

# THE CONNECT

A Center for Critical Race Studies Newsletter



## CCRS WELCOMES YOU!

### DR. VIDA ROBERTSON

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

The Fellows of the **Center for Critical Race Studies (CCRS)** would like to welcome you to the University of Houston-Downtown and back on campus this semester. The ongoing pandemic has left an indelible and historic mark on the Greater Houston community and we encourage each of you to stay vigilant in preventing the further spread of the disease by protecting the diverse and intersectional communities that call our beloved city home. With this in mind, we welcome you back on campus and **invite you to join us** in the fight to liberate the minds and bodies of those we love.

The Center for Critical Race Studies is an interdisciplinary coalition of faculty, staff, student activists, and community organizers committed to the study and emancipation of marginalized peoples. As a dedicated **alliance of scholactivists devoted to social justice**, our core objectives are to provide engaging programming, effective community outreach, and intersectional research/teaching that positively impacts the lives of the most vulnerable communities in the Gulf Coast region. Consequently, we would like to encourage you to participate in the wide array of events, courses, and opportunities we have scheduled for the Fall semester.

The Fellows will celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month with our upcoming Fall Symposium on Race, Politics, and Culture featuring Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas of the Vanderbilt University Divinity School and "LatinX Literature Aloud and Proud" hosted by CCRS Fellow Dr. Stalina Villarreal in collaboration with the Department of English. Join our **celebration of the vibrant Latin American communities** that call Houston home and make our university and wonderful place to learn.

**Happy Fall Semester!!!**

We look forward to seeing you in class, on campus or in the community.

## *In This Issue...*

Celebrating National  
Hispanic Heritage Month

CCRS 2022 Fall Symposium

Introduction to Visiting Author,  
Jasminne Méndez

Small Black Film Archives

## CONGRATULATIONS TO DR. CHISM!

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Jonathan Chism as the new **Assistant Director** for the Center for Critical Race Studies. We look forward to the wonderful contributions he will continue to make in serving the essential work of the Center.

We also extend warm congratulations to Dr. Chism for his recent selection as a **Campus Compact 2022-2023 Engaged Scholar!** Dr. Chism represents one of 15 scholars nationwide awarded this esteemed honor for community-engaged scholarship.



Photo Credit: www.uhd.edu

# NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

SEPTEMBER 15 - OCTOBER 15

## DR. FELICIA HARRIS

INTERIM DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR LATINO STUDIES  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The Fellows of the Center for Critical Race Studies join the University community in celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month, observed annually from September 15 to October 15, in honor of the important contributions and heritage of Hispanic and Latinx communities and cultures to the United States.

The observation originally began in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week, with the period of commemoration later extending to 30 days under President Ronald Reagan in 1988. The 30-day period is marked by anniversaries of independence for Latin American countries Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua on September 15, Mexican Independence Day (September 16), and Chile's Independence Day (September 18).

According to the National Council of Hispanic Employment Program Managers (NCHEPM), the theme for this year's observance is "**Unidos: Inclusivity for a Stronger Nation.**" The theme was chosen as a reminder to "ensure that all voices are represented and welcomed to help build stronger communities and a stronger nation."

During this month-long commemoration, students, faculty, staff, and University visitors will have the opportunity to participate in important celebrations, conversations, and community-building events, such as:

- **2022 Hispanic Heritage Celebration** kickoff event at the Marilyn Davies College of Business
- "**The State of the LatinX Student at UHD**" forum hosted by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion
- **Workshop and reading by Latinx author**, Jasminne Méndez
- **And many others!**

[LEARN MORE](#)



Photo Credit: [www.afsme.org](http://www.afsme.org)

# CHECK OUT THESE SPEAKERS!



Photo Credit: <https://divinity.vanderbilt.edu>

## CCRS 2022 FALL SYMPOSIUM

RACE, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

WITH DR. STACEY FLOYD-THOMAS

### DR. JONATHAN CHISM

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR CRITICAL RACE STUDIES  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

CCRS is proud to welcome **Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas** as our keynote speaker for the 2022 Fall Symposium. She will present a lecture entitled "**This is My Body Broken for You: The Syndemic and Our Body Politic**" on **October 5, 2022 at 11:30 am**.

Dr. Floyd-Thomas is the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Chair and Associate Professor of Ethics and Society at Vanderbilt University. Her research and teaching probes the intersection of ethics, feminist/womanist studies, interreligious dialogue, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and postcolonial studies with an overall approach to the study of ethics that engages broad questions of moral agency, cultural memory, ethical responsibility, and social justice.

She has authored numerous articles, book chapters, eight books, including the newly released *Religion, Race, and COVID-19: Confronting White Supremacy in the Pandemic*, *The Altars Where We Worship: The Religious Significance of Popular Culture*, and *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. She is unquestionably one of the nation's leading voices in ethical leadership and is globally recognized for her scholarly reputation and institutional leadership for social change.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## LATINX LITERATURE ALOUD AND PROUD!

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH X CENTER FOR CRITICAL RACE STUDIES

Join us for a **read-in** with host **Dr. Stalina Villarreal**  
Poet, Scholar, and Assistant Professor of LatinX  
Literature and Creative Writing

**October 10, 2022**  
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm  
Mural Area



Photo Credit: [stalinavillarreal.com](https://stalinavillarreal.com)

# THE BODY AS A SITE FOR INTERSECTIONALITY

LITERARY PROWESS  
FROM  
JASMINNE MÉNDEZ

### DR. STALINA VILLARREAL

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH



Photo Credit: [www.jasminnemendez.com](http://www.jasminnemendez.com)

UHD's Cultural Enrichment Center, Center for Latino Studies and English Department have collaborated to bring the acclaimed author **Jasminne Méndez** to campus. Méndez writes in multiple genres: drama, fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Her book *Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e* is a hybrid of creative nonfiction and poetry that tells the narrative of her struggles with scleroderma, lupus, and infertility from her perspective as a Dominican American Afro-Latina. Méndez asks, "Was scleroderma my body's way of keeping score of all the insults, racial slurs, bullying and micro-aggressions I had chosen to repress?" (53). This book of literature intersects Latinx Studies, Black Studies, and Disability Studies.

The subject of **Latinidad** is vast, but a reoccurring theme in the book is bilingualism. It is both present as a method and as a subject:

Inevitably, my English continued to grow and seemed easier to remember. But it was my Spanish tongue and my Spanish ear for new words and old sayings that I was always chasing, always trying to resuscitate and always hoping to catch...I needed my Spanish and my English to remember me, the me I was before...I was a Dominican-American woman who had married a Mexican-American man, and we loved in both English and Spanish, and therefore mi español was a language—a song—my pericardium/mi corazón/my heart cannot afford to forget. (150-151)

This passage is an **emblem of biculturalism** as language is at the forefront of Méndez's writing.

Admittedly, Méndez experiences racial trauma. She faces antiblack racism even within her own family and with Latinxs "[b]ecause we take our cues from European colonizers" (163-164). Her hardships include feeling like an "outsider" for being "usually one of only two women of color in the room" (71). Even during her acting brevity, she critiques theater casting "where people of color didn't exist, or worse, could only be cast as the help, the janitor, the busboy or the nanny" (41). Méndez interrogates positionality using real-life experiences.

The detailed descriptions that Méndez uses to describe her disabilities are very impactful. When her finger gets amputated, she compares her finger being cut to the victims of the Dominican Republic's El Río Massacre, when dictator Trujillo had Haitians "hacked" (156-9). Throughout the book, Méndez uses a range of description, metaphor, and irony, which is mostly serious but occasionally humorous. Indeed, this book is both heartfelt and intellectual. Méndez has written her method of survival: "I wanted to be in control of everything related to my illness—my narrative of it was all I had" (181).

To [hear more](#) from Méndez and her books, please  
**attend her reading on Thursday, October 6, at 4 p.m.**  
in the Welcome Center Tour Room.



# LOOSENING THE GRIP:

## Small Black Film Archives in Introduction to Film Studies

**DR. CHUCK JACKSON**  
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

If asked to name one of the most impressive Black filmmakers of all time, many of us would likely go with 1) any recent, **big-name director** out of Hollywood whose talents ensure box office success and mainstream critical acclaim; or, 2) a singular breath-taking **star performance** that embodies a character in unexpected and expansive ways while challenging racist stereotypes; or, 3) a **screen writer** who tells riveting stories that reveal the multi-textured truths and experiences of a diverse community.

Ava DuVernay. Spike Lee. Jordan Peele. Viola Davis. Lupita Nyong'o. John Singleton. Barry Jenkins. Kasi Lemmons. And the list goes on -- all excellent choices.

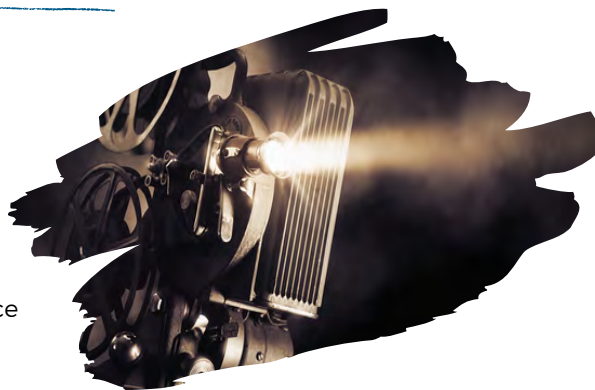
However, this semester in **ENG 3354: Introduction to Film Studies**, students are working to loosen and release the grip that Hollywood filmmaking has on how we think about impressive film, to begin, and then train our attention elsewhere – **small Black film archives**.

Students, as part of this class, research, analyze, describe, and contextualize Black home movies, Black student films, Black art films, and Black films that fall outside of outsider cinema. This means students develop a critical vocabulary for discerning the aesthetic values of films originally shot on small gauge celluloid (such as 8mm, Super-8, and 16mm), digitized but faded color film stock, amateur cinematography and editing, evidence of cracks and scratches, rips and tears, and the feel of films worn so thin, the image is barely there. Not available on any commercial platforms, these small Black films are housed and cared for by librarians, archivists, art collectors, and university research centers.

Among our cinematic objects are a collection of home movies digitized and held as part of the Texas Archive of the Moving Image in the **Michael Cook, Jr. Collection**. Shot in the 1950s and 1960s in San Antonio, TX, and donated by the Cook family, the films appear to have been originally recorded on Super-8 film color film stock, without sound.

Upon first viewing, the films look like what we would expect from home movies, but with careful study and analysis, students learn more about the value of one middle-class Black family's practice of taking out the camera to record, remember, document, showcase, admire, and celebrate ordinary life which, when originally projected on home movie screens or, for us, when studied as archival evidence, becomes **extraordinary**.

Further, questions begin to emerge about how time itself changes the look of Super-8 home movies, altering their once brilliant clarity and sharp resolution. In their digitized forms, films in the Cook Collection preserve these visible alternations and likely transform how we behold these once personal Black images now made public. In our contemplation of such films as evidence of impressive beauty and life far outside of the cinematic mainstream, we ask: **how does our encounter with them possibly change our experience of viewing films produced by Black Hollywood – how so, and why?**



**UHD**  
Center for  
Critical Race Studies

**Dr. Kristin Anderson**  
*Professor of Psychology*

**Dr. Nina Barbieri**  
*Associate Professor of  
Criminal Justice*

**Dr. Jonathan Chism**  
*Assistant Professor of History*

**Dr. Sucheta Choudhuri**  
*Associate Professor of English*

**Dr. Felicia L. Harris**  
*Associate Professor of  
Communication Studies*

**Dr. Chuck Jackson**  
*Professor of English*

**Dr. Vida Robertson**  
*Associate Professor of  
English and Humanities*

**Dr. David Ryden**  
*Professor of History*

**Dr. Stalina Villarreal**  
*Assistant Professor of English*

**Dr. Adriana Visbal**  
*Assistant Professor of  
Natural Sciences*

**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](mailto:CCRS@uhd.edu).

