

## Where Are They Now?

Every LGS student's journey to and through graduate school is unique. Some arrive soon after their undergraduate studies. Some return mid-career to further their professional training or to acquire new skills. And some take an entirely different approach. No matter the path that leads them here, each

LGS student brings something new to the Laney Graduate School, shaped by perspective, experience, and personal history, the combination of which molds their interests and ambitions and adds another layer to the storied history of scholarship at LGS.

In this issue's *Where Are They Now?*, we are pleased to feature Pellom McDaniels (07G, Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts) whose journey to Emory is truly inspiring.

### A UNIQUE BACKGROUND

McDaniels was a star athlete at Silver Creek High in San Jose, California, lettering in track and field, wrestling, and football. His athletic talent was enough to convince Oregon State University to recruit him for their football program. While a dedicated athlete, McDaniels was also a dedicated student nurturing an intellectual interest in the fine and applied arts that would eventually shape his career trajectory. He notes, "As long as I can remember, I have always loved and appreciated art. Whenever I travel, I try to visit local museum to see some of the unique holdings in their respective collections. I try to find time to draw and paint, which is most helpful when I am working through some complex problem



Pellom McDaniels 07G

that is still fuzzy in my head. While in graduate school, I produced several paintings and collages related to my research on Jack Johnson and Joe Louis. The process of creation helped me work through different theoretical problems I found myself wrestling with in my mind."

At Oregon State, McDaniels excelled on the football field earning him Second Team All-Pac 10

honors and honorable mention All-America recognition as a senior. Upon graduation, the undrafted NFL prospect was heavily recruited by the Proctor & Gamble Company to become their Portland, Oregon, area representative. Determined to prove the NFL had made a mistake, the former college standout decided to leave P&G to pursue his dreams of playing professional football. Beginning with the World League of American Football's Birmingham Fire, he secured a position in the NFL with the Kansas City Chiefs and later the Atlanta Falcons. Already a public scholarship advocate, Pellom worked with Kansas City youth, establishing the Arts for Smarts Foundation in 1993 to expose children to the fine and applied arts by creating programs designed to encourage expressive development and creative thinking. While a medical condition would eventually halt his NFL career, his early interest in the arts and the work he implemented for Kansas City youth would herald what was to come. "I supported my decision to leave Proctor & Gamble based on the three factors," reflects McDaniels, "First of all, I was a college graduate. I had proven I was intelligent enough to negotiate the university system as a student-athlete, and in the process developed leadership skills that I could use in the real world. Second, I had gained invaluable work experience through my time at Proctor & Gamble, which I continue to draw from even today. Lastly, I was

young and I recognized that this was the time to do something crazy like pursue my dreams. Why not?"

### A CHANCE MEETING

In addition to his athletic career, McDaniels is also an inventor and business man. Even as his NFL career wound down, he had already established a business to market and sell a dental product he had invented and patented, Dr. Brizzly Professional Dental Lubricant. But the lure of scholarly inquiry beckoned, and while supremely talented athletically and possessing a distinct business acumen, he couldn't quiet intellectual questions with broader social and cultural implications, particularly as they related to race and sports. "As irony would have it, I was able to sell my patent for Dr. Brizzly to Proctor & Gamble many years ago. My decision to apply to graduate school was informed by my experiences in college and professional football, as well as working with youth interested in playing at Division I institutions," further noting, "Recognizing that some of the most athletically talented and smart individuals I have ever been associated with felt powerless within the context of pursuing their dreams for athletic glory, helped shape my intellectual questions related to agency, identity, and power relations relative to African American boys and men involved in sports."

In 2000, after visiting Emory to participate in the introduction and release of Microsoft's Encarta Africana Encyclopedia, McDaniels became acquainted with Emory Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts (ILA) faculty, the late Goodrich C. White Professor of American Studies Rudolph Byrd, an esteemed and prolific scholar of African American culture, and Dana White, Emeritus Professor of American Studies and senior faculty curator in the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL). Byrd and White encouraged Pellom to apply to the doctoral program of the ILA, and once accepted, McDaniels' career—and life—would take another turn. He reflects, "It was an honor to be able to work with Rudolph Byrd as one of my advisers and mentors, and I am grateful for having had the chance to know him. He was a very unique individual whose impact on the world of African American arts and letters, African American masculinity, and gender studies is yet to be fully understood. He was indeed, 'an eloquent specimen of manhood.'"

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In 2007, McDaniels earned a PhD in American Studies. His dissertation, "The Angle of Ascent: Race, Class, Sport and Representations of African American Masculinity," explores through case studies the impact of African American athletes on America from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. He returned to Kansas City as an assistant professor of History and American Studies at the University of Missouri where he remained until 2012, when he decided to return Emory.

Appointed associate curator of African American Collections at Emory's Woodruff Library Special Collections in 2010, after two years McDaniels accepted a full-time appointment as faculty curator of African American Collections in the Woodruff Library's Manuscript, Archives and Rare Books Library (MARBL) and assistant professor of African American Studies.

The six principal collecting areas in this African American Collections include: Civil Rights and Post-Civil Rights Movements, Black Print Culture, Blacks and the Left, African American Literature and the Arts, Expatriate Literary and Cultural Figures, and finally, African Americans and Sports, a new focus that promises to bring collective attention to this exciting and underrepresented area. Considering his work at MARBL, McDaniels notes, "What I find most exciting about working in MARBL is the opportunity to help shape a world of experiences for our undergraduate and graduate students, as well as our faculty supporters who utilize our holdings for teaching and their own research. Programmatically speaking, we have a lot to offer our university community and the surrounding Atlanta community as it relates to the world of ideas and the many forces responsible for shaping our understanding of that world."

McDaniels' work at MARBL is innovative, and his ability to bridge the curatorial work at MARBL with teaching instruction is bringing a new level of scholarly interaction in the classroom. He also sees opportunity to promote scholarly access and public scholarship through the digitizing of the [Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection](#). The collection features more than 12,000 photographs depicting African American life from the early 19th century to the mid-20th. His work in the collections and experience in the classroom offers him a unique platform to

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nurture student research skills, explore areas of public scholarship and advance digital scholarship efforts. “Working with students to develop a greater understanding of how to conduct research and the process of analysis of evidence is rewarding in a number of ways. By providing opportunities to learn how to design and build exhibitions, and participate in the public programming created to support their particular research interests, students are better able to develop and exercise marketable skill sets that can be used in any career.”

## MORE TO COME

In fall 2013, MARBL kicked off its Race and Sports in American Culture Series (RASACS), jointly organized by McDaniels and Emeritus Professor of American Studies and MARBL senior faculty curator Dana White. The purpose of the series is to advance conversation around race and sports in American culture, provide space to explore new scholarship related to this area, and encourage research in this area to coincide with the development of the African American in Sports Collection. The series, which the Laney Graduate School is also proud to support along with other partners, will continue throughout the 2013–2014 academic year, its theme—fittingly enough—professional football. McDaniels is ready to. “In A

*Hard Road to Glory* (1986), the late tennis champion and writer Arthur Ashe Jr. argues, ‘Black historians never deemed sports serious enough for their scarce time; and these same historians had underestimated the sociohistorical impact of the black athlete in black American life.’ Historians in general and African American scholars in particular have since recognized the value in studying the life and contributions of black sports heroes such as Jack Johnson, Jackie Robinson, Althea Gibson, Wilma Rudolph, and Muhammad Ali, to understand the impact of their performances on the whole of American history. RASACS provides the space to have an ongoing conversation about the importance of sports in the 21st century.”

This year, Pellom will also assume a place on the Laney Development Council, a new body of volunteer leaders committed to promoting the [vision and mission of the Laney Graduate School](#). As an advocate for graduate education, McDaniels says, “I see this as an opportunity to help shape the future of the LGS and the kinds of potential collaboration possibilities across the university to enhance the experience our students can have.”

McDaniels has an upcoming book, *The Prince of Jockeys: The Life and Career of Isaac Burns Murphy*, which will be published next month by the University Press of Kentucky. ■

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effectively present the essence of their research and projects in three minutes or less, Three Minute Thesis, or 3MT, at Emory. And finally, it is my pleasure to introduce you to Pellom McDaniels, an alumnus of LGS, former NFL player, and now, professor and curator at Emory. His journey and his commitment to graduate education are truly inspiring.

Take a moment to look through and linger over this second issue of the *LGS Newsletter*. We are proud of the work we are doing here at the Laney Graduate School and likewise, incredibly

proud and grateful for your support. Please visit our [website](#) to learn more about our work and ways that you can stay connected and get involved! ■

**Lisa A. Tedesco**

*Vice Provost for Academic Affairs—Graduate Studies  
Dean, James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies  
Professor, Rollins School of Public Health*

# Events and Opportunities

## GET INVOLVED! VOLUNTEER FOR THIS YEAR'S ALUMNI MENTOR PROGRAM

The Alumni Mentor Program is entering its fourth year. As students develop their career interests, finalize their dissertations, and begin navigating the job market, alumni can provide important guidance on activities such as preparing CVs, managing work/life balance, negotiating salaries, and much more.

Since its launch in 2010, the program has successfully matched more than 130 mentors and protégés. This program operates entirely on a volunteer basis and is a rewarding, mutually beneficial opportunity for both alumni and students. **To learn more and register by October 15, visit our website.** ■

## LANEY GRADUATE SCHOOL EVENTS

Fall is an exciting time of year for us in the Laney Graduate School as we get to know our new students and welcome back those who came before them. Here are just a few events on the calendar for this fall.

- **October 5**—Back to Class in Washington, D.C., featuring LGS Senior Associate Dean Cathryn Johnson
- **October 6**—Screening of Perry Brickman’s documentary *From Silence to Recognition* (Birmingham, AL)
- **October 10**—Screening of Perry Brickman’s documentary *From Silence to Recognition* (Tulsa, OK)
- **October 15**—**Deadline for Alumni to Register as Mentors for the Alumni Mentor Program**
- **October 24**—Pathways Beyond the Professoriate
- **October 24–25**—ILA 60th Anniversary Celebration
- **October 26**—Alumni Event, London, UK
- **November 3**—Screening of Perry Brickman’s documentary *From Silence to Recognition* (Boston, MA)
- **November 6**—*Pathways Beyond the Professoriate* featuring Nicholas Zachariades
- **November 6**—3rd Annual Competitive Fellowship Reception
- **November 24**—Emory Reception at the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in Baltimore
- **February 11**—Inaugural Laney Symposium

Visit [www.gs.emory.edu](http://www.gs.emory.edu) for information about upcoming events and opportunities. Also visit [www.alumniconnections.com/olc/pub/EMR/geventcal/showListView.jsp](http://www.alumniconnections.com/olc/pub/EMR/geventcal/showListView.jsp) to stay informed of events and ways you can be involved. ■

## Support Laney

The Laney Graduate School is continuing to grow and evolve to meet student needs. The support of our alumni is critical to developing new programs and opportunities that support the next generation of scholars. A gift in support of the Laney Graduate School is truly an investment in the future. To learn about our funding priorities and ways to give, [please visit us here.](#) ■



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