



ATLAS 2026

Annual Conference



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

Conference Program

Dear Participants,

Thank you for joining the 3rd Annual UMD ATLAS Conference! This year's theme is "Identity, Belonging, and Postcolonial Politics: Reflections and Futures" and we hope that the roundtables and keynote addresses foster meaningful discussions, new collaborations, and deeper interdisciplinary connections. With this theme, we want to take a moment to reflect on the past and look ahead to the future, especially as current events, changes in world order, shifts in norms, and other aspects of our changing world seem to be moving ahead very rapidly. This is a time of both uncertainty and an opportunity to imagine what might lie ahead for Africa and the world. We are so thankful to be able to convene an amazing group of scholars and practitioners to shed insight on and engage in dialogue about these topics.

With gratitude,

Miranda Abadir and Matthew Thomann

ATLAS Co PIs



GRAND
CHALLENGES GRANTS

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Conference Schedule

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Time	Event/Session	Room info
1:30 pm – 1:55 pm	Coffee and opening remarks	HJP 2124 & 2130
2:00 pm – 3:15 pm	Global Health Roundtable Discussion	HJP 2124 & 2130
3:15 pm - 3:40 pm	Reception	HJP 2124 & 2130
3:45 pm - 5:00 pm	Opening Keynote Address: Jordanna Matlon “The Long Crisis of Black Masculinity in Racial Capitalism”	HJP 2124 & 2130

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Time	Event/Session	Room info
9:45 am – 10:15 am	Morning reception	HJP 2124 & 2130
10:15 am - 10:30 am	Dean Stephanie Shonekan Remarks	HJP 2124 & 2130
10:35 am - 11:50 am	Arts, Literature, and Cultural Production Roundtable Discussion	HJP 2124 & 2130
11:50 am - 12:50 pm	Lunch	HJP 2123, 2124 & 2130
12:55 pm - 2:10 pm	Environmental Justice and Sustainability Roundtable Discussion	HJP 2124 & 2130
2:10 pm - 2:25 pm	Coffee Break	HJP 2124 & 2130
2:25 pm – 3:40 pm	Governance and Politics Roundtable Discussion	HJP 2124 & 2130
3:40 pm – 4:10 pm	Afternoon reception	HJP 2124 & 2130
4:15 pm – 5:30 pm	Closing Keynote Address: Anita Plummer “Building Whose Future? China’s Digital Footprint and the Politics of Transformation in Africa”	HJP 2124 & 2130

Sessions

Keynote Addresses

Tuesday, March 31

3:45 pm – 5:00 pm

Jordanna Matlon, Associate Professor, Department of Global Inquiry, School of International Service, American University

“The Long Crisis of Black Masculinity in Racial Capitalism”

In this talk, I explore labor narratives and imaginaries of Black masculinity in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. Engaging the histories, representational repertoires, and performative identities of men in Abidjan and across the Black Atlantic, I examine how French colonial legacies and media tropes of Blackness act as powerful axes, rooting masculine identity and value within labor, consumerism, and commodification. I draw on fieldwork I conducted examining the livelihoods and lifestyles of underemployed Abidjanais men and consider the methodological entanglements and theoretical implications around my ethnography of transnational Blackness.

Wednesday, April 1

4:15 pm – 5:30 pm

Anita Plummer, Associate Professor, African Studies; Director, Center for Women, Gender and Global Leadership, Howard University

“Building Whose Future? China's Digital Footprint and the Politics of Transformation in Africa”

Africa's digital transformation has been celebrated as a pathway to development, inclusion, and economic sovereignty. Yet the infrastructure underpinning that promise telecommunications networks, data centers, fiber optic cables, and mobile platforms is increasingly financed and built by China, raising urgent questions about whose vision of modernity is being constructed, and for whom. This talk argues that digital transformation is not a technological or economic inevitability but deeply contested political terrain, one that demands analysis rooted in lived experience, structural power relations, and specifically the collective agency of African women.

Roundtable Sessions

Tuesday, March 31

2:00 pm – 3:15 pm

“Beyond the Shock: Uncovering Old Fault Lines and New Paths in Global Health”

Moderator and Participant: [Matthew Thomann](#), Associate Professor, Anthropology, University of Maryland

Participants:

- [Agbessi Amouzou](#), Professor, International Health, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University
- [Nicole Angotti](#), Associate Professor, Sociology, American University
- [Hassanatu Blake](#), Associate Clinical Professor, Global, Environmental, and Occupational Health, University of Maryland
- [Kenneth Leonard](#), Professor & Chair, Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Maryland
- [Sangeetha Madhavan](#), Professor, African American and Africana Studies & Sociology, University of Maryland

This roundtable brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to reflect on the future of global health in Africa. Panelists will reflect on the colossal impact of the shuttering of USAID but the focus of the roundtable will be on new opportunities for decolonizing global health, strengthening local infrastructures, and addressing persistent inequities that were only partially addressed by what was lost. The discussion will foreground local research infrastructures, health systems integration, community-based approaches, and the role of emerging technologies in reshaping health systems and interventions. Particular attention will be paid to how global health agendas have historically been delivered and how new collaborations can lead to the creation of a more equitable and just global health landscape. By fostering dialogue across anthropology, public health, sociology, demography, and economics, this roundtable aims to identify key challenges and opportunities that will define the next generation of global health work in Africa.

Wednesday, April 1

10:35 am – 11:50 am

“Arts, Literature, and Cultural Production in Africa”

Moderator: [Sharada Balachandran Orihuela](#), Director, Comparative Literature; Associate Professor, English, University of Maryland

Participants:

- [Amsale Alemu](#), Assistant Professor, African Studies, Howard University
- [Chambi Chachage](#), Assistant Professor, African Studies, Howard University
- [K.E. Coney-Ali](#), Co-Executive Director, Gallery of Art; Adjunct Lecturer, Art Department, Howard University
- [Lisa Gilman](#), Director, Institute for Immigration Research; Professor, Folklore and English, George Mason University
- [Caroline Maguire](#), Professorial Lecturer, Museum Studies, George Washington University; Provenance Researcher, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art

This panel brings together a multidisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of arts, literature and cultural production. They will be considering questions about post-colonial legacies of African cultural production; archives and publics; politics and modes of production; aesthetics and definitions; provenance and classification; and power and resistance.

Wednesday, April 1
12:55 pm – 2:10 pm

“Africa, Environmental Justice and Sustainability”

Moderator and Participant: [Jayson Maurice Porter](#), Assistant Professor, History & Latin America and Caribbean Studies Center, University of Maryland

Participants:

- [Asma Amina Belem](#), Visiting Fellow, Center for African Studies, Howard University
- [Maurice Carney](#), Executive Director, Friends of the Congo
- [Amy Yeboah Quarkume](#), Associate Professor, Environmental Studies, Howard University
- [Quito J. Swan](#), Professor, History and Africana Studies; Director, Africana Studies Program, George Washington University

The scholars and practitioners on this panel will be discussing environmental justice and sustainability practices in Africa. They will consider questions about current environmental and sustainability issues in post-colonial Africa, the impact post-colonial legacies have had on the continent, environmental justice and racism, the extent to which the diaspora or migration within Africa informs environmental justice, and the role of international players and their impact on environmental issues in Africa.

Wednesday, April 1
2:25 pm – 3:40 pm

“Retrenchment and Reordering: Governance, Aid, and Geopolitics in Africa”

Moderator: [Beka Guluma](#), Assistant Professor, African American and Africana Studies, University of Maryland

Participants:

- [Ampson Hagan](#), Assistant Professor, Anthropology, University of Maryland
- [Bulelani Jili](#), Assistant Professor, African Studies, Georgetown University
- [Carl LeVan](#), Professor and Chair, Politics, Governance & Economics, School of International Service, American University
- [Fiona Shen-Bayh](#), Assistant Professor, Government & Politics, University of Maryland
- [Michael Woldemariam](#), Associate Professor, Public Policy; Senior Fellow, Center for International & Security Studies at Maryland, University of Maryland

This roundtable examines how shifting global priorities—particularly the retrenchment of U.S. aid, changing security commitments, and evolving geopolitical competition—are reshaping governance and political life across Africa. Moving beyond a narrow focus on aid volumes, the discussion considers the broader normative and institutional effects of these shifts: how declining support reconfigures state–society relations, alters the incentives of political elites, and reshapes the terrain of democratic practice. Participants will reflect on how African governments and communities are navigating a landscape marked by reduced external support, new security alignments, and intensified US-China competition. What forms of political order emerge when longstanding development and security partnerships are restructured or withdrawn? How do these changes intersect with domestic political economies, patterns of militarization, and the recalibration of international alliances? By foregrounding both structural transformations and local responses, the roundtable aims to interrogate whether current shifts signal a reconfiguration of geopolitical lines or the emergence of new political possibilities on the continent.

Practical Information

Wifi access

To access UMD’s free guest wifi, go to the settings -> wifi -> umd-guest.

Complete the UMD Guest Registration page. You will receive an email or text with your password. You may now login with your email and password.

Food & Beverage

We invite all conference attendees to enjoy the snacks and beverages available throughout the conference.

Lunch will be available to all conference attendees on a first come, first serve basis at H.J. Patterson Hall, room 2130. Please enjoy the buffet and lunchtime conversation with other attendees.

Additionally, conference attendees can visit one of the many dining options at Stamp Student Union for lunch or during breaks. There is also a cafe on the first floor of H.J. Patterson (Samovar), as well as various other dining options near HJP and around campus.

Name tags

If you are attending the conference both days, you can either hold on to your name tag and bring it with you on Wednesday or leave it at the registration desk. We will happily reuse lanyards, so feel free to return your badge at the end of the conference!

Acknowledgements

The ATLAS team would like to thank the many people who made this conference possible.

We would like to begin by thanking Deans Stephanie Shonekan and Susan Rivera and their colleagues in the ARHU and BSOS Deans' office for their early and continuous support. We would like to extend a special word of thanks to ARHU for their generous financial support.

We would also like to thank the VPR's office and the Grand Challenges team for their leadership and funding.

We would like to extend our thanks to the entire ATLAS team and various faculty, staff and volunteers from the College of Arts & Humanities and across campus who have contributed their time and talents behind the scenes to make this conference possible. Also, a special thank you to the Language Science Center for providing us with incredible event space and support.

We would like to thank each person who participated in the conference by sharing their research and expertise. The range of topics explored in various roundtables and presentations is the reason why ATLAS exists at UMD.