

The Moderna Covid-19 vaccine and the Black PhD who was instrumental in its creation

Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, currently only 36 years old, grew up in North Carolina and had a natural propensity for education from an early age. After earning a BS and a PhD in microbiology and immunology, and training with scientists in various parts of the U.S. and abroad, she arrived at the NIH as a viral immunologist in 2014.

Working with prior knowledge of other virus proteins that caused severe acute respiratory syndrome, Dr. Corbett helped discover the actual structure of the COVID-19 virus, and how best to elicit an immune antibody response in humans. To manufacture and test this experimental vaccine, Dr. Corbett's NIH team

partnered with Moderna, a biotechnology company, which led to the vaccine that has been given to VA and NCIRE employees since December 2020.



Dr. Corbett (called Kizzy by Dr. Fauci) has not only worked tirelessly in the lab, but she has also been a very public figure speaking to communities where historical trust of vaccines has been low.

According to Dr. Corbett, the vaccine sends a message to your cells to trick them into thinking that they've been exposed to the virus; your body's immune system is then activated and starts to create antibodies so that you are better prepared to fight off the virus if or when you are exposed to it later on. "We're just taking an important piece of the virus, a protein from the virus that is on the surface of the virus," Corbett said. "So, if you expose yourself to that one protein which is the Spike protein, then, your body, when it sees that protein again, is able to react very quickly."

Dr. Corbett also addresses any rumors that the vaccine is somehow changing your DNA. "Your DNA inside of cell is inside of a portion of your cell, in the middle of your cell, called the nucleus,"

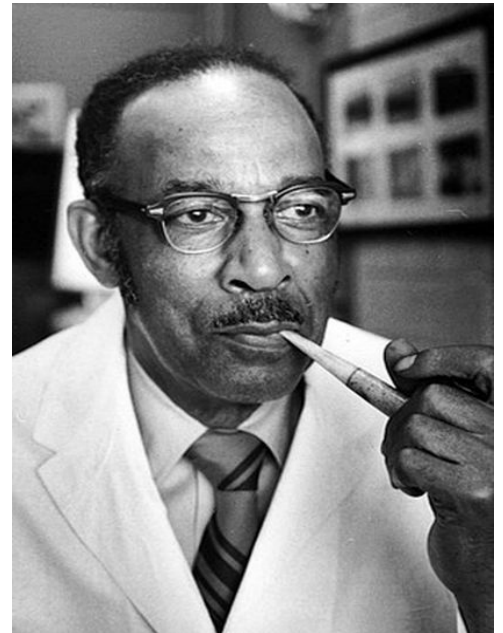
Corbett said. “This message doesn’t even go close to that. It stays in the squishy outside part of your cell.”

This vaccine is doing exactly what it’s supposed to do when administered - in learning each of our immune systems and better equipping each of us to fight off potential future encounters with the virus.

An Unlikely Partnership

Vivien Theodore Thomas first met Dr. Alfred Blalock when he came to interview for a research assistant position in Blalock’s animal laboratory. After Thomas accepted the job, he started performing complex surgeries on laboratory dogs within a month. What he thought was a temporary position, turned into a decades long career and partnership. Together, Dr. Thomas and Dr. Blalock went on to surgically correct Tetralogy of Fallot in so called ‘Blue Babies’, deconstruct the pathophysiology of shock, and invent modern cardiac surgery.

You might be wondering, what is so unlikely about this partnership? Isn’t it common for brilliant doctors to collaborate with each other in the interest of advancing medical science? Not so for Thomas and Blalock, for the year was 1930 and Vivien Theodore Thomas was a black man. Outside the walls of their laboratory, the world seethed with prejudice. One doctor was black, while the other doctor was white. The times they lived in dictated that they should never meet, much less work together, but that notion was wrong.



Together, Thomas and Blalock pioneered the understanding and treatment of hemorrhagic shock. Thomas was paid a janitor’s wage while fulfilling the role of a senior research fellow, for he was the only black man in his line of work. Thomas’s pay increased after Blalock intervened, but it was never confirmed if they reclassified him as a researcher. In a few years, Blalock received a lucrative offer from Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. However, that hospital had a policy against hiring black men therefore Thomas could not go, so Blalock refused.

Eventually, they moved their laboratory to Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where Blalock was appointed surgeon-in-chief and where Thomas became the first black man to wear a white lab coat. In that deeply segregated institution, they were confronted by the challenge of cyanotic babies with Tetralogy of Fallot, a birth defect in their heart. Thomas took up the task of recreating this defect in canine hearts and successfully devised a surgical procedure to treat it. Both made history after Blalock first performed this procedure successfully on Eileen Saxon, an infant who weighed nine pounds, while Thomas stood behind and coached him throughout. However,

when the warm light of recognition came, it fell only on Blalock,. This did not deter Thomas, instead he quietly and efficiently went about supervising his laboratory research, while also training the next generation of surgeons in heart surgery. Even though he had the admiration and respect of his colleagues and trainees, he was not officially recognized for his tremendous contributions until many years later. In 1976, Johns Hopkins University presented him with an Honorary Doctorate and he served as a faculty member until 1985.

Today, when you walk into the Blalock building in Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, you see portraits of two men, one black and one white, they were Dr. Alfred Blalock and Dr. Vivien Thomas, still seemingly immersed in an unending dialogue.



References:

<http://reprints.longform.org/something-the-lord-made-mccabe>

<https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/1904.html>

<http://portraitcollection.jhmi.edu/portraits/blalock-alfred>

<http://portraitcollection.jhmi.edu/portraits/thomas-vivien-theodore>

Making Poetry and History – Amanda Gorman is Doing Both

Black History Month is a time to honor the important contributions and achievements made by Black leaders and activists, like Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Martin Luther King Jr., just to name a few. Their accomplishments have inspired the next generation to bridge the gap of racial inequity and discord that have long plagued our country.

As we turned to the next chapter of our democracy, there was a longing for a voice of unity. At 22, Amanda Gorman is the youngest inaugural poet ever in the United States. She joins a small group of poets who have been recruited to help mark a presidential inauguration, among them includes Robert Frost and Maya Angelou.



It was reported that Gorman finished the inaugural poem, “The Hill We Climb”, the night rioters sieged the Capitol Building. She would not gloss over the events that marked the fragile state of the U.S., but rather, made it a point to use her words to inspire hope, and foster a sense of collective purpose, envisioning a country that can and will heal.

It is critical to pay tribute to the generations of Black Americans who struggled through adversity and strengthened the voices of the coming generation. Gorman is a shining beacon of hope for the future, and she issues a challenge to all of us: “The new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light if only we’re brave enough to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it.”

Events and Happenings for Black History Month

Attached to this communication is a **Black History Month Resource List for 2021**, which is generously being shared with NCIRE for distribution to our employees. This amazing resource was created in collaboration for February 2021 Black History Month by Erin Watson, Emily Garfinkle, Jennifer Stewart, Black History Month Planning Committee, and Psychology Diversity Committee. Please take a moment to review the attached resource list and the many events listed below.

Happening Around the Bay Area

February 4, 10:45 a.m. – online at <https://oaklandlibrary.org>

The Oakland Library Presents Black Culture Fest: Young Truths, Beautifully Told

- After Oakland Youth Poet Laureate Finalists Siara Edmonds and Monique Jonath share their poems and engage with Oakland students. Cost-Free, registration required.

February 4, 7 p.m.

The Exploratorium (stream from their YouTube channel)

- After Dark Online: Shaping Landscapes. USC Professor Alaina Morgan will discuss the Black Panther Party's impact on the East Bay and share contemporary and historic photographs. Cost-Free

February 10, 9 a.m. Online- Eventbrite

City of San Jose Black History Month celebration: Three contemporary Black women inventors

- City of San Jose and USPTO's (US Patent and Trademark Office) free online Black History Month celebration spotlighting three contemporary Black women inventors: Aprille Ericsson, Ayanna Howard, and Arlyne Simon. Cost-Free, registration required.

February 13, 5 p.m. – online at <https://www.globalartslive.org/>

Global Arts Live Presents: Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

- This event aims to raise awareness about the disparities and systemic barriers preventing Black men from becoming medical doctors and to provide a collective space discuss the experiences of Black-identified medical students and physicians. Hosted by the Office of Diversity and Outreach and the School of Medicine. Cost-\$25.00

February 16, 4pm – online at <https://www.moadsf.org>

The Museum of African Diaspora's Blatant Series

- Art, Joy and Rage. This month's episode of the museum's monthly series is set to feature award-winning documentary filmmaker Yoruba Richen and Maori Holmes, artistic director/BlackStar Film Festival CEO and Curator-at-Large for film at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts. Cost-Free

February 21, 5 p.m. – online at <https://www.moadsf.org/>

African Diaspora Film Club | HOW IT FEELS TO BE FREE

- HOW IT FEELS TO BE FREE A conversation about the documentary, which focuses on trailblazing black female entertainers Lena Horne, Abbey Lincoln, Diahann Carroll, Nina Simone, Cicely Tyson and Pam Grier (available to stream for free at the PBS "American Masters") Cost-Free

All Month Long. – online at <https://smcl.org/blogs/post/celebrate-black-history-month-2021/>

San Mateo County Library Black History Month events

- You're invited to celebrate with us at San Mateo County Libraries as we continue to amplify the history, experiences, and voices of Black and African American people. Cost-Free

UCSF Events Hosted by the Graduate Division and the UCSF community

To join any of the virtual events below please go [here](#) and sign up!

February 4, 6 p.m.

Jeopardy Night!

- Join the UCSF chapter of SNMA, SNDA, BE-STEM, the School of Pharmacy, and the Multicultural Resource Center for a night of trivia, fellowship, fun, and prizes. Hosted by the Office of Diversity and Outreach.

February 9, 5:30 p.m.

Restorative Justice Circle: Building Connections + Community

- Hosted by Student Life, this community circle is meant to provide individuals in the UCSF community a space to show up as they are and to find a sense of community through sharing stories.

February 11, 6 p.m.

Exploring and Empowering Our Community: Black Men in White Coats Film Screening and Panel

- This event aims to raise awareness about the disparities and systemic barriers preventing Black men from becoming medical doctors and to provide a collective space discuss the experiences of Black-identified medical students and physicians. Hosted by the Office of Diversity and Outreach and the School of Medicine. Cost-Free (RSVP by 2/8 at 4:30 pm)

February 17 – webinar at 12 p.m. | post-event discussion at 1 p.m.

Anti-Blackness and Its Link to Racism, Power, and Privilege

- In this webinar presented by Dante King, MEd, the focus will be on the impacts of white supremacy and anti-Blackness on housing, during this century and the last. Hosted by the Office of Diversity and Outreach.

February 18, 2021, 12 p.m.

Fourth Annual Student Leadership Forum on Diversity and Inclusion

- Join UCSF student leaders in a discussion on the state of UCSF regarding data and support for marginalized groups, allyship, institution-wide policy, and inclusive curriculum. Hosted by the Graduate and Professional Students Association and IDEA.

About

NCIRE's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Group is comprised of NCIRE employees, staff and leadership. Working together we strive to create an environment that fosters diversity, ensures equity and creates a culture of inclusion across the organization. If you would like to join us, please contact DEI@ncire.org.