

THE CONNECT

A Center for Critical Race Studies Newsletter



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READING

"At nearly 800 pages long, I am certain that volume one of my forever president's memoir, **A Promised Land**, will be more than enough reading material for the winter break. I am excited to relive the first two years of Barack Obama's historic presidency through his own words and from his vantage point."

CRESHEMA R. MURRAY, PH.D.
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO
THE PRESIDENT



LISTENING

"For the past few months, I have committed to taking time to exercise and to walk and jog in my neighborhood. I have accompanied exercise with listening to books on Audible, such as Glaude's **Democracy in Black**, Ellison's **Invisible Man**, Morrison's **The Bluest Eye**, Prizant's **Uniquely Human**, Hill's **Nobody**, and a host of other books. I have been dealing with this pandemic by striving to cultivate and create new habits."

JONATHAN CHISM, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY



WATCHING

"I've heard so many great things about Netflix's **Jingle Jangle** that it has jumped to the top of my must-see movie list for the holidays. Not only are there rave reviews, but the film has an all-star cast that is beyond impressive. As soon as we cross the finish line of the semester, I'll be planted on my couch with holiday cookies, ready to enjoy this instant holiday classic."

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

CHECK OUT THESE CCRS CONVERSATION STARTERS



In October, CCRS Fellow **Dr. Chuck Jackson** joined Fellow **Dr. Stacie Craft DeFreitas** for the annual **CCRS Faculty Spotlight Interview**. The half-hour conversation explores the inspiration and behind-the-scenes process for Dr. DeFreitas' groundbreaking text, ***African American Psychology: A Positive Psychology Perspective***. This interview may be particularly interesting if you are a student curious about how to get involved with the publication process or a writer interested in tips for book-length projects.

THE CENTER FOR CRITICAL RACE STUDIES PRESENTS
THE 2020 VIRTUAL FALL SYMPOSIUM
RACE, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Join us for a timely discussion on the importance of voting, voter suppression, celebrities in politics, voting during a pandemic, and more!

Available for streaming on **Tuesday, October 27** via uhd.edu/ccrs and our Social Media

Featuring a Panel Discussion with

 CHRIS HOLLINS, HARRIS COUNTY CLERK	 DR. ANNIE BENFIELD, VP OF VOTER SERVICES FOR THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF HOUSTON	 NATALIA "NATA" CORNELLO, ATTORNEY AND CANDIDATE FOR JUDGE, DISTRICT COURT	 ROKANNE WERNER, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE	 TAKAH TAYLOR, ACTIVIST, PRECINCT GRASS AND UHJ ALUM	 MODERATED BY DR. JONATHAN CHISM, CCRS FELLOW AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY
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For more information contact Dr. Vida Robertson, robertsonv@uhd.edu

Prior to the historic conclusion of the 2020 election cycle in November, the Center for Critical Race Studies hosted a panel of local activists and experts for our **2020 Fall Symposium on Race, Politics, and Culture**. The timely discussion tackled the importance of voting, voter suppression, celebrities in politics, and more. Although this year's election cycle is nearing a conclusion, the conversation on race, politics, and culture is more urgent than ever. **[Stream the symposium](#)** to unpack some of the most pressing talking points.



SHOULD WE GO BACK TO NORMAL? HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS THE URGENCY OF CREATING A NEW AMERICA

JONATHAN CHISM, PH.D.
 ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

COVID-19 has not come or gone as fast as most of us have desired. I personally have missed exercising in the gym, dining in at my favorite restaurants, going to church, and teaching my face to face classes. Like most Americans, I have had to accept the reality that a return to pre-COVID-19 normalcy is not on the immediate horizon.

Rather than dealing with the stress of these times through binge watching shows on Netflix, playing video games, and through frequent snacking, I have endeavored to use time wisely during this pandemic. For example, for the past few months, I committed to taking time to exercise and to walk and jog in my neighborhood, wearing my mask of course. I have accompanied exercise with listening to books via Audible such as Eddie Glaude's *Democracy in Black*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Barry Prizant's *Uniquely Human*, Marc Lamont Hill's *Nobody*, and a host of other books. I have been dealing with this pandemic by striving to cultivate and create new habits.

Likewise, instead of merely longing to return to normalcy, we must recognize that the "good old days" were not truly good for everyone. We should not settle for returning to the prevailing and ruling norm of racist, heteronormative, and capitalist patriarchy. How might we create a more socially just world after COVID-19?

In his latest book, *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*, historian Eddie Glaude provides sophisticated commentary on the writings and activism of James Baldwin. While juxtaposing Baldwin's reflections with our contemporary realities during the presidency of Donald Trump, Glaude urges Americans to consider how we might "begin again" and bring forth a more socially just and inclusive America. What must we do to give birth to an America that has not yet been born—an America that is truly just for all?

Throughout history, students at several colleges and universities, including Diane Nash and John Lewis from Fisk University and Anne Moody from Tougaloo College, have carefully developed strategies and plans of action to challenge white supremacy and various forms of social injustice. They spearheaded sit-ins, freedom rides, and other creative demonstrations during the 1960s to strive to reconstruct America. Using time wisely and constructively during this pandemic requires brainstorming how we might enable our democracy to function properly and flourish. We must not simply settle for going through the motions until things return finally to "normal." We must consider how we might create a new normal through being and becoming agents of social justice and transformation.

IN MEMORY OF MONICA ROBERTS

A NATIONAL AND HOMETOWN HERO LAID TO REST

HOUSTON ATTORNEY AND UHD ALUMNA FRAN WATSON AND UHD PROFESSOR DR. KRISTIN ANDERSON OFFER TRIBUTE TO A HOUSTON TRAILBLAZER



Photo Credit: Eric Edward Schell

Monica Roberts, the “[TransGriot](#),” an unapologetic Black transgender woman, was laid to rest on October 24, 2020, at age 58. Monica was a force in the LGBTQIA+ community, advocating for full equality, particularly for transgender people. She first transitioned in the 1990s while working at Continental Airlines and was terminated shortly thereafter. When she was fired from a job she loved, she used that hurt, disappointment, and anger to embark on a journey to make a lasting impact on the queer community.

Monica was raised by a teacher and a radio disc jockey, so using the power of her voice to fight injustice came naturally to her. She traveled all over the country to advocate for laws to protect queer people. She publicly demanded LGBTQIA+ equality at protests, rallies, and conferences. She walked the halls of state legislatures and the United States Capitol to speak truth to power.

Monica started her [TransGriot](#) blog because articles about transgender people did not feature anyone who looked like her--a Black transgender woman. What started as a place to ensure that Black transgender perspectives were visible became a place where the community turned for information regarding the endless string of murders that targeted transgender people, particularly transgender women of color. The media routinely misgenders trans people, and Monica’s blog not only ensured the victims had dignity but also called out the media for their insensitive errors.

As Monica traveled the country, she fought hard until the day she died for the City of Houston. She was front-and-center fighting for LGBTQIA+ Houstonians. Before the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance was written, she was joined by Dee Dee Watters while speaking at City Council meetings about the need for protections for the community. She took an intersectional approach to her advocacy, addressing issues of police reform and education because she understood that queer people were part of every issue. She supported efforts by UH-Downtown and UH on issues relating to restroom access and was present during meetings when SGA members voted.

Monica’s passing is a profound loss for the LGBTQIA+ community. Her forceful voice will be missed but the impact of her activism lives on. Her work helped empower the next generation to continue the fight for fully realized equality, dignity, and empowerment.



Dr. Kristin Anderson
Professor of Psychology

Dr. Jonathan Chism
Assistant Professor of History

Dr. Sucheta Choudhuri
Associate Professor of English

Dr. Stacie DeFreitas
Interim Associate 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
Special Assistant to the President

Mr. Daniel Peña
Assistant Professor of English

Dr. Vida Robertson
Associate Professor of English and Humanities

Dr. David Ryden
Interim 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.

