

Conference Agenda
THE 2026 UNCF/MELLON PROGRAMS CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 1-3, 2026
THE WESTIN BUCKHEAD ATLANTA HOTEL
3391 PEACHTREE ROAD NE
ATLANTA, GA 30326

Scholars Transforming the Academy: Centering and Stabilizing Scholar Activism in Times Like These

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2026

12:00–4:00 pm | Pre-Function A & B: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Conference Registration

1:00–3:30 pm | East & West Paces: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Pre-Conference Luncheon and Workshop for All Mentors and Coordinators

- **Cynthia Neal Spence, Ph.D.**, UNCF/Mellon Programs Director; Social Justice Scholars Program Founding Director; Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Spelman College
- **Lauren Eldridge Stewart, Ph.D., (MMUF Fellow, Spelman College, C'10)**, Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology; Co-Director of the Summer Institute; UNCF/Mellon Advisory Board Member, Washington University in St. Louis
- **Vincent Willis, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences in New College; Co-Director of the Summer Institute; UNCF/Mellon Advisory Board Member, University of Alabama

5:30–6:00 pm | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Scholars Transforming the Academy: Centering and Stabilizing Scholar Activism in Times Like These

Welcome and Greetings

- **Cynthia Neal Spence, Ph.D.**, UNCF/Mellon Programs Director; Social Justice Scholars Program Founding Director; Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Spelman College

6:00–7:00 pm | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Opening Plenary

The Role of Scholar Activism in Times Like These – A Conversation

- **Carol Anderson, Ph.D.**, Robert W. Woodruff Professor of African American Studies, Emory University
- **Cynthia Neal Spence, Ph.D.**, UNCF/Mellon Programs Director; Social Justice Scholars Program Founding Director; Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Spelman College

7:00 pm | Pre-Function A & B: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Conference Opening Reception

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2026

8:00–8:45 am | Ballroom B: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Breakfast

8:45–10:45 am | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Morning Plenary

The Impact of AI During Times Like These – A Conversation

- **Marla Byrd, M.Ed.**, Associate Director, Teaching Resource and Research Center, Spelman College
- **Nicol Turner Lee, Ph.D.**, Director, Center for Technology Innovation (CTI); Senior Fellow, Governance Studies, The Brookings Institution

Convener:

- **Cynthia Neal Spence, Ph.D.**, UNCF/Mellon Programs Director; Social Justice Scholars Program Founding Director; Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Spelman College
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10:45 am–12:15 pm | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Scholars Transforming the Academy: Ph.D. Panel

- **Anna Flood, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Fisk University, C'19), Executive Coordinator for Development, Fisk University
- **Carileigh Jones, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Hampton University, C'18), Instructor, Salisbury University
- **Lewis Miles, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Morehouse College, C'18), President's Postdoctoral Fellow, University of California, San Diego
- **Bria Paige, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Spelman College, C'19), Thurgood Marshall Postdoctoral Fellow, Dartmouth College
- **Tiffany Pennamon, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Spelman College, C'16), Assistant Professor of African American Literature, Lincoln University of Pennsylvania
- **Ryan Russell, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Morehouse College, C'18), Independent Scholar

Convener:

- **Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper, Ph.D.**, Professor Emerita; UNCF/Mellon Advisory Board Member, Spelman College
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12:30 –2:00 pm | Ballroom B: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Luncheon Plenary: Undergraduate Fellows and Mentors in Conversation

- **Zya Fleming**, (Huston Tillotson University, C'27), UNCF/Mellon Undergraduate Fellow
- **Shawanda Stewart, Ph.D.**, Professor of English; Chair, Department of English and Communication; UNCF/Mellon Mentor and Campus Coordinator, Huston Tillotson University
- **Elijah Qualls**, (Morehouse College, C'27), UNCF/Mellon Undergraduate Fellow
- **Andrew Douglas, Ph.D.**, Professor and Chair of Political Science; UNCF/Mellon Mentor, Morehouse College
- **Sky Turntine**, (Huston Tillotson University, C'27), UNCF/Mellon Undergraduate Fellow
- **Julie Hudson, Ph.D.**, Professor of English; UNCF/Mellon Mentor, Huston Tillotson University

Facilitator:

- **Tanya Clark, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Clark Atlanta University, C'93), Assistant Professor, Humanities and Academic Affairs Divisions; UNCF/Mellon Faculty Residency Award Recipient, Morehouse College
-

2:15–3:45 pm | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Uplifting and Protecting the Work of Black Scholars in Times Like These: One Black Writer at a Time: How Literary Coverage Shapes Reception

- **Howard Rambsy, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Tougaloo College, C'99), Distinguished Research Professor of Literature, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
- **Kenton Rambsy, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Morehouse College, C'10), Associate Professor of African American Literature, Howard University

Convener:

- **Candice Love Jackson, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Tougaloo College, C'97), Associate Provost; Associate Professor of English, Lane College

3:45–5:00 pm | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) Plenary: Importance of Integrating the Work of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums into the Experiences of Mellon Fellows

- **Tony Bounds**, College Archivist & Institutional Historian, Tougaloo College
- **Andrea Jackson Gavin**, Program Director, HBCU Digital Library Trust
- **Danille Taylor, Ph.D.**, Art Museum Director, Clark Atlanta University
- **Doretha Williams, Ph.D., (MMUF Fellow, Fisk University, C'98)**, Director, Center for the Digitization and Curation of African American History, National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution

Facilitator:

- **LaTanya Rogers, Ph.D., (MMUF Fellow, Washington University in St. Louis, C'97)**, Dean, School of Humanities & Behavioral Social Sciences; Associate Professor of Literature & Drama; Associate Director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Honors Program; UNCF/Mellon Mentor, Fisk University

6:00 pm

Depart for the National Center for Civil and Human Rights

National Center for Civil and Human Rights
100 Ivan Allen Jr. Blvd. NW
Atlanta, GA 30313

7:00–10:00 pm | National Center for Civil and Human Rights

Conference Reception

Remarks by:

- **Nomhle Gcabashe Canca**, Chairman, Chief Albert Luthuli Foundation (CALF); Chairman, National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI)

10:00 pm

Return to the Westin Buckhead Atlanta Hotel

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2026

9:00 am | Ballroom B: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Breakfast

9:30–10:30 am | Ballroom A: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Faculty Career Enhancement Programs Updates

Highlighting the Impact of the UNCF/Mellon Faculty Residency Program

Book Talk Featuring:

- **Anastasia Valecce, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Hispanic Cultural Studies, Department of World Languages and Cultures, Spelman College
Disobedient Women: Decolonial Movements of Afro-Queer Puerto Rican Artists

In Conversation with:

- **Alberto Sosa-Cabanas, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of Spanish; Faculty Residency Award Recipient, Hampton University
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10:45 am–12:00 pm | Ballroom C, Ballroom D, Ballroom E: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

BREAKOUT ONE | Ballroom C – Fourth Floor – Conference Level

UNCF/MMUF Mellon Ph.D.s Using Their Voices and Pens to Reclaim Our Stories and Expand Disciplinary Canons

Conveners:

- **Julius Flemming, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Tougaloo, C'09), Associate Professor of English, Washington University in St. Louis
- **Jarvis McInnis, Ph.D.**, (MMUF Fellow, Tougaloo, C'09), Associate Professor of English & African and African American Studies, Duke University

BREAKOUT TWO | Ballroom D – Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Expanding the African Diasporic Narrative: Race, Gender, Culture, and Power in the Arab World

Facilitators:

- **Marlon Bailey, Ph.D.**, Professor of African and African American Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Associate Chair, Washington University in St. Louis
- **John Thabiti Willis, Ph.D.**, Inaugural Kesho Scott Endowed Chair in African Diaspora Studies; Coordinator of the 2026 International Faculty Seminar, Grinnell College

BREAKOUT THREE | Ballroom E – Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Faculty Career Enhancement Programs Updates –Faculty Residency, Faculty Development and Archival Research Award Recipients – Roundtable Discussion

Faculty Residency:

- **Francisco Y. Chen-Lopez, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of Spanish, Department of World Languages and Cultures, Spelman College
- **Fernanda Guida, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of Portuguese, Department of World Languages and Cultures, Spelman College
- **Cassandra Shepard, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor, African American & Diaspora Studies, Xavier University of Louisiana

Faculty Development:

- **Gertrude Allen, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Chair, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Spelman College
- **Richard Boada, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor, St. Philip's College (formerly at Lane College)
- **Dylan Griffith**, Assistant Professor of Piano, Lane College
- **Daniella Mascarenhas, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Political Science, Xavier University of Louisiana

Archival Research:

- **Sheronda Gipson-Marion**, Instructor of English, Rust College
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12:00–2:00 pm | Ballroom B: Fourth Floor – Conference Level

Closing Lunch and Debriefing

2:00 pm

Adjournment