

From the weeks of May 13 to June 10, I assisted Dr. Eric Thurman in researching the multiple creative works of Aaron McGruder. Dr. Thurman plans to analyze and respond to the critical responses surrounding McGruder's newest live-action television show *Black Jesus*. He intends to examine "how issues of race, masculinity, and humor intersect in the construction and reception of the show's 'scandalous' Jesus." My primary responsibility during the four weeks as a research assistant was to collect qualitative data from Aaron McGruder's repertoire of work. This work includes: McGruder's most recent creation, the live-action show, *Black Jesus*; the critically acclaimed animated television show, *The Boondocks*; the multiple volumes of *Boondocks* comic strips from which that television show derived; and any speeches, interviews, or nonfictional pieces by McGruder. Along with accumulating detailed notes directly from McGruder's work, I collected and annotated existing articles about the artist from various outside sources.

Throughout the course of my four-week research, I was challenged to seek out creative and effective means of analyzing an artist. I found it vexing at times how to effectively interpret and communicate the interwoven layers of religion, politics, popular culture, and social commentary that are so synonymous with McGruder's work. Often, it felt inadequate to simply note McGruder's references to such topics and move on. Consequently, I would sometimes find myself reflecting personal opinions into my notes to Dr. Thurman. Over the four-week span, I learned how to differentiate objective points from subjective thoughts in my notes to

Dr. Thurman. I also learned to recognize when the latter was permissible and when it would only hinder Dr. Thurman's own work.

Managing my time effectively was the most important part of my job. I did not work on a specific schedule, but adhered to the forty-hour weeks for which I was generously being paid by the University. While I was assigned specific tasks to accomplish, I was also charged to discover on my own particular pieces that would help Dr. Thurman better understand the intricacies of McGruder and his subversive art. I was told to spend a week watching and taking notes on as much of a particular show as possible. Although this could be time consuming, it was not enough to keep me busy the entire week, so I was also expected to use my time in search of outside research that would complement McGruder's work which I was studying directly.

This position helped me learn how to prevent the monotony of daily tasks from being reflected in the overall product of my work. I found it extraordinarily helpful to work in different spots on campus. I feel as if the consistent changes in my physical workplace kept my task from becoming tedious and repetitive and likewise, my work stayed innovative and fresh. I followed the advice all first-year college students are told: avoid working in the same room you sleep. This certainly helped when part of my job was to watch television shows and read comics. Keeping this in mind, I effectively turned these tasks into academic endeavors by performing them in an academic setting. Had I done otherwise, I'm confident that my finished product would have been underwhelming. My advice to others who assist a professor in summer research is to use the unusual vacancy of the campus to your advantage.

I worked primarily under my own supervision and because of this, I learned how to hold myself accountable for the time and effort I put into my work. In four weeks of research, I managed to accumulate over forty pages of notes to submit to Dr. Thurman. By being self-directed, remaining self-motivated, and managing my time well, I left the mountain feeling confident that my finished product was of high enough quality to be an effective tool for Dr. Thurman's future project. While there are some aspects of academic work that are inescapably monotonous, I ultimately found my first experience in a paid academic position to be a rewarding one. I am extremely grateful that Dr. Thurman was willing to give me the opportunity to assist him in his project and equally as thankful that the University was willing to provide the funding which allowed this to happen.