The Ethics & Arts Program is part of the Emory University Center for Ethics.

We are committed to inspiring innovative thought by using creative expression to elevate moral discourse; bringing together communities while prompting ethical dialogue between students, artists, scholars and the general public.
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As an intern for Carlton Mackey, Ethics & the Arts Director at the Emory Center for Ethics and co-creator of Typical American Families, I am incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity be part of the process in which he creates inspiring exhibits that bring social justice to light. However, last month, I was able to accompany Mackey to the showing of the new Typical American Families exhibit at the Georgia State Capitol. This experience opened my eyes to the reality and immensity of the work I am part of.

For this new exhibit, the Typical American Families project co-creators Carlton Mackey and Ross Oscar Knight collaborated with Feminist Women’s Health Center and Strong Families to help shift the understanding of who the families in Georgia are today and to help pass legislation these families require to thrive. As Mackey says, “through powerful visuals and storytelling, our newest photo exhibit features the ethnic, generational, and geographic diversity of both blood and chosen families from throughout Georgia to depict their lived realities.”

Walking into the State Capitol, I felt the weight of the pivotal decisions being made in the chambers. As we set up the display, school groups walked through asking what the exhibit was about, and within an hour, the room had grown to include employees and interns from our collaborating organizations, people visiting the capitol building, legislators, and the families featured in the exhibit. It wasn’t until speakers from the collaborating organizations, Representative Nikki Randall, and family members came up to the podium to share what the exhibit meant to them, however, did I realize how truly momentous of a movement this was.

This Typical American Families exhibit was not just a project that displayed the diversity of Georgia’s families, but a message for legislators that there is no typical American family and policies must reflect the state’s diversity. By forming a partnership with Feminist Women’s Health Center, Racial Justice Action Center and SPARK Reproductive Justice, this exhibit has become a campaign that urges legislators to sign on to the Strong Families Resolution (HR 746), which highlights urgent issues affecting all families and commits legislators to doing
In her speech, Representative Nikki Randall affirmed that our voices matter, and that the House Resolution 746 is a reflection of this—forcing legislators to acknowledge that typical families are the thing of the past and building healthy families produces a productive state.

Further, I continued to be moved as members of the families in the photographs came to the podium to share what the exhibit, and the opportunity to be part of it, meant to them. To each of these diverse families the exhibit meant something a little bit different. However, all were united in the fact that family was one of the most important aspects of their life and that the photo shoot gave them an opportunity to document their story. Speaking about their photo in the exhibit brought the Winn family to tears as they talked about how the photo shoot had reconnected Marilyn Winn with her daughter Pamela after several years.

Mackey said in his speech, “Art can lead to awareness, and that’s what it happening today. Awareness can lead to advocacy, and that’s what we are here to do. Advocacy can lead to action, and that’s what we hope the lawmakers do. Action can lead to a revolution, and I want to be part of a revolution.” I took this to heart --seeing how art, within one project, had brought about changes in my personal perspective, family dynamics, and in political climate. Being at the State Capitol, listening to these speeches, surrounded by the exhibit, and immersed in a climate of advocacy, I saw that the Typical American Families project was truly urging a society on the brink of a revolution. This transformative day was something I will hold onto forever and will continue to motivate me to voice my opinions and find channels to advocate for what I believe in.

-Ashwini Krishnamurthy
What is a Family?
Bought & Sold is a photography exhibit that is a part of Freedom Expressions ATL, a human trafficking awareness campaign by the international Human Trafficking Institute and ArtWorks for Freedom.

Emory University’s Students Against Modern Day Slavery (SAMS) and Emory Ethics and Arts Program collaborated with the Freedom Expressions team to bring this powerful photography exhibit to Emory’s campus with the intention to inspire thought, conversation and action among Emory’s faculty, staff and students as well as the greater Atlanta community.

“Bought & Sold: Voices of Human Trafficking” speaks to the experience to the experiences and suffering of the hundreds to the thousands of men, women and children caught up in slavery’s web. It has been exhibited in many places from Singapore to Jacksonville, FL and we are thrilled to bring it to Emory.
Photos by Scott Langley
Troy Davis Exhibit

The execution of Troy Davis photo essay was presented by Scott Langley a human rights photojournalist and Amnesty’s state death penalty Abolition coordinator for New York. He was present in Georgia before Troy’s execution to document the events through a series of photographs.

The state of Georgia executed Troy Davis on September 21, 2011 despite serious doubts about his guilt. The campaign to try to save Troy was a historic effort, led by Amnesty International and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

In the months and days leading up to Troy’s execution, Amnesty activists from around the world participated in solidarity events calling for clemency. Cities such as New York, Paris, London and Hong Kong held events for international days of action. In Atlanta alone, over 4,000 people marched through the streets the week before Troy’s execution.

Over one million petitions were signed world-wide during this campaign, and ten-of-thousands of activists became involved in the work for death penalty abolition for the first time.

While the execution of Troy Davis was not stopped, a new movement for abolition was galvanized. New activists were motivated to join the work. Seasoned activists were reenergized to take up the struggle again. Brown, black and white - the world came together for the cause of human rights.
The purpose of the Southwest Air- 
lines Art & Social Engagement Proj- 
ect is to engage the Emory Univer-
sity student body, Atlanta non-profits 
and Atlanta-based artists as co-cre-
ators of thought-provoking collabor- 
ative art projects designed to address 
important social issues in atlanta. 
The production process involved all 
participants in a meaningful way 
invoking critical thinking and re-
flexion about social issues. The 
finished projects also communicat-
ed a critical and creative outlook 
about social issues facing Atlanta, 
incresed awareness about said is-
sues and catalyze action toward 
making positive change to address 
those issues.
Featured Artists
Jerushia Graham
Masud Olufani
Michael Reese
Darci Rodenhi

Non Profits
Wholesome Wave GA
Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition
City of Refuge
NO PAPERS NO FEAR

The Undocumented Student Movement in the U.S. South

A Photo Exhibit By Laura Emiko Soltis

SEPTEMBER 24TH - DECEMBER 4TH, 2015 EMORY CENTER FOR ETHICS
CO-SPONSORED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, DEPARTMENT OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE
Dr. Laura Emiko Soltis is a documentary photographer and human rights educator based in Atlanta, Georgia. Her work focuses on the people and places she encounters as a social justice activist, musician, and movement photographer in the South. Specifically, as a participant in the migrant farmworkers’ movement, the undocumented youth movement, and racial and economic justice movements, she is able to capture vibrant images of individual courage and collective struggle on the front lines of radical democratic change.

Soltis received her PhD from Emory University in 2013, where she completed her dissertation and photo essay on the global human rights strategies and cultural practices of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, an interracial farmworker movement organization in South Florida. Soltis currently serves as the executive director of Freedom University, a modern freedom school for undocumented students in Georgia. Her photographic work has appeared in Smithsonian Magazine, Urban Cusp, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights Blog Series, Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society, and numerous online and print media.
In this exhibition, Soltis presents documentary photographs of the undocumented student movement in Georgia. Soltis’ first-hand participation in the movement – first as a documented student ally while in graduate school and later as a teacher and mentor of undocumented students – allows her to provide a rare and intimate perspective of the movement as it has unfolded since 2010. Through this collection of photographs, Soltis captures the courage, creativity, and diversity of undocumented students and their allies in their collective struggle to end modern segregation in higher education and to assert their human rights here at home.

Freedom University students stand beside their documented student allies at Emory University. The Freedom at Emory campaign successfully led to Emory’s announcement in April 2015 that it would admit undocumented students without discrimination and provide need-based aid to those who qualify. Atlanta, Georgia. December 10, 2014.

We Are Human

Freedom University students protest outside the office of UGA President Jere Morehead, demanding he state his position on the university’s admissions ban. Athens, Georgia. April 28, 2014.

Freedom Riders, Freedom Fighters

Freedom University siblings stand in front of mug shots of the Freedom Riders at the Center for Civil and Human Rights. Lessons on SNCC and the Freedom Rides are central to their social movement education at Freedom U. Atlanta, Georgia. May 24, 2015.
No Papers, No Problem


Undocumented, Unafraid

Two Freedom University students are arrested for disrupting a Georgia Board of Regents public meeting. They are taken to Fulton County Jail, where their professors post bail for their release. Atlanta, Georgia. November 12, 2013.

Generations

Representative John Lewis greets a family member of a Freedom University student at a protest. Atlanta, Georgia. April 21, 2014.

Freedom University students lead chants outside the office of UGA President Jere Morehead. Athens, Georgia. April 28, 2014.
Ethics on The Stage
The audience at Bowie State had just watched There Is A Field, a new play about the killing of a young Palestinian by Israeli police over 15 years ago. I expected to see expressions of sadness and stress, of anguish and anger on the students’ faces but instead saw expressions of solemnity – as if what they had just experienced was less shocking, but rather a sobering truth, less something troubling and more of a sobering reality.

A coalition of civil society, organizers, artists and educators had worked on the curriculum for the post-play discussion for hours. We wanted to explore ways of engaging various audiences that would illuminate both their collective and individual experiences. The initial invitation was simply for a one-word reflection. After a moment of silence, I asked the group to describe what they were feeling, what they had discovered through the play. A young man in the front row was the first to speak. Without hesitation, he said: “Familiar.”

Though not a single cast member of this production was Black and though the documentary-style play was set in a country thousands of miles away, for these young Black men and women attending Maryland’s oldest historically Black university, nothing that they had just witnessed was foreign. Not the 17-year old boy killed by police, not the nightmarish phone call his sister received. Not his untimely funeral, nor his family’s futile pursuit of accountability. They related to each other. Not any one of the daily experiences everything this marginalized community experienced at the hands of a within a majority society; a majority that believes in the false notion of its own exceptionalism, of its own supremacy.

There Is A Field is the true story of Aseel Asleh, a Palestinian citizen of Israel who was killed by police while at a demonstration in Israel in October 2000. When I asked the audience about the extent of their exposure to Israel/Palestine prior to the play, only a few raised their hands. But after the young man’s “familiar” came a chorus of other telling words: “Relatable.” “Society.” “Reality.” “Baltimore.” “Ferguson.”

The story was known, the plot was familiar, and connections were immediately made to the narrative being performed. And as we unpacked specific scenes, a new character emerged, as if written into the script. The stage became a portal, beyond time and space, shining a spotlight on the global phenomenon of racism, so formulaic and with outputs so intimately known by the audience. The outputs are the same, because the systems that produce them are the same – systems that are designed to consolidate power on the basis of arbitrary
factors (race, religion, ethnicity), and wield that power against others with the intent of forcing them to accept an identity based on the perception of their diminished value. The fragility this acceptance yields is a tactic of the system to produce compliance.

In a particularly poignant scene, Aseel’s sister Nardeen reflects on her heightened sense of how fragile everything seems after her brother’s murder. Though I do not know exactly what it’s like to bury a brother who was murdered by police, and I don’t know what it is like to bury a father or a son, I am expected to live with that same fragility. I am expected to accept that on any given day I could know. By simply being Black, I know that I am five times more likely to bury my son than my colleague who lives in the same neighborhood with a son the same age. We are expected to accept not only that is life is fragile but the right to live can be determined by someone other than you. This is racism’s corporate lie.

Dr. King said famously that a lie cannot live. But its defeat is not inevitable. We can only defeat what we understand. Herein lies the power of transnational movements for justice as they have been pursued throughout history. Efforts, like There Is A Field, that contribute to the ongoing work of building intersectional, and particularly Black-Palestinian, solidarity are valuable in the way that they make understandable the lie.

Racism is not about difference, it is about exploiting difference. It is predicated on power and capitalizes on the fear of those it privileges that (their) power can be taken away by those it marginalizes. It also exploits difference by creating the allure of power among those who have experienced marginalization so that instead of uniting to fight against it, they are either totally ignorant of other people who are oppressed or use the same tactics of oppression they experienced to gain power over the other.

The power of this play was that in drawing closer to the subject (and each other), the audience grew more distant from racism. Thus, combating racism can neither be about eliminating difference nor even achieving a status quo of co-existence. Instead, we defeat racism when we narrow the distance between ourselves and others and begin to engage in co-resistance against the system. It is in narrowing the distance between ourselves and those we share the world with that we begin to dismantle these systems. What this play did was offer new perspectives on a system these students may have previously considered was targeted only at them. These new perspectives lead to new understanding. And what we understand we can defeat. We dismantle the systems by refusing to accept the fact that oppression is the only thing that can be shared across our narratives. We must also have the courage to accept that shared oppression only serves to offer us keen insight into methods of resistance that will lead to our shared liberation. May solidarity not be defined by our oppression, but by our united resistance to it.
Tuesday, June 28, Emory’s Center for Ethics held a community conversation discussing the themes of race, class, and gender inequalities in Kenny Leon’s True colors play “Smart People”. The play is about four Harvard intellectuals find themselves entangled in a complex web of social and sexual politics on the eve of Obama’s first election. A whirlwind of crackling dialogue and tricky questions are thrown by the fearless and funny Lydia Diamond (Stick Fly) in this provocative and funny play.
Serial Black Face
Serial Black Face is a play presented by Actors Express about The 1979 Atlanta Child Murders grip the entire city. A single mother Vivian copes with the disappearance of her young son while working tirelessly to give a fresh start to her troubled teenage daughter. When a handsome stranger enters her life with promises of new love, she soon learns that nothing is as it seems.

On April 17, Carlton Mackey, and guests gather for an intellectual and informative discussion on how Serial Black Face relates to the Black Lives Matter movement.
Disgraced tells the story of Amir Kapoor, a successful lawyer who is rapidly moving up the corporate ladder while distancing himself from his Muslim roots. When Amir and his wife Emily host a dinner party, friendly conversation quickly explodes into something far deeper and more dangerous. A turbulent thrill ride, Disgraced examines an American identity far more complicated than any melting pot.

It is 2011. Troy Davis is about to be executed for killing a white police officer, catalyzing worldwide debates about racial justice & capital punishment. Burned-out activist Alison finds purpose in efforts to exonerate Davis, exasperating her corporate lawyer husband. Civil Rights veteran Mary and her grandson Curtis clash on capital punishment in light of a dark trauma in their past. Commissioned by Synchronicity, this powerful world premiere by Lee Nowell presents a balanced investigation of diverse beliefs about race, justice and the death penalty.
2016 has been a very rough summer for Louisiana. I am currently a student at Southern University located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. During my time here as a summer intern for Emory’s Center for Ethics I have often kept tabs of what going on in the community around my school and people who live in it. However, the normal peace was interrupted when Alton Sterling, a 37 year old man, was shot and killed for selling CD’s outside a of a local convenience store in Baton Rouge. Before America even had the time to fully process what happened the very next day Philando Castile was also shot and killed behind the wheel of a car after being pulled over for a “Broken Taillight”. The hearing of Sterling’s death really hit home because not only did it happen not that far from my school but it could have been anyone I knew. As you can imagine America broke out in chaos as a response to the killing of another black man. Although this time happened to be much worse, aside from the protest there were also a number of cops who lost their lives. As a result the tension between the law enforcement and the black community has gotten extremely high. I have been watching videos of my peers protesting in anger, some getting arrested, and even facing worse conditions for fighting about what is right. The whole situation has been awful all together because there is never a change in the system. It keeps happening and has gotten to a point where the people who we put in positions for our protection are now questionable and good police along with black men lives are now threatened everyday. It has gotten so out-of-hand it is not only tension between blacks and cops but racial as well. It is COMPLETELY WRONG to kill someone unarmed, in the back, with their hands in the air and any other tactics used that abuses authority and ends a life. Imagine losing a loved one only for some ,who know nothing about this person, to say they deserved to die because they were a thug . Then the killer is free to live their life with pay because it was justified. Now double this same situation, then triple it. Where is the humanity in that? When does it end? The school has been very helpful with all that is going by offering counseling services and even holding Sterling’s Funeral in our Mini Dome for the neighborhood to come and show their support. Its a very sad situation to be in to watch children cry over their lost fathers, mothers over sons, wives over husbands and so on. Montrell Jackson, one of the fallen Baton Rouge police, posted “...These are trying times. Please don’t let hate infect your heart....” With that being said we shouldn’t assume that equality and peace is impossible to obtain.
The Journeys of Reconciliation program is an inter-religious program that gives members the opportunity to cultivate relationships of partnership service and friendship with communities’ around the world. Through the Journeys program a group of Emory students and scholars were presented with the opportunity to explore Cuba in a new era of tradition. During this trip artist and ethicist Carlton Mackey, a photographer who operates the multimedia project “50 Shades of Black” which explores the spectrum of race and identity, chose to take on a project observing Afro-Cubans in today’s society.

The experience helped “awaken those parts of me that long to be inspired as an artist and didn’t go to sleep the whole time I was there,” said Mackey.

With Havana as a home base, participants toured the historic government buildings, churches, plazas and markets of Old Havana, visited with Afro-Cuban artists and musicians, observed a Shabbat dinner with a local Jewish community, and visited the Bay of Pigs, as well as historic battle sites and a museum documenting slavery.

More than one million Africans were enslaved in Cuba, and by some estimates, as much as 60 percent of the Cuban population is descended from them, explains Mackey, who has participated in previous Journeys trips to Jordan-Palestine-Israel and South Africa.

“I found the religious and spiritual practices in Cuba to be as beautiful as it’s people.” - Mackey

“To see and meet those people gave me a shared sense of struggle and enterprise and triumph,” he says. “It also gave me the ability to not take for granted that the way we see ourselves is not necessarily the way that we are seen by the rest of the world.”
Contributors
Kay Chernush
Ashwini Krishnamurthy
Scott Langley
Laura Emiko Soltis
Amari Cheaton
Carlton Mackey
Kayla Foster

Created By
Kayla Foster
Carlton Mackey

Featured Partners
Alliance Theater
Southwest Airlines
True Colors Theater
Synchronicity Theater
Actors Express
Typical American Families
S.A.M.S
Journeys of Reconciliation

Carlton Mackey, Director
Ethics & the Arts Program
cmackey@emory.edu

Emory University Center for Ethics
Ethics & the Arts Program
Ethics & the Arts News
1531 Dickey Drive
Atlanta, GA 30322