

THE CONNECT

A Center for Critical Race Studies Newsletter

IT DOESN'T END HERE

FELICIA L. HARRIS, PH.D.
ASST. DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR CRITICAL RACE STUDIES
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

As we conclude this unprecedented semester and move toward an uncertain future, we are reminded that the work we begin in our classrooms and event spaces does not end there. In fact, in the summer months ahead I am certain that a new type of "work" must begin: we must innovate, organize, collaborate, and more as we learn how to thrive in our new way of life.

The mission of UHD's Center for Critical Race Studies is anchored by three action statements: producing knowledge, transforming lives, and empowering communities. In this issue of *The Connect*, the fellows of the CCRS beckon you to forge ahead in action by taking care of yourself, celebrating your accomplishments, learning from notable leaders, engaging in critical conversations, and standing in solidarity with integral members of our UHD community.

In this issue

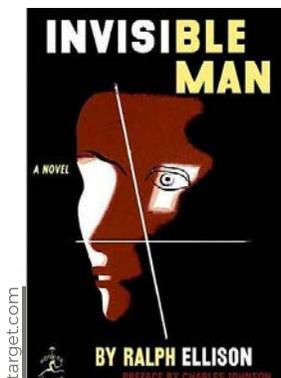
The Privilege of Protest

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READING

"This crisis has allowed me to re-establish a practice I started with my son when he was small but our lives became too busy to maintain.

Every day we have "The Reading Hour," where we read together and have discussion. It usually goes an hour and a half or more. I brought out a stack of books I love and want him to love, too. He selected Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. I love it, so "Thank you COVID-19."

DOVEANNA S. FULTON, PH.D.
DEAN OF COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



LISTENING

"I've always been a fan of NPR's *Code Switch* podcast, but I found myself especially grateful for their recent episode, "What does 'Hood Feminism' Mean for a Pandemic?," which explores some of the complexities that Women of Color and working-class women are confronted with while trying to navigate a crisis that is disproportionately affecting Black women and Black families."

CRESHEMA R. MURRAY, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF
COMMUNICATION STUDIES



WATCHING

"Last year, my book club had the distinct opportunity to have brunch with former First Lady Michelle Obama. Watching her Netflix documentary *Becoming* has been a great reminder of our once-in-a-lifetime experience and the grace and hope that the Obamas represent in a time of uncertainty."

FELICIA L. HARRIS, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF
COMMUNICATION STUDIES

WOMEN TO WATCH LEADING COVID-19

CRESHEMA R. MURRAY, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF
COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed racial and gender gaps in leadership responses across the world. However, while many countries battle rising death tolls, tanking economies, and declining trust in elected officials, several leading women have risen above the fray and showed courage coupled with care and strength. Here are a few women to watch in the fight against COVID-19:

Dr. Kizzmekia S. Corbett, 34, is a viral immunologist working with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Corbett is the lead scientist charged with developing a COVID-19 vaccine. With nearly ten years of research experience in vaccine development, Corbett and her team are the first group to begin clinical trials for a vaccine.

New Zealand's Prime Minister, **Jacinda Ardern**, 39, has been widely recognized for her swift enactment of stricter gun laws after the Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019. Ardern has focused much of her time in office on the New Zealand housing crisis, child poverty, and social inequality. Recently, Ardern has been praised for her transparent crisis communication, as well as her tough border restrictions at the height of the pandemic. As a result, New Zealand is being revered for nearly "quashing the coronavirus."

Tsai Ing-wen, president of Taiwan, has presided over one of the most successful efforts in the world at containing COVID-19 using testing, contact tracing, and isolation measures to control infections without a full national lockdown. Ing-wen, 63, is Taiwan's seventh president and the first woman to serve as the chief leader of the Republic of China.



THE PRIVILEGE OF PROTEST

VIDA ROBERTSON, PH.D.
DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR CRITICAL RACE STUDIES
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND HUMANITIES

In recent months, militarized groups of white men brandishing assault rifles and waving confederate flags have come to be a common feature on the steps of state capitals across the country. From Michigan to Texas, armed protestors in overt acts of intimidation have demanded a repeal of their state's mobility restrictions and renewed access to the nation's markets and local businesses. It is understandable for such groups to seek acknowledgment and redress from their elected officials. However, the reemergence of Alt-Right iconography and militant signs of force are intentionally orchestrated to personify and unite the social, political and economic interests of the domineering white majority.

These protests highlight the historic terror tactics used since the founding of our nation to uphold the preeminent status of white men. White supremacists do not simply seek to be socially isolated from people of color; rather, they share a profound desire to be insulated from the socio-economic circumstances that define the lives of poorer and less upwardly mobile people of color. By superimposing assault style rifles and tactical equipment with the Confederate flag, the organizers of these events provide immediate gravity and historic meaning to their cause. They intentionally usher the country back to a bygone era when white privilege and power were widely understood and acquiesced by all. Sadly, such bigotry emanates not simply from class, but also from caste struggle forged in the brutal enslavement, disinheritance and colonization of people of color. Armed conflict and shameless intimidation are familiar instruments of white supremacy.

In solidarity with the numerous racial, ethnic, and gendered communities suffering from the devastating effects and implications of COVID-19, we must be resolute in bringing attention to these acts of naked terrorism and intimidation. The future and wellbeing of minoritized communities is dependent on our unwavering commitment to equality, equity and social justice. We must once again stand united against the forces that wish to divide and subjugate marginalized people throughout the country. We commit ourselves to shine a light on these overt acts of fear and intimidation, to speak out against white supremacy and violence of all kinds, and to stand in solidarity with those who strive for social justice.

Congrats

CLASS OF 2020

“IF YOU’RE WILLING TO STAND FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN, YOU WON’T NEED ADVICE FROM ME, BECAUSE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO HANDLE WHATEVER COMES.”

WHOOPI GOLDBERG

A LETTER TO OUR GRADUATES

FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL KNOW YOUR COURAGE

SUCHETA CHOUDHURI, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Dear UHD graduates:

Congratulations on arriving at one of the most important milestones of your life! The affiliates of UHD’s Center for Critical Race Studies commend your commitment to stay the course and finish strong. This is not an ordinary year; we are in the middle of a global pandemic and life, as we know it, has been turned inside out. Given the circumstances, we are awed by your determination as you grapple with this new reality. We see your struggles as you balance school and work, your burden of caregiving, and your anxieties for your safety and that of your loved ones. We grieve the loss of our own ability to be here for you in person and provide comfort and encouragement. The isolation that you have felt in the past few weeks is frightening, but please remember that we are here to cheer you on. The crisis has produced—as we have seen a number of times in the history of our institution—a stronger community, and we are in this moment with you and your cohort.

We feel your sadness at graduating without the traditional pomp and circumstance, the beloved ceremony that brings together friends and family who can acknowledge their pride in your achievement. Still more intimidating is the world that awaits you after graduation. Besides its immediate threat to human life, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare a world riddled with economic uncertainties and racial hostilities. While we have very little idea of what the future holds, we are certain of one thing: **our faith in you**. We are inspired by your strength, and we feel honored to have mentored one or more of you. We will live with the story of how you persisted in this moment of history and shaped it to your will. The future generations of UHD students will hear about the courage and grace with which you overcame obstacles to reach this milestone.

Take a moment to breathe. You are strong, but remember to take care of yourself. The poet and activist Audre Lorde reminded us, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” Nurture the bright light that led you to this moment, so that you can light up the world. Hold on to your strength as you go forward to support communities that need you. You will always have a home with us and CCRS will be here to welcome you back.

In solidarity, safety and health,

The Center for Critical Race Studies

CHECK OUT THESE CCRS CONVERSATION STARTERS



CCRS Fellow Daniel Peña discusses the CHSS Spring Common Reader, *Reclaiming Conversation* by Sherry Turkle, with faculty and students in his [latest podcast](#). The book explores the consequences of prioritizing digital connection over conversation.



CCRS Fellow Dr. Stacie Craft DeFreitas was recently interviewed by [Texas Standard](#) about her new textbook, *African American Psychology: A Positive Psychology Perspective*.

A STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

ASIANS AND ASIAN AMERICANS ARE INTEGRAL MEMBERS OF OUR UHD FAMILY

DANIEL PEÑA

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

UHD's Center for Critical Race Studies is closely monitoring the rise in assault, harassment, and hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans in the Houston area and the nation at large. We remain deeply concerned by the rhetoric from certain political leaders and other prominent voices that fan the flames of racist sentiment to the ends of exploitation of racial divisions and political deflection. CCRS, its fellows, affiliates, and its allies condemn such rhetoric. We stand in solidarity with our Asian and Asian American students, staff, faculty, and their families and communities in Houston and elsewhere as they navigate life in this COVID-19 era. We hear you and we are here for you as a resource and safe space on-campus and off as you navigate work and study throughout your career at UHD.

Asian and Asian American communities are integral members of our UHD family. Contributions to UHD's cultural and institutional fabric can be felt everywhere from the classroom to conferences, festivals, and student organizations to curriculum, instruction, and leadership. At every level, we witness how Asian and Asian Americans contribute to the health and vibrancy of the University of Houston-Downtown. You should know that we see you too for the complex and diverse individuals you are, with disparate hopes, dreams, and desires that shape how you maximize yourself and your work at the University of Houston-Downtown.

Your work is important; it is essential. At CCRS, we recognize your aspirations and sympathize with the difficulty of working under the oppressive and demoralizing forces of racism. As you move forward, do keep in mind these words by the great James Baldwin:

"Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority, but to their inhumanity and fear."

Together we are stronger. And grounded in a radical love and respect for ourselves, our communities, and our interrelatedness, we can thrive together.

CCRS is here for you.



CCRS Fellows, May 2020



Dr. Kristin Anderson

Professor of Psychology

Dr. Johnathan Chism

Assistant Professor of History

Dr. Sucheta Choudhuri

Associate Professor of English

Dr. Stacie DeFreitas

Associate Professor of Psychology

Dr. DoVeanna S. Fulton

Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr. Felicia L. Harris

Assistant Professor of Communication Studies

Dr. Chuck Jackson

Associate Professor of English

Dr. Creshema R. Murray

Associate Professor of Communication Studies

Mr. Daniel Peña

Assistant Professor of English

Dr. Vida Robertson

Associate Professor of English and Humanities

Dr. David Ryden

Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr. Doug teDuits

Assistant Professor of Management

Dr. Antoinette Wilson

Assistant Professor of Psychology

LET'S CONNECT

If you have resources, stories, or inspiration you would like to share with the CCRS community, please e-mail CCRS@uhd.edu.

