

A Commitment to Racial Justice

When **URIAH RICHEY** graduated in spring 2020 with a dual degree in Africana studies and sociology, she had succeeded in every way.



A first-generation college student and the inaugural recipient of the Zaevion Dobson Memorial Scholarship, Richey had felt an enormous responsibility to succeed. Fulton High School awards the scholarship annually to honor the legacy of Dobson, who died during his sophomore year in 2015 protecting the lives of his friends when they were threatened by an act of gun violence in their neighborhood.

“I went to school with Zaevion, and when he passed away it brought our community together—our Knoxville community, but also the community at Fulton,” Richey said. “Receiving an award in his memory means a lot. I had to make sure that I lived up to that honor.”

Her involvement on campus carried this dedication. Richey served as a 1794 Scholar, the squad leader for the Pride of the Southland Color Guard, an officer for the campus chapters of the National

Society of Collegiate Scholars and the NAACP, and a precollege mentor in the Project GRAD Summer Institute. She has also continued to volunteer at her alma mater, Fulton High School.

“Uriah is committed both intellectually and in spirit to the university and her community,” said Michelle Brown, professor of sociology and one of Richey’s favorite instructors.

When she first arrived at UT, Richey planned to be a doctor and started down that path by pursuing a pre-med degree, but she kept coming back to sociology and eventually changed her major.

“Switching to sociology was a big deal,” she said. “I carefully researched it and tried to understand the things that were happening to me and my community.”

For Richey, the sociological imagination had been built into her efforts to understand the world, long before she knew the term.

“My biography and history have always come together,” she said. “In fifth grade, my first Black teacher gave me outside resources to help me understand my history and the history of my people—the kind of history that was not in any of the textbooks. It was a life-changing moment.”

Like the Dobson Memorial Scholarship, that knowledge has not always been easy to carry. After a discussion of local statistics about race and education in Knoxville during one of her sociology classes, Richey found herself crying in her professor’s office.

“I felt like my life was on that board,” she said. “It was hard, but it reaffirmed my commitment to sociology and my community.”

All of these experiences have been a key part of Richey’s growing commitment to racial justice and the work of political consciousness. After speaking at UT’s Commission for Blacks, a group dedicated to the protection and retention of Black and African American students, faculty, and staff, Richey was approached by Knoxville’s Community Empowerment Director Charles Lomax, who is also a UT sociology alum. He and others recruited her as a campaign organizer for the Democratic Party. She is now hard at work on electoral campaigns at the county, state, and federal level—doing voter registration, organizing canvassing and issue-based forums, and managing social media accounts. An aspiring civil rights attorney, she plans to attend Howard University School of Law to prepare for a career fighting for the rights of underrepresented Black men and women.

Read more about Richey online at tiny.utk.edu/richey.



The Power of People to Change the World

MESSAGE FROM **STEPHANIE BOHON**
NEW DEPARTMENT HEAD

Greetings, everyone! This is a time unique in our history. While the world has faced global pandemics, world-wide recessions, and widespread anti-racist protests before, never have we done all three together in this technological era of rapid communication and visual messaging. I cannot predict what the world will look like next week, next month, or next year, but I do know that the choice to become a sociologist is a choice selected by those who are fundamentally optimistic about the future. Although the study of society is often depressing and maddening, we engage in it because we fundamentally believe in the power of people to change the world. If we were here simply to record the world as it is, we would have become historians or journalists; we chose sociology. Thus, we face our turbulent times with cautious optimism, viewing the world with a critical eye, lending our voices and bodies where we can do the most good, and standing ready to face the next good fight.

We are excited that three new faculty members joined our swelling assistant professor ranks this fall. Critical race scholar Deadric Williams left the faculty of the University of Nebraska to join us in January. Alex Moulton joins us having recently received a PhD in geography from Clark University. He will be joined by political economist, Tim Gill, who was recently on faculty at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. We also welcome with them a new

cohort of graduate students who hail from across the country and around the globe. Every year I am amazed at the depth and breadth of talent that our graduate students possess, and our new cohort will help us shine even brighter.

On the heels of these new arrivals are the departure of several of our MA and PhD students. I am proud of our continuing excellent record of high-quality placement of our newly minted PhDs. Congratulations also to our recent BA sociology graduates. Although we could not be there to send you off in person this spring, please know that our warmest wishes go with you for your future success.

This year will be my first year as department head. I am excited about the possibilities, and very, very nervous to follow in the footsteps of Jon Shefner, who ably led and constantly advocated for our strong department. My nervousness is exacerbated by taking the reins during an unprecedented time. I feel a bit like an ensign being handed the wheel of a big ship just as it is heading into a monsoon. At the same time, it is very clear to me that my path has been paved by all of you and your efforts to create and maintain a healthy department that can weather any storm. I look forward to working side-by-side with you as we work through many new challenges and discover new ways to support each other.

YOUNG ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

Increasingly, a number of our graduate students, for reasons related to family, work, and regional commitments to Appalachia and the South, build their lives here with us. In fact, we have a formidable sociological and intellectual presence in community power building regionally. This year, we profile several of our recent alumni who are currently playing important roles in our part of the world.



Lisa East came to sociology from the tradition of student organizing. As an undergraduate, she worked with and studied the Fair Trade movement, worker cooperatives, and economic justice in the global South. She remembers spending time in Nicaragua and learning that as a person with a lot of privilege, her place was not in leadership there, but

closer to home in Tennessee and Appalachia. She felt stories of Appalachia need to be told by Appalachians in ways that uncover power relations built around coal, land, and mountain justice. This is all apparent in her dissertation work on environmental politics, fossil fuels, and political economy.

After completing her PhD in 2017, East focused her interests in community and applied sociology by asking herself where and how she could best use her skills to help movement work under the leadership of those directly impacted. She notes how commitments to graduate school can require large amounts of time and energy in community, often hyperlocalizing professional and family bonds and commitments. Pregnant with her first child and working intensively with her partner on building a progressive local movement, she became a key player in Knoxville's City Council Movement (CCM), all while teaching intensively as an adjunct faculty member in the UT Department of Sociology.

In just a short time, CCM has had substantive electoral wins, but perhaps, more significantly, has changed the conversation on what governance, community power, and equity might mean on issues related to Knoxville's racialized history of gentrification, displacement, affordable housing, criminal justice, and state violence.

As she continues her teaching this fall, East will chair a CCM committee dedicated to envisioning a Knoxville For All through programming and remembering the racial legacies and roots of the city.



Andrew Gunnoe finished his PhD in environmental sociology with us in 2012, followed by a postdoctoral fellowship in agricultural economics and rural sociology at Auburn University. He now teaches in the social sciences division at Maryville College and raises his children in the shadow of the Smoky Mountains.

He developed his environmental consciousness about the Southeast US through outdoor recreation, such as playing on rivers, which led to a commitment to taking care of the water and land. This commitment is now at the center of his teaching and research. His focus on land ownership, particularly the issues of absentee land ownership, has led him to a multi-institutional research collaboration focused on updating a classic Appalachian land study with the Appalachian Landowner Task Force at the University of Kentucky. He is also president of the board of the Little River Watershed Association. The Little River originates from a protected area, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and is a biodiversity hot spot for fish and other species. It also provides drinking water for more than 120,000 residents of Blount County. As the river flows downstream closer to Knoxville, it becomes more impacted from pollutants, including sediment, agricultural and development practices, urban runoff, and failing septic tanks. Gunnoe heads the community effort to preserve this resource and prevent its recent documented decline.

continued on page 4...



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He incorporates all of this work into his pedagogy. His students pursue projects related to environmental concerns, such as studying the redevelopment of the South Knox superfund site or completing their semester at the Highlander Research and Education Center where they learn more about advocacy for land ownership and reclamation in Appalachia.



Katie Morris also teaches nearby at Pellissippi State College. After completing her PhD in 2016, she took on her first academic job, pregnant, teaching a 5/5 course load and two courses in the summer, with more than 400 students during her first year. She

was overwhelmed, to say the least, but centered her efforts in pedagogy and the inequalities she knew she and her students faced. For her, the classroom is the space of real social justice work. Morris's teaching, like her research and dissertation, which focused on urban development in the "Scruffy City," is grounded in local issues related to Knoxville.

"Most students don't have a good sense yet of where they are or where they are from or how their values are grounded in where they come from, which takes time to realize," Morris said. "It's important to me to take the time to talk with them, taking the time with them, daily, to move into how to access education and new possibilities."

This combination of pedagogy with social justice has led Morris to publish on teaching social justice and to take on numerous mentorship roles at Pellissippi. She is an award-winning teacher, recognized for her work with community engagement and service learning. She has led

regional workshops and panels on teaching intersectionality, community engagement, and diversity and inclusion. She and Gunnoe presented recently on "Teaching Introductory Sociology to Non-Sociology Majors in the Trump Era" at the Southern Sociological Association Meetings, where Morris is a regular attendee. The challenges of parenting, teaching, and pursuing social justice work is a continuous effort, one exacerbated in the current pandemic. In her words, we are "always trying to figure it out."

The American model of graduate education has traditionally been directed at - and measured by - placements in prestigious universities, often far away from professors' families, communities, and commitments. These positions have grown increasingly difficult to achieve as the university increasingly relies upon contingent adjunct and graduate student labor. Universities have become more visible as intensely fraught spaces for women and faculty of color, facing the quadruple workload of teaching, research, service, and justice and its attendant stressors of inequities in labor. As East reminds us, we should think about who stays upon completion of their degrees: largely women and those committed to families and their communities. She argues they find themselves in a kind of unnecessary trap torn between centering their work on what their communities need or pursuing a handful of annual tenure-track positions. We are proud that a new wave of PhDs are pointing us to other possibilities and the need to rethink their place in a more equitable and meaningful university structure.

East, Gunnoe, and Morris are just a handful of success stories from our department. Enkeshi Thom El-Amin ('19), whom we profiled in last year's newsletter, recently launched *Black in Appalachia* and is leading entrepreneurial efforts for Black women in Knoxville, while, again, teaching with us. What would it mean to take our local brain power and direct it toward change, working alongside our communities? What kinds of new positions and professions might we carve out in popular, participatory, and university spaces together? It is an exciting and important time to take on the task of reimagining the university.



Timothy M. Gill joins the Department of Sociology as an assistant professor, coming from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. His work focuses on US foreign policy, Venezuelan politics and human rights, and sociological theory. He has published in several academic outlets, including *Sociological Forum*, *Journal of World-Systems Research*, *Social Currents*, and *Sociology of Development*. He has also written for several public outlets, including the *Washington Post*, *The Nation*, *Jacobin*, *World Politics Review*, and *Contexts*.

Gill completed his dissertation, "The State and Civil Society in Socialist Venezuela: The Case of U.S. Democracy Assistance, Venezuelan National Sovereignty, and International Cooperation Law," at the University of Georgia in 2016. Thereafter, he was a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Inter-American Policy and Research at Tulane University. In his dissertation, he focused on US democracy assistance efforts in Venezuela under the government of former President Hugo Chávez, and the Venezuelan government's attempts to prohibit these efforts. His manuscript, tentatively titled *Encountering U.S. Empire in Socialist Venezuela: The Legacy of Race, Neocolonialism, and Democracy Promotion*, is under contract with University of Pittsburgh Press and due out in 2021. Gill is also the editor of a book volume titled *The Future of U.S. Empire in the Americas: The Trump Administration and Beyond*, released in April 2020 by Routledge Press.



Alex Moulton comes to UT from the Department of Global Studies and Human Geography at Middle Tennessee State University where he was a Provost's dissertation fellow and lecturer for 2019-2020. He completed his PhD in geography at Clark University in Massachusetts in 2020.

Moulton's research and teaching interests center on the intersections of race, development, and justice in human-environmental dynamics. His dissertation follows the spatial politics, epistemologies, and environmental struggles of Jamaican Maroons. This work is related to broader research exploring Afro-indigenous rights as they play out in the politics of nature and race around state directed conservation and development. He plans on developing this research into a manuscript that will highlight formulations of humanness, agency and rights articulated from the liminal geographies and environments of Black counter-cultural communities.

In a forthcoming co-authored chapter in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Geography*, Moulton sheds light on the black land and freedom struggles in colonial Jamaica and mid-twentieth-century US South. The chapter argues for grounding analyses of racial capitalism in land and struggles for land as a material and symbolic liberatory space. Moulton's work has been published in *Journal of Extreme Events*, *Geography Compass*, and *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.

In addition to his teaching at Middle Tennessee State University, Moulton has also taught courses at Clark University and the University of the West Indies (Mona, Jamaica). His courses include Black Geographies and Maroon Societies; Environment and Society; Food Justice and Food Movements; Gender and Environment; and Urban and Regional Planning. He believes in using student field-based research projects and community-based participatory research to foster undergraduate and graduate mentorship, research-based learning, and scholar-activism. Aside from teaching and conducting field research, Moulton is an amateur rural landscape photographer and gardener. He is excited to be joining the UT family!

FACULTY SPOTLIGHTS



Deadric Williams joins the Department of Sociology as an assistant professor in critical race and ethnic studies. He received his doctoral degree in sociology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and served as a postdoctoral research associate in minority health disparities at UNL. Williams spent three years as an assistant professor in sociology at UNL prior to joining the sociology department at UT.

Williams's research focuses on three themes. The first theme, racial stratification and Black families, uses critical race tenets (e.g., race as a social construction and the permanency of racism) to understand economic and family inequality. The second theme focuses on stress and health in couple dyads as a longitudinal and dyadic process. The last theme addresses health disparities by focusing on the association between race-based stressors (e.g., discrimination) and stress biomarkers (e.g., cortisol) among Black couples.

His research has appeared in *The Journal of African American Studies*, *Issues in Race & Society*, *Society & Mental Health*, *Population Research & Policy Review*, *Journal of Family Issues*, the *American Journal of Human Biology*, among others. Williams presented his research for the

College of Arts and Sciences College Conversations series: Allyship & Antiracism, a bi-weekly series featuring faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences whose research focuses on identifying racism, how to become an effective antiracist, and other topics related to allyship and antiracism. Learn more at tiny.utk.edu/cas-conversations.

Previously, Williams's taught courses on race and racisms, family diversity, and social relationships and health at UNL. Williams is passionate about cultivating student's critical thinking skills to understand how, and in what ways, the social construction of race undergirds racial inequality in the US. He looks forward to working with undergraduates and graduate students at UT. Aside from researching, teaching, and mentoring students, Williams enjoys spending time with his family.

DEPARTMENT NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM A FINLAND FULBRIGHT | Professor Lo Presser has been in Europe for more than a year working on her latest book project, *Unsaid: Methodology and Methods*. From May to August 2019 she was a visiting research fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University College London. Next stop was a Fulbright US Scholars fellowship at Tampere University in Finland (August 2019-April 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic kept Presser and her children in Finland for a while longer. Walks in the forest and the relatively low rate of infection in Tampere were a solace, even as Presser lost her cousin Shelley Rosen to COVID-19 April 13, 2020.

Presser's Fulbright co-sponsors at Tampere University were the faculty of social sciences and the Narrare Centre for Interdisciplinary Narrative Studies. She delivered a Narrare-sponsored keynote talk in September 2019 on the theme of "Dangers of Narrative." In her presentation, she considered how our stories shape our identities and consequently our actions, and therefore how stories constitute identities that tolerate harmful actions and arrangements no less than helpful ones.



GLOBAL STUDIES PROGRAM UPDATE

Global Studies has had a busy year, but one heavily interrupted by COVID-19. Just before we went into isolation, we worked with the Center for the Study of Social Justice to organize a well-attended panel discussion March 13 to launch Jon Shefner and Cory Blad's new book *Why Austerity Persists* (Palgrave, 2019). In addition to Shefner, respondents included Paul Gellert, Tricia Hepner and Raja Swamy from the UT anthropology department, with Harry Dahms presiding.

We conducted the first curriculum review since Shefner created Global Studies and added a third, more language-intensive concentration (effective fall 2021). Finally, we planned and received a Haines-Morris grant for a lecture series on "The US in the Globe and the Global in the US: a view from the Southeast periphery" across the next two years.

FACULTY NEWS | Solange Muñoz, assistant professor of geography, spent fall in Buenos Aires on a Fulbright researching urban spatial politics. Adam Willcox, research associate professor in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries and UT's Peace Corps coordinator, had his spring break class trip abruptly cancelled, along with many other faculty who had summer research trips cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

STUDENT NEWS | Among our graduates, Shannon Peronne received a Fulbright grant in Brazil to study Portuguese and work alongside Brazilian nonprofits to research the inequities faced by the non-neurotypical communities in Brazil. Meghan Gagg, one of our two outstanding graduates (the other was Hannah Stauffer) is headed to Florida to teach ESL with Americorps after a Peace Corps assignment was postponed.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Remembering Ann Louise Page

In keeping with this issue's focus on regional commitments, we remember Ann Louise Page, who received her PhD in the Department of Sociology in 1979. Native to West Virginia, Professor Page pursued her undergraduate and master's degree at Marshall University where she studied population mortality trends in the state. She completed her dissertation, titled "Energy Policy and Ruling Class Hegemony: The Dissemination of Corporate Policy Preferences via Teachers and Textbooks," under the directorship of Tom Hood. Page went on to teach for more than 30 years in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Appalachian State University. In 2009, she retired as a full professor.

Page's teaching spanned the sociological spectrum, from introductory sociology to social problems; research methods to Appalachian Culture; the energy industry to social stratification. She was also a prolific researcher, whose work was reprinted often and cited in numerous professional journals, including *Social Forces*, the *Journal of Social Psychology*, the *Sociological Spectrum*, and *Business and Society Review*. She was an active member of the Southern Sociological Society, the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and Sociologists for Women in Society. She also worked on or served as principal investigator on numerous grants. Throughout the years, she maintained a steady research trajectory focused on the institutional messaging and advertising of energy corporations and their role in shaping popular opinion and attitudes. She also pursued important work on Appalachian women's health and risk. Many of our environmental and critical race students and faculty in our department continue these lines of research today. Finally, it is clear from her service record that she was a prodigious force in her department, serving on more than 25 committees.

Professor Page passed away this spring, but her legacy lives on through a generous gift to enable research in our department. We offer much gratitude.

Congratulations to our recent graduates!

This year, Aya Barnes, Bryan Clayborn, Mike Ickowitz, Bob Leonard, and Vivian Swayne completed master's degrees. Swayne will continue with us for her PhD. Tamra Gilbertson, Grady Lowery, Ruben Ortiz, and Della Winters completed doctoral degrees.

Gilbertson and Lowery will remain with us for now as instructors in the Department of Sociology. Gilbertson is also in a new position as Carbon Pricing Education Project Coordinator for the Indigenous Environmental Network. Ortiz has assumed the title of Social Scientist in the Economic Research Service at the US Department of Agriculture.

Nikhil Deb has joined the Department of Sociology at Murray State University as an assistant professor. Winters is now an assistant professor of criminology at Arkansas State University.

Many of them completed their work and these transitions facing the sudden stresses of pandemic in teaching, writing, jobs, moves, and family life, ultimately defending and earning their degrees across Zoom meetings, which makes all of your achievements especially poignant for us. We wish you health and hope in your journeys!



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A Special Thanks to **Jon Shefner**

After 10 years of service as department head, Professor Jon Shefner returns to the faculty. Under his leadership, we hired 13 faculty members, and of those, tenured and/or promoted eight. We conducted full reviews of undergraduate and graduate curricula and hosted four nationally recognized conferences, bringing hundreds of scholars to our department. We created a new concentration in Critical Race Studies, the first new scholarly area in this department in 30 years. Through the generosity of Wanda Rushing and Sherry Cable, we established new funds that help graduate students and undergraduates alike. We underwent external reviews that consistently emphasized our strengths and encouraged our growth.

Shefner has continued to make vital contributions in his research in the areas of social movements, globalization, and the political economy of Latin America. During his tenure as department head, he has published 21 refereed articles and book chapters, authored a book, edited or co-edited five books, submitted 17 grant proposals, 10 of them successful. He was tireless in his efforts to advocate on our behalf and to build a space for award-winning, internationally recognized research, exceptional teaching, unceasing service, and the pursuit of social justice. We stood at the forefront of multiple struggles on campus and in the city, state, and nation with him – and will continue to do so in the future. Thank you, Jon, for all of your efforts.



movement