

## BIOGRAPHIES OF OUR PANELISTS

### Keynote Speaker



**Ayah Nuriddin** is Assistant Professor in the History of Medicine at Yale University. She is a historian of medicine and biology with particular interests in the histories of eugenics, racial science, scientific racism, and reproduction.

Professor Nuriddin is currently at work on her first book, tentatively titled “Seed and Soil: Black Eugenic Thought in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” It examines how African Americans navigated questions of racial science, eugenics, and hereditarianism in relation to their personal struggles for racial justice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It also analyzes the complex and often paradoxical ways that African Americans challenged scientific racism and advocated for racial equality. It will also trace how the ongoing legacies of racial science within the medical establishment continue to shape health disparities for African Americans.

Professor Nuriddin’s research has been supported by the Consortium for the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine (CHSTM) and the Alexander Grass Humanities Institute (AGHI) at Johns Hopkins University. She was an inaugural inductee of the Johns Hopkins University chapter of the Edward Bouchet Graduate Honor Society. Her work has been published in *Historical Studies of Natural Science*, the *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, and the *Lancet*. She has appeared on the Disability History Association podcast and American History TV on C-Span.

Prior to arriving at Yale, she was a Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows, and Lecturer in the Council of the Humanities and African American Studies at Princeton University. She received her PhD in the History of Medicine from the Johns Hopkins University. She also holds an MA in History and an MLS from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a BA in International Relations and History from American University.

### Moderator

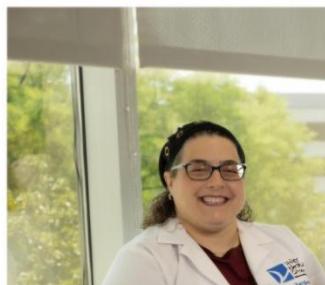


**Dr. Mary Pickney** is a board-certified anesthesiologist and a dedicated advocate for healthcare equity. She graduated from the University of Louisiana Lafayette with a degree in Microbiology, earned her Doctor of Medicine from Louisiana State University School of Medicine, and completed her anesthesiology residency at the University of Michigan. She further expanded her expertise by completing the Integrative Medicine Fellowship through the Andrew Weill Center for Integrative Medicine.

During medical school, Dr. Pickney witnessed the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina on Louisiana’s healthcare infrastructure while training in the state’s charity

hospitals. Years later, as an attending physician at safety-net hospitals in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Harlem, she again observed the severe consequences of healthcare system disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. These formative experiences solidified her commitment to addressing healthcare disparities, particularly for vulnerable and underserved communities.

Currently practicing as an anesthesiologist in the NYC metropolitan area (NY/NJ), Dr. Pickney is also a second-year student at Fordham Law School, pursuing a Juris Doctor degree. She is deeply committed to delivering high-quality, patient-centered care to individuals from all backgrounds and actively mentors medical students and residents. Additionally, she is an engaged member of the American Society of Anesthesiologists and the New York State Society of Anesthesiologists (NYSSA), where she serves on the Women in Anesthesiology and Diversity in Anesthesiology Committees. Dr. Pickney is also a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.



**Pnina Bargad, RPA-C** With 24 years of experience as a Physician Assistant (PA), Pnina Bargad has dedicated the majority of her career to the field of obstetrics and gynecology, with the last 19 years focused on maternal fetal medicine. Pnina has developed a particular expertise and passion for managing diabetes in pregnancy, working closely with patients to provide the best possible care. In addition to her clinical work, she has a deep commitment to mentoring and teaching future Physician Assistants, sharing her knowledge and experience to help shape the next generation of healthcare professionals.

## Dr. Traci Burgess

Dr. Burgess is the Director of Maternal Fetal Medicine at Valley Medical Group. She attended medical school at SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn (Downstate) (1991). Dr. Burgess completed her residency training at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in obstetrics and gynecology (1995) and then completed a fellowship in maternal and fetal medicine at Columbia-Presbyterian (1998), followed by another fellowship in patient safety at Virginia Commonwealth University (2009). Dr. Burgess is certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology in obstetrics and gynecology and maternal and fetal medicine. She is part of Valley Medical Group Maternal Fetal Medicine practice located in Paramus.



**Traci Burgess, MD**



**Seleene Lewis Wong** is a fierce advocate for education, community empowerment, and Black women's mental health, all while being a devoted mother to three teenagers—a college student, a high schooler, and a middle schooler. Her commitment to service and leadership drives her work in uplifting communities,

promoting literacy, and championing wellness for Black women and families.

With over 20 years of experience in education, she currently serves as an Educational Development Specialist for the New Jersey Department of Education, overseeing preschool programs across two counties and supporting more than 20 school districts. She holds dual master's degrees in Early Childhood Education and Special Education, as well as a master's degree in Administration and Leadership.

Beyond her professional career, Seleene is a passionate advocate for literacy, youth empowerment, and Black women's wellness. She is the Founder and President of the Free Reads Educational Mentoring Program, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting a love of reading and literacy among children in Black and Brown communities. She is also a mayor-appointed trustee of the Teaneck Public Library Board, Co-Chair and Founder of the Juneteenth Committee of Teaneck, and a member of the Dr. Martin Luther King Birthday Committee. Additionally, she serves on the PTA Executive Board as the 8th grade chair at her daughter's middle school.

Seleene is a certified trauma-informed yoga instructor and the Founder of Breathe and Vibe Meditation Sessions, where she promotes holistic well-being and mindfulness through guided meditation and yoga practices.

As an advocate for Black women's mental health, Seleene has created platforms to amplify Black voices and celebrate Black women's history. She founded The SistaHood Radio, an online radio show featuring segments focused on Black women's wellness, and created the Daughter of the Yam Podcast, highlighting the contributions of Black feminists throughout history.

She is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., currently affiliated with the Bergen County Alumnae Chapter. She is also an active member of Bergen County Mocha Moms and a new member of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), further strengthening her commitment to sisterhood, service, and advocacy.

Seleene attends First Baptist Church in Englewood, where she continues to nurture her faith and serve her community.

Through her leadership, storytelling, and commitment to education, wellness, and community service, Seleene remains passionate about empowering communities, advocating for Black women, preserving history, and fostering meaningful change.  
*"Women are powerful and dangerous."* – Audre Lorde



**Assemblywoman Shama Haider** started her activism in Pakistan as a college student protesting against military dictatorship. She received her Bachelor of Science from the University of Punjab in Pakistan. After moving to the United States in 1977, she settled down in the Borough of Tenafly in Bergen County, New Jersey. During her professional career she helped to fundraise for a non-profit focusing on funding arts programs for schools. Shama

became an active member of her community by participating in municipal boards and parent teacher associations. She was elected to local council in both 2001 and 2015. Most recently, Shama made history by becoming the first Muslim American elected to serve in the state legislature. In her second term, she is a Deputy Majority leader and Chair of the Assembly Children, Families and Food Security Committee. She also serves on the Assembly Health and Appropriations Committees.