

THE CONNECT

A Center for Critical Race Studies Newsletter

MOVING FORWARD THIS FALL

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

In the May 2020 issue of *The Connect*, I wrote that "we must innovate, organize, collaborate, and more as we learn how to thrive in our new way of life." At the time, those words were largely aspirational, and I had no way of knowing that our summer months would be marked by national unrest, widespread organizational change, and an unyielding battle with COVID-19. Yet, here we meet again, with innovation, collaboration, and change bustling all around us. We're no longer standing still in the midst of multiple crises. This fall, we're moving forward.

While we acknowledge the interlocking systems of oppression that make moving forward more challenging for some than others, we stand in partnership with those who, like the historical vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris declared, "see what can be unburdened by what has been." In this issue of *The Connect*, the Fellows of the Center for Critical Race Studies invite you to imagine a pathway forward in these unprecedented times.

In this issue

Welcome Message to UHD Students

On Kamala Harris: See What Can Be

CCRS Conversation Starters

Athletes Won't Just "Shut up and Play"

COMING SOON: 2020 Fall Symposium

WELCOME MESSAGE TO UHD STUDENTS YOUR PRESENCE SPEAKS TO YOUR PERSISTENCE

STACIE CRAFT DEFREITAS, PH.D.
INTERIM ASSOCIATE DEAN, COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dear UHD Students:

Welcome back to the fall semester!

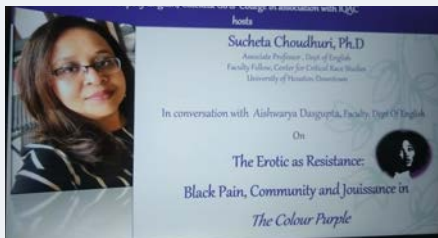
We know this is an unprecedented time as we continue to go on and against the backdrop of continued social unrest. Both of those decisions that can impact our political landscape for the next few years on some positives. One undeniable positive is that you are here. I am so glad you are here. Chosen to continue your education despite the obstacles we are facing, the Center for Critical Race Studies at UHD are committed to support you like yours out in the world making decisions and guiding us in the right direction. So, for now, we encourage you to focus on successfully learning in your classes while maintaining your physical and mental health. How do you do that? Make sure that you schedule time not only to take care of your class work, but also to exercise and engage in self-care. We know many of you are juggling several roles and things can become overwhelming very quickly. We know because we are, too.

I'll give you a bit of advice: try to notice when you are becoming overwhelmed and make some time to take care of yourself. This might include asking someone for help (including your professors), taking a break (but not so long of a break that it makes your stress worse), or focusing on doing something that you enjoy (I like to do a Dance Train with my kids). Also, try to make required boring tasks more enjoyable. For example, I listen to music while doing housekeeping and audiobooks or podcasts when I go for a walk. And, perhaps most importantly: get good sleep, eat well, and take care of you and yours. These are just a few simple steps you can take to combat feelings of being overwhelmed in the face of the unprecedented circumstances under which we are persisting in our educational goals.

Again, welcome back! We are so glad to have you here.



CHECK OUT THESE CCRS CONVERSATION STARTERS



CCRS Fellow **Dr. Sucheta Choudhuri** had a busy and productive summer. In July, Dr. Choudhuri was invited to give the keynote speech at a virtual event hosted by Calcutta Girls' College, an institution affiliated to the University of Calcutta in India. Her talk, "The Erotic as Resistance: Black Pain, Community and *Jouissance* in *The Color Purple*," was viewed by more than 200 attendees from all over India. In May 2020, Dr. Choudhuri published an article on queer masculinity, abjection and popular culture. You can check out the publication in the [Journal of South Asian Popular Culture](#).



After a series of pandemic-related delays, CCRS Fellow **Dr. Chuck Jackson's** recent publication, "[Petrification and Petroleum: Affect, the Gas Pump, and U.S. Horror Films \(1956-1973\)](#)," is available just in time for a Halloween-themed horror binge. His article investigates the political economy of oil in the American horror film, including the dreadful depiction of gasoline, terror, and anti-Black racism in George Romero's 1968 classic *Night of the Living Dead*.

COMING SOON 2020 FALL SYMPOSIUM

This October, the Center for Critical Race Studies annual Fall Symposium will address voting issues that impact every UHD student and stakeholder with a slate of panelists including local elected officials, UHD alumni, and more. Stay tuned for more details.

ALSO: Watch our [Voter Registration PSA](#) on YouTube.



Photo: [harris.senate.gov](https://www.harris.senate.gov)

ON KAMALA HARRIS: SEE WHAT CAN BE THE HISTORICAL VP NOMINATION OF SENATOR KAMALA HARRIS IS AN INSPIRATION FOR MANY AND ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN OF COLOR

CRESHEMA R. MURRAY, PH.D.

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

"Joe Biden here. Big news: I've chosen Kamala Harris as my running mate. Together, with you, we're going to beat Trump" are twenty-one words shared in a text message on the sunny afternoon of August 11th. A look of shock, a sudden rush of adrenaline, a pulsating heartbeat, and excessive tears running down my cheeks detail the emotional reactions I experienced as the news that Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's vice-presidential running mate was a Black woman, just like me.

I fell in love with Senator Kamala Harris in 2015 after she announced her decision to run for Senator Barbara Boxer's vacated California senate seat. I was extremely elated when she defeated Loretta Sanchez, winning all but four counties in California, to become the second African American woman and first South Asian American to serve in the United States Senate. Her victory in 2016 gave me hope that the moral compass of our country was still intact and ethical, accountable, and trustworthy leadership would remain in Washington, D.C. I followed her actions as a senator, condemning the xenophobic Muslim ban, calling Donald Trump to the carpet on Russian election meddling, holding Brett Kavanaugh accountable for unethical judicial interactions, and demanding the resignation of U.S. attorney general William Barr.

I am a Kamala Harris fan. Long before I received that historic text message, I was enamored with her leadership style and captivated by her passion "for the people." I feel a sense of connection with Senator Harris deeper than our sisterhood in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. I share a bond with Kamala as a Black woman and a Woman of Color navigating American spaces built for white men to succeed. I see the battle for equality and ensuring everyone has a chance to succeed. I understand the pressure of success as the oldest daughter raised by a single mother. I recognize the bravery to face the fear of failure as the first and as the only in leadership positions. More importantly, I feel the ambition to find your place in society and achieve your dreams while paving the way for so many others following behind you.

The text message, read around the country on August 11th, symbolized more than the first African American and South Asian American woman selection as a vice presidential nominee by a major political party. The message signified a movement for all Black and Brown women and girls to know that they have the power to shape their story, the determination to reject false limits, the ability to change what has been, and the opportunity to create what will be.



Change doesn't happen with just talk!! It happens with action and needs to happen NOW! For my @IPROMISESchool kids, kids and communities across the country, it's on US to make a difference. Together. That's why your vote is @morethanavote 🍌 #BlackLivesMatter

ATHLETES WON'T JUST "SHUT UP AND PLAY"

THE ROLE OF BLACK ATHLETES IN PROMOTING SOCIAL EQUALITY, HUMAN DIGNITY, AND RACIAL JUSTICE IS AN EXPANSIVE TRADITION

VIDA ROBERTSON, PH.D.

DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR CRITICAL RACE STUDIES
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND HUMANITIES

In a 2018 interview, Fox News journalist and provocateur Laura Ingraham attempted to ridicule NBA super star LeBron James for "talking politics." Ingraham explained to her viewers, "It's always unwise to seek political advice from someone who gets paid \$100 million a year to bounce a ball." She added, "Keep the political comments to yourselves. . . Shut up and dribble." U.S. culture has long demanded that Black athletes passively condone Black suffering by requiring that they simply "shut up and play." This sentiment has persisted since the introduction of Black athletes in mainstream sport. However, the role that Black athletes have played in promoting the social equality, human dignity, and racial justice is an expansive tradition. The world's greatest athletes demonstrably refuse to keep silent. Ingraham's vulgar comment reduces Black athletes to mere beasts for American amusement and financial gain. The statement echoes the racist sentiments of white slaveholders who purchased Black flesh in order to forcefully extract their strength, skill, and talent. The notion that Black athletes would simply "play ball"—while their family, friends and loved ones are being terrorized and killed—again reinforces the notion that Black love, pain, and loss are less profound. Laura Ingraham assumed that LeBron James' money means more to him than his community. In 2020, LeBron James and the NBA have taken unprecedented steps to prove this assumption wrong.

Black athletes have long embraced the privilege of their social platforms and power of their voice. In 1917, a Rutgers University football player named Paul Robeson took a stand in support of Civil Rights and social justice long before he became a world renowned actor, singer, and lawyer. His trailblazing activism would lead MLB baseball player Jackie Robinson to use his celebrity to help organize the 1958 Youth March for Integrated Schools with Martin Luther King Jr. Since the inclusion of Black athletes in the major collegiate and professional athletics associations, Black athletes have played an notable role in the social, political, legal, and economic liberation of marginalized communities. Long before LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, and other NBA players dressed in hoodies to protest Trayvon Martin's murder, sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised black gloved fists during the medal ceremony in the 1968 Olympic Games protesting the violence and racial injustice endured by African Americans. In a 1975 interview, heavy weight champion Muhammad Ali ounce remarked, "Sure, I know I got it made while the masses of black people are catchin' hell, but as long as they ain't free, I ain't free."

Nor should we forget that months before San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick kneeled during the national anthem, Black women on the Minnesota Lynx basketball team wore black warm-up shirts that said, "Change starts with us. Justice and accountability." During the following press conference, these pioneering women declined any question that did not address police brutality and the slaying of Philando Castile. Black athletes understand that their future as a competitor is inextricably bound to the future of their communities. Black achievement is worthless without Black dignity. We must embolden professional and collegiate athletes to carry their intersectional communities with them. These athletes aren't just athletes; they're ambassadors. And, as ambassadors for underserved communities, their words and actions amplify the voices of the invisible and the silenced who find themselves "playing" a prejudicial game for their very lives.

UHD
Center for
Critical Race Studies

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
Associate Professor of Communication Studies

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.

