broad criteria has led to concerns about its lack of an intersectional framework and its dependency on having multiple characters as a determinant of "good" representation, among other concerns. A number of alternatives have been proposed as a means of addressing these concerns, including focuses on people of color and LGBTQ+ characters. While there is no truly correct way to "fix" the Bechdel test, the proposed alternatives provide an excellent basis for improvements and revisions for an intersectional Bechdel test. This paper seeks to learn of the original intentions of the Bechdel test, inspect applications of its criticisms, and analyze its proposed alternatives to formulate a proposed intersectional alternative.

### ***Drivers of Road Rage: A Social Phenomenon***

Rachel Turner, Columbus State University

Faculty sponsor: Brennan Gonzalez

The social phenomenon of "road rage" is unique as it is an extremely common occurrence closely tied to psychological processes and behaviors that have immediate real-world consequences. Despite the frequency of life-threatening accidents caused by this phenomenon, little has been done to address the combination of psychological and social factors regarding road safety. First recognized in the 1980s, road rage is a social issue linked directly to road stimuli. Observable behaviors associated with road rage include yelling, speeding, following too closely, hand gestures, and shootings. The catalyst for these behaviors is believed to be multifactorial, including factors such as stress, external stimuli, and personal anonymity. Road rage has been linked to intermittent explosive disorder as well as state-trait anxiety, certain coping styles, and self-determination theory. Through the philosophical framework of pragmatism, Herbert Mead's social behaviorism, W.I. Thomas's theory on the relationship between thoughts and behaviors, and Herbert Blumer's emphasis on meaning to understand human actions, we can better understand how these factors culminate to create this phenomenon. Only a thorough understanding of how these behaviors develop can properly address this social issue.

### ***Living in the Border: The Governance of Mobility***

Xinyun Ma, Emory University

Faculty sponsor: Nathan Hoffman

This research project argues that borders should no longer be understood merely as the territorial frontiers of the state; rather, they manifest as dispersed and interconnecting zones within which populations are constantly monitored so that mobility can be managed. Therefore, bordering today unfolds as an ongoing condition rather than a discrete moment of crossing. Analyzed through a Foucauldian framework of governmentality and power, the paper shows that the modern border operates as a form of securitization: it does not simply prohibit circulation but seeks to optimize it by minimizing risk while maximizing utility or profit. Embedded in everyday life, border technologies demand continual verification for access to basic necessities such as driver's licenses, jobs, and housing. As these practices proliferate worldwide, the paper conceptualizes the border as a global regime that expands spatially, temporally, and systematically. This expansion appears to encompass more people; yet those captured within it are not regarded as insiders but subjugated as others. Driven by persistent anxiety, the regime incessantly produces more forms of otherness that were once out of sight, which in turn justify its further expansion and intensification, forming a self-sustaining loop.

### ***Global Contradictions: Third Wave Feminism and the Limits of Western Inclusivity***

Kennedy McNeal, Agnes Scott College

Faculty sponsor: Yvonne Newsome

The evolution of feminism in the Western world—from early suffrage movements to mid-twentieth-century struggles for workplace equality—has profoundly reshaped gender politics in the United States and Europe. However, both First- and Second-Wave feminism were largely shaped by the experiences and priorities of affluent white women, positioning their perspectives as the normative foundation of feminist discourse. Emerging in the 1990s, Third Wave Feminism sought to challenge this legacy through an emphasis on intersectionality, a concept articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) to address the interlocking systems of oppression affecting women of color, LGBTQ+ communities, and individuals from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite this expanded theoretical framework, Third Wave Feminism has faced sustained criticism for its limited success in achieving genuine global inclusivity. This paper examines whether Third Wave Feminism has meaningfully transcended Western paradigms of liberation or whether it continues to reproduce Western-centered assumptions within feminist theory and practice. Drawing on critiques from transnational feminist scholars, the analysis reveals persistent ethnocentric and neocolonial tendencies that obscure the political, cultural, and material realities of non-Western women. Through a comparative analysis of feminist concerns in an African national context and a Western setting, the paper assesses the extent to which Third Wave Feminism offers cross-cultural relevance or reinforces a hierarchical global feminist framework. Ultimately, this research argues that feminism can only become truly transformative on a global scale by de-centering Western epistemologies and prioritizing the voices, leadership, and lived experiences of non-Western women through a de-colonial and intersectional approach.

## **Panel 6: Racial Identities**

### ***Sanctified Whiteness: Race, Coloniality, and Christian Iconography in Cape Coast, Ghana***

Tabitha Meadors, Rhodes College

Faculty sponsor: Earl Wright II

This ethnographic study in a Cape Coast church investigates how Whiteness persists as a visual, moral, and institutional structure within Ghanaian Christianity. Focusing on a Eurocentric display of Jesus at the forefront of the worship area, this study examines how this continued inaccurate portrayal functions as a symbolic, racialized mechanism. This representational imagery works to shape congregants' understandings of divinity and leadership with Eurocentric features Újvári (2020). Using participant observation and semi-structured interviews with two clergy members, this study took place over one month. This research argues that the visual display of a White Christ is not just decorative, but functions as a medium for spiritual reflection and exchange (Scherff 2025). Such plays a role in how church-goers internalize, interpret, and reproduce societal hierarchy.

### ***“Motherwork” from an “Othermother” Perspective***

Jess Sheffield, Agnes Scott College

Faculty sponsor: Yvonne Newsome

Most theorizing about Black motherhood and motherwork has been done from a dominant, western-centered view that places work in and outside the home as separate and distinct spheres. This study applies Black feminist theory to analyze motherhood and motherwork from Black women's intersectional locations and standpoints. It goes beyond the limiting assumptions made by western-centered scholarship and brings to light new and existing insights about motherwork from Black women's perspectives. Taking this approach reveals and emphasizes the critical role of othermothers and motherwork in Black communities. The study explores and analyzes the significance and contributions of motherwork by othermothers in the preservation and survival of Black individuals and communities. Primary data were drawn from two community othermothers' narratives on their own motherwork, with one being Susie King Taylor's self-authored personal chronicle of her life during the Civil War and Reconstruction era and the other consisting of an in-depth interview with, and case study of, my paternal Aunt. Secondary data were derived from research findings and theoretical arguments

presented in past scholarship. Using personal narratives values the Black feminist theoretical framework that emphasizes recognizing, centering, and empowering Black women, their voices, and Black communities. The study reveals how Black motherhood is dynamic, dialectical, and inherently contradictory (Collins, 2000). At the same time, it supports Patricia Hill Collins' (1994; 2000) argument that Black motherhood functions simultaneously as a site of self-definition and—relatedly—of individual and group survival and empowerment. The paper concludes that Black feminist perspectives work to generate and reimagine existing narratives and research in ways that give voice to, center, and empower Black women and Black communities.

***Authentic Black Masculinity: An Exploration of Black Men's Perceived and Experienced Identities***

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The United States is grounded in classist, racist, and sexist beliefs that are permeated throughout the culture and code of the country. Black men appear in an interesting intersection as one of the most oppressed groups in the state, yet still often associated with and practicing an exaggerated patriarchal attitude and character in social media and popular discussion. This engagement seeks to explore why that is, using data taken from surveys of individuals in relation to Morehouse's Black Masculinities class. Respondents indicated that they felt Black men in the US have to fight to "prove" that they are positive and productive members of society. These results initiated a range of questions, including: What are Black masculinities and what is "True/Authentic Black Masculinity"? How does patriarchal oppression look in Black spaces, and how does a patriarchal mindset affect both men and women in these spaces? What does an ideal Black Man look like inside of a patriarchal system? To engage these questions, we use Mutua's and Patricia Hill Collins' "progressive masculinities" as a framework.