

UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN-MADISON

CLASS OF 2020

DEPARTMENT OF
AFRO-AMERICAN
STUDIES

PROGRAM

Message From The Chair

-Christina Greene, Department Chair

Announcement of Graduates

Tom Shick Awards

Congratulations

Dr. Michael Thornton

Dr. Ethelene Whitmire



Message From the Chair

Dear Graduating Students,

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine addressing our graduating majors, certificate holders and graduate students under these circumstances. I know I speak for the faculty and staff in the Afro-American Studies Department in applauding your achievements, made all the more remarkable in the face of this devastating pandemic crisis. The Afro-American Studies Department has long held that learning about Black experience is far more effective in face-to-face instruction rather than through internet distance learning. And yet you stepped up and made the transition to virtual classes with little advance notice and with perseverance, courage, and grace. And many of you did so under very difficult circumstances. Graduation is a time of celebration and excitement, and we hope you can savor some of that, even in these challenging times. We also hope you will keep in touch with us -- we always love to hear from our alumnae. More than ever, you deserve a resounding congratulations! We know that many of you are facing an uncertain future. But in the tradition of the African American elders and ancestors, we are confident that you will "keep on keepin' on!"

Good luck, be well and stay safe.

Christina Greene, Chair
Afro-American Studies Department

2020 GRADUATES

Master of Arts – Afro-American Studies

Steve Dueck

Evan Lewis

Bachelor of Arts – Afro-American Studies

Natasha Cherono

Victoria Millet

Certificates

Knisha Boswell

Andrew Briceno

Nia Cayenne

Shiloah Coley

Breana Collins

Chloe Flesch

Carmyn Hayes

Annika Heyworth

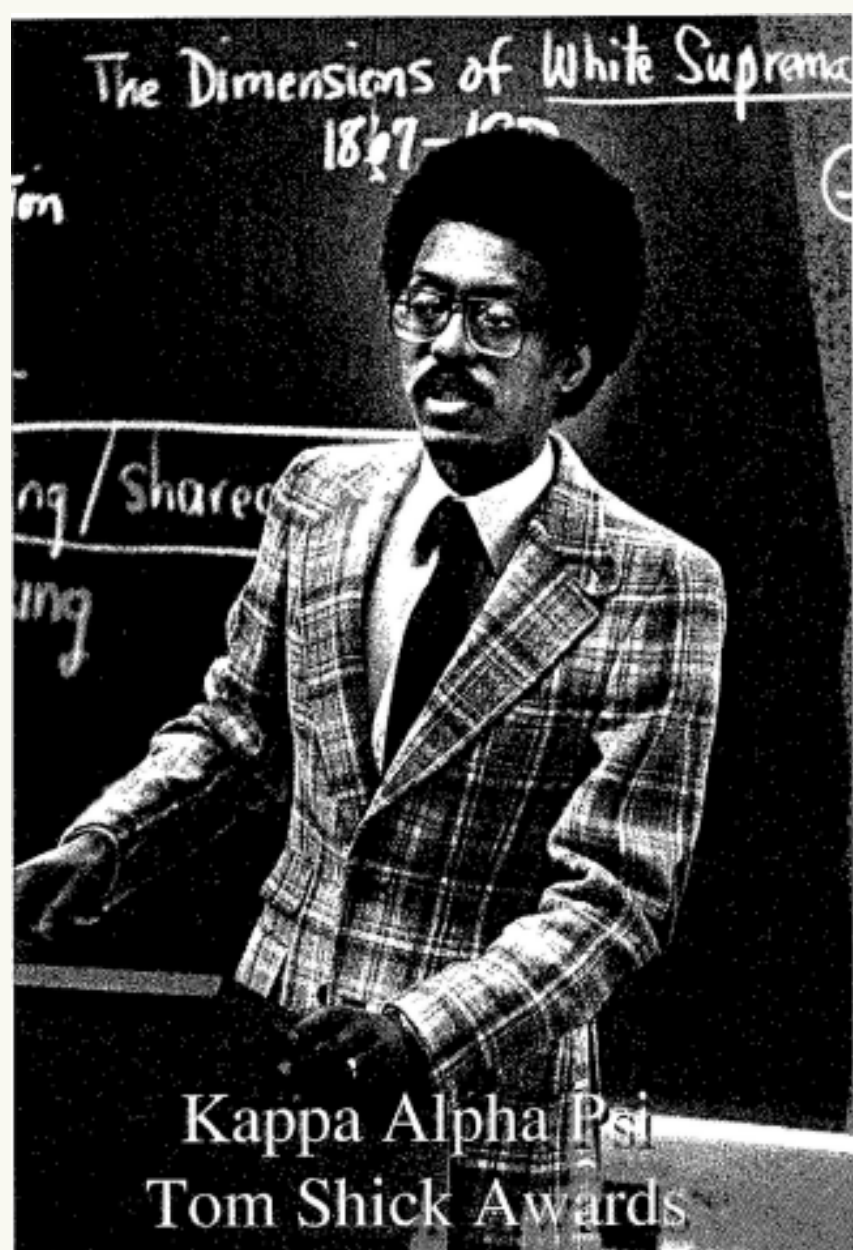
Emma Hicks

Ahmed Ibrahim

Synovia Knox

Shasparay Lighteard
Olivia Lopez
Mariah Mell
Morgan Moore
Fiona Moran
Kynala Phillips
Kaitlynnne Roling
Solomon Roller
Penda Smith
Trea Vance
Jack Michael Ward
Dequadray White
Gloria Wide
Carl Zabat





The late Dr. Tom Wing Shick (1947-1987) received his M.A. (1970) and Ph.D. (1976) from the Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was a Danforth Fellow in the M.A. program, and earned a Social Science Research Council Fellowship to conduct research in Liberia for the Ph.D. He joined the Department of Afro-American Studies in 1977, with prior teaching experience as Assistant Professor of Black Studies at San Jose State University 1970-1972. In the Department of Afro-American Studies, he developed four new courses in the History area. His major publication, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settlers in Nineteenth Century Liberia*, was published in 1981 and he was promoted to Associate Professor the same year. His articles and book reviews appear in the following journals: *Journal of African History*, *The Black Scholar*, *History in Africa*, *Historia*, *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, *Umoja: A Scholarly Journal of Black Studies*, etc. He was an academic consultant for the U.S. Department of State, Carnegie Corporation (Kinte Library Project), The Institute of the Black World, The National Endowment for the Humanities (Highlander Folk School Project), among others. At the time of his death, he was writing a book about the late Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. Shick's academic and social interests were inextricable. He shared his knowledge with civic and social groups to speak out against injustice, and to assert his interest in African-American and African culture. With such aims, he was President of Black History, Inc. (1985-86) and the Dane County Criminal Justice Committee on Minority Issues (1985-86), and, of course, the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, among other associations. After his death, The Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity initiated the Kappa Alpha Psi-Tom W. Shick Award in 1990, in conjunction with the Department of Afro-American Studies, to honor his memory. Recipients of the Kappa Alpha Psi-Tom W. Shick Award are undergraduate and graduate students who demonstrate the values of the late Dr. Shick in their academic achievement and activities that extend their knowledge beyond academia into the community with a commitment to social justice.

Shick Award Recipients



Kingsley-Reigne
Pissang

Tyrone T.J.
Braxton



Kingsley-Reigne Pissang

When Kingsley-Reigne Pissang received not one, but two requests for her resumé from professors in the department, her first thought was, “Did they ask for my resume to critique it?” That resumé is two pages long, a testament to her accomplishments as one of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s most outstanding campus leaders. In addition to working toward a double major in Afro-American Studies and Journalism, Kingsley has served as President of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and the Wisconsin Black Student Union, and co-chaired the Black History Month committee, to name just three of the leadership roles she has undertaken since arriving on campus from Madison’s West High School in the Fall of 2016. She will complete her undergraduate degree in 2021.

At the center of Kingsley’s scholarship, leadership, and activism are her concerns about achievement gaps among African American males, issues of racism and exclusion at the UW-Madison, and equity and inclusion in higher education generally, for which she has emerged as a national and international spokesperson. Kingsley attributes her ability to balance her activism and academic work in part to the fact that she is a “Proud PEOPLE program scholar.” She said that the “family” she met in the PEOPLE program helped her learn how to network. She also has the support of two incredible role models: her mother, Camille Carter, who is the President of the Madison Black Chamber of Commerce, and her grandmother, Dr. Norvella Carter, the Distinguished Professor and Endowed Chair of Urban Education at Texas A&M University. It seems that Kingsley is doing what comes naturally for her, following in their footsteps and making some of her own. When asked about her heavy course loads and extra curricula activities, Kingsley said, “I genuinely love what I’m doing. We’re pleased to present Kingsley-Reigne Pissang with a Thomas Schick Award.

Tyrone Scott Braxton, Jr.

As an active member of the Mercile J. Lee Scholarship program, Tyrone Scott Braxton—TJ as he likes to be called—exemplifies Mercile Lee's vision of ensuring that students from underrepresented groups have the support they need to achieve academic excellence. With a double major in Afro-American Studies and Political Science, TJ lists among his honors five semesters on the Dean's list. He plans to graduate in the Spring of 2021.

Among his numerous community and volunteer activities, an internship with Mahlon Mitchell's 2018 campaign for Wisconsin Governor gave TJ first-hand experience on how to run a political campaign. In addition to providing valuable practical training to complement his academic studies, working on the campaign and the other volunteer activities he participated in is his way of giving back to his community, something that his parents have always believed in: to always be involved in work that is about improving the lives of others.

An example of TJ's commitment to giving back is an ice hockey tournament he planned and managed when he was Vice President and Recruitment Chair of his fraternity. The tournament raised \$10,000 for epilepsy research. TJ loves sports and as a tennis professional has helped to organize numerous community events for adults and children. TJ's campus leadership activities include participating in the National Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action and working as a peer mentor for the Chadbourne Residential College where he facilitated discussions with first year students on what constitutes a liberal education.

Tyrone Scott Braxton continues to live up to the high standards set by Mercile J. Lee when she established the Chancellors Scholarship program nearly 40 years ago. We are pleased to award him with a Thomas Schick Award.



MICHAEL THORNTON RETIRES!

After 30+ years in the Department of Afro-American Studies, Dr. Michael Thornton is retiring. He leaves with an outstanding record of scholarly achievement, teaching excellence and service to department, the university, and the wider community.

An accomplished Sociologist, Professor Thornton is particularly interested in how people cross racial and cultural boundaries. His research pushes beyond the black-white binary, to explore inter-group relations among people of color, especially African Americans and Asian Americans. He boasts nearly 60 publications, the vast majority single-authored or first authored. Even as he enters retirement, Michael has over half a dozen works in progress or under review for publication.

In addition to his tenure in the Afro-American Studies Department, Dr. Thornton was Faculty Director of the Morgridge Center for Public Service, twice directed the Asian American Studies Program (where he is also an affiliated faculty member), and co-chaired the Campus Diversity Oversight Committee. These are just few examples of his varied administrative and service contributions to the university.

Professor Thornton created one of the Afro-American Studies Department's only service-learning courses, which allowed students to work directly with local community organizations as part of their course requirements. He worked for many years with the Multi-cultural Learning; and recently received the Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching Award, and the First Wave Outstanding Faculty Recognition Award.

And finally, Michael Thornton's long and varied involvement with the local community is extraordinary, whether working with the Goodman/Atwood Community Center, the Boys & Girls Club, the Madison Fair Housing Committee, the Lussier Community Education Center, the Achievement Accountability Forum, or Schools of Hope – to name just a handful of the many organizations with which he has offered his time and commitment.

We wish you congratulations and best of luck in your retirement!

For individual tributes from the Department of Afro-American Studies faculty, staff and former students, please visit the Department website <https://afroamericanstudies.wisc.edu/>





Congratulations to Ethelene Whitmire, who has been elected the new Chair of the Afro-American Studies Department.