



ImPrints


SPRING
2024



Celebrating 100 Years of Child & Family Development in Detroit

Beating the Socioeconomic Odds

*by Ryan Cunningham
MPSI Program Assistant*

For most American kids, the trip to school is a short walk or bus ride away, a time to delay serious thought and master one's paper-plane flying skills – at the expense of the driver's sanity. But for MPSI faculty member Olive-

 enne Skinner, PhD, the daily commute to her high school took hours; hours not necessarily free of serious contemplation.

Dr. Skinner

As a young Black woman from Jamaica growing up in the U.S., the rumble of city bus wheels sounded like a chance to beat the socioeconomic stats against her. This determination to get a good education helped her attend New York University through the Higher Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP), a program for academically and economically disadvantaged New York State residents, where she studied psychology and Africana studies. Within those disciplines, she began to understand her own family's dif-

ficult socioeconomic situation and the challenging situation faced by many people of color.

Dr. Skinner went on to earn her PhD in Developmental Psychology at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and did her post-doctoral training at Pennsylvania State University in Human Development and Family Studies. While at Penn State, she was recruited to become a faculty member and researcher for MPSI. Dr. Skinner was drawn to WSU by

SEE P. 2

War or Pandemic, MPSI Steps Up

*by Hilary Ratner, PhD
WSU Emerita Professor and
Former Vice President for Research*

As men enlisted in the military to fight World War II, they left their factory jobs by the thousands. Women soon stepped up to take their places and help to win the War. This spring, these real-life “Rosie the Riveters” received the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their service. Rosies were particularly significant in Detroit, which was such a key supplier of material for the Allied war effort it



Merrill Palmer nursery class, circa 1940

became known as “The Arsenal of Democracy.” But while Rosies took over the factories, who cared for their children?

Merrill Palmer led the way. The Federal Works Administration

(with funds from the 1941 Lanham Act) established daycare “war nurseries” to serve these children. Edna Noble White, the director of the Merrill Palmer School from

SEE P. 4

Skinner FROM P. 1

its diverse student body. As an assistant professor, she enjoys hearing the varying perspectives and sparks of brilliance emanating from her students. "These classroom interactions enhance my research," she said.

Dr. Skinner's research is focused on Black children and families. The topics she studies include academic achievement and motivation; intersectional approaches to understanding Black youth's experiences; and family relationships. During her post-doc training, she began using a dataset to identify potential differences in the ways Black mothers treat their sons versus daughters. It has been a commonly held belief that Black mothers are more demanding of daughters than sons. Surprisingly, a recent qualitative analysis of these data showed that the majority of mothers and fathers interviewed did not believe they treated sons and daughters differently.

Dr. Skinner and her colleague Vanessa Volpe, PhD, an associate professor at North Carolina State University, have also conducted some of the first research examining associations between state-level racism (one indicator of structural racism), and the physical health of Black adolescents. She's now wondering whether the measuring system used in that study can be applied to studying structural racism and the Black-White academic achievement gap. She was recently awarded a University Research Grant for her project "State-Level Racial Inequities and the Black-White School Adjustment Gap." This grant could help answer ques-



This spring MPSI trainees selected **Waldo Johnson, Jr., PhD**, Professor of Social Work and Vice Provost of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Chicago to be their special guest speaker. He spoke on *Dismantling Social Difference for Advancing Justice: The Case for Black Males*.

Don't Miss our Research Colloquia!

Scan the QR code today and select the "MPSI Research Colloquia" list to receive fall and winter notices of upcoming speakers and topics.

All Colloquia are Free

tions like whether state-level racism is a factor in the higher rates of academic suspension among Black youth over White youth.

Although Dr. Skinner is passionate about research and teaching, her primary responsibility is to her husband and two children Grace (3) and Rose (2). She reflects on the challenges of balancing motherhood and academia that are often unaddressed in her field where studies consistently document the positive association between mothers' psychosocial functioning and their children's well-being. "In the future, I look forward to doing

advocacy and research to support mothers' success," she said. "This goes beyond grant writing workshops and traditional mentorship that ignore the real issues that reduce scholarly productivity for mothers in academia."

John Adams once wrote that he should study politics and war, so his children could have the liberty to study commerce, so their children could have time to study the arts. If a short and carefree bus ride to your well-funded grade school is an advantage in life, Dr. Skinner's work is a step toward providing that advantage for all.

Infant Mental Health Leaders Win Statewide Awards

Two MPSI faculty members who coordinate its Infant Mental Health (IMH) program have won prestigious statewide awards from the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health.

Ann Stacks, PhD, director of the program received the Betty Tableman award for public actions that promote the welfare of infants/young children and their families. Her nomination cited Dr. Stacks' tireless work for more than a decade to sustain and expand the Baby Court model in Michigan. She has helped to train more than 1,800 judges, referees, attorneys, child welfare specialists, and infant mental health professionals working with and on behalf of Michigan infants, young children and their families. Through her dedication to the Baby Court model and to ensuring professional competency, she promoted the welfare of countless babies and families affected by trauma, family separations, and repeated caregiving changes through the child welfare system.

Carla Barron, PhD, is the IMH



From left: Alissa Huth-Bocks, Carla Barron, Carolyn Dayton, Nichole Paradis, Ann Stacks, Marjorie Beeghly, and Michele Hall enjoy the MI-AIMH awards celebration

clinical coordinator. She won the Selma Fraiberg award in recognition of outstanding contributions to Michigan infants/young children and their families in the areas of direct service delivery, program administration and training. Dr. Barron was nominated by colleague Karol Wilson as "quietly brilliant, humble, courageous, caring, insightful, deeply reflective and an advocate for social justice and belonging." She cited Dr. Barron's willingness to engage in critical self-examination as it relates to

culture, race and diversity, and her ability to embrace differences as opportunities for growth and connection. Dr. Barron is also a mentor and leader in bringing attention to the importance of honoring diversity. Many of her students have become leaders and authors in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

The Infant Mental Health Dual Title training program at MPSI is the first of its kind in the United States, building off the remarkable history of Infant Mental Health training at MPSI since the early 1980s.



We Need your Help!

Send a Student to Giant Step for \$50

Giant Step Teen Conference Oct. 29, 2024



Scan to learn more and donate!

Inclusion, Harmony & Acceptance

Each year hundreds of teens gather from communities across metro Detroit, representing different religions, ethnicities, schools, neighborhoods and backgrounds. They start as strangers and end as friends.

Then & Now FROM P. 1

1920 to 1947, chaired the national Advisory Committee to the FWA and, closer to home, chaired the State Committee on the Day Care of Children. Her work also crossed the Atlantic to Wales where nine war nurseries were modeled on Merrill Palmer's programs. She partnered with the Detroit Public Schools to prepare teachers and staff for emergency service in the Detroit centers.

By 1944 more than 3,000 programs enrolling 130,000 children nationally were federally subsidized. In Detroit, 90 war nurseries and child-care centers served more than 2,500 children. Merrill Palmer's response to children and families during the War did not end with war nurseries. Changes in program content and delivery were also needed. Problems unique to wartime required the spread of new information, but gas rationing limited public and private transport to Ferry Street. Technologies (e.g., telephones, print media, and mobile units) had to be used in new ways to reach people remotely in the community. (We saw a similar pivot during the Covid-19 pandemic.) Established programs like the Infant Service and the Advisory Service (made up of volunteer, college-educated community women) nearly tripled their outreach by telephone. In 1943 The Detroit Evening Times created a "War Problem Clinic" in which experts in 12 different fields responded to readers' inquiries.

Merrill Palmer's director of family counseling, Dr. Robert Foster, fielded questions about marriage and divorce, such as whether an



Merrill-Palmer nursery student checks on her "pet" hitchhiker

Have a question about
Merrill Palmer's history?
write to
hilary.ratner@wayne.edu.



[View Centennial Exhibit](#)

18-year-old should marry her overseas boyfriend or how to divorce a soldier. *Cupid's Role in War* was a seven-week series in 1944 for women in which Foster and other Merrill Palmer faculty gave talks titled, "Men and Women in a Changing World" and "Marriage for Moderns." In 1945 the Family Lifemobile was created with the Detroit Police, Health, and Parks and Recreation Departments. This mobile unit was stationed in four areas of the city along with a child-care center for

young children, so parents and older children could attend the unit's programs. A police sound car drove through neighborhoods announcing the unit's arrival and describing its offerings.

From its earliest days to the present, MPSI has responded to the needs of children and families in an ever-changing social, political, and economic environment: Merrill Palmer's historic response to the War and MPSI's recent resilience in helping families respond to the trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Our current programs often center on responding to the post-pandemic effects on children and families, such as the pediatric mental health crisis and the increased developmental delays seen in early childhood settings," said MPSI Director Dr. Huth-Bocks. The use of internet-based service delivery to address some of these challenges began in lockdown but many continue today because they are convenient, and they work. Edna Noble White would feel right at home.

Honors & Achievements

MPSI Mentor Proud of Student Success

WSU undergrad **Darius Love** has won acceptance into a highly competitive summer program at the University of Missouri to study interpersonal relationships across the lifespan. Darius, a psychology major, is mentored by MPSI faculty **Lucy McGoron, PhD**, and worked with her to collect data from 270 undergraduates to test his research ideas. The new National Science Foundation program he will attend trains students to design research projects about relationships and includes a stipend, housing and travel funds. Darius is also a member of ReBUILD Detroit, an NIH funded program to encourage underrepresented students to become scientific researchers.



Making the News

The *Detroit Free Press* and *Bridge Michigan* were among the media outlets that recently interviewed MPSI faculty.

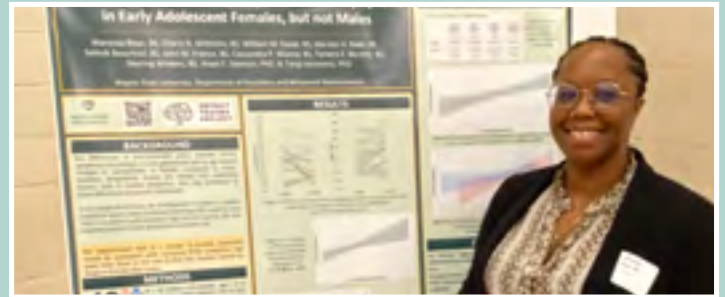
The article “*Infant mental health: Michigan clinic aims to build resiliency for a lifetime*,” in *Bridge Michigan* featured **Beverly Weathington, LMSW** (far right in photo), and **Carolyn Dayton, PhD** (not shown and also interviewed on Detroit Public Radio), discussing the new partnership of MPSI, the WSU School of Social Work and Wayne Pediatrics. The grant-funded project provides early intervention and support to young parents and children as part of regular pediatrician visits.

The *Detroit Free Press* interviewed MPSI’s Director of Infant Mental Health **Ann Stacks, PhD**, about her work with the Stop Overreporting Our



People project to insure that children of color are not being unnecessarily investigated or removed from the family home. “This project is unique because a multidisciplinary group of experts is working to develop cross-system solutions to a long-standing issue in child welfare,” she said.

Research for Every Age



MPSI partners with the Institute of Gerontology to provide a Lifespan Alliance Research Day to spotlight research and training from birth to old age. Each year, trainees from both institutes create research posters and oral presentations, competing for awards from WSU judges. This year’s Research Day hosted 22 posters and four papers, on topics from racial trauma in adolescence and mental health, to school engagement of disabled youth.

MPSI winners were **Manessa Riser** (with poster) and **Nicole Kouri** (middle) for their research posters, and **Alexandra Ehrhardt** (bottom) for her oral presentation.

Rising Star

Hannah Schacter, PhD, is a 2024 Rising Star for the Association for Psychological Sciences. An affiliate MPSI faculty member and advisor to MPSI’s Giant Step Teen Conference, Dr. Schacter is an “exemplar for the exciting work being done by the field’s newest researchers,” wrote the APS. The award recognizes researchers whose “innovative work has already advanced the field and signals great potential for their continued contributions.” She studies how young people adjust when faced with interpersonal stressors such as bullying, discrimination and dating violence.

An International Landmark of Multicultural Significance

THE FREER HOUSE

The historic 1892 Freer House has proudly served as home to Merrill-Palmer since 1921 and been part of WSU since 1983.



(It-rt) Tim Ha, Chief Investment Officer, First Independence Bank; Madiha Tariq, MPH, Deputy County Executive in charge of the Health and Human Services and the Public Services departments; Van Nguyen, Ed.D., Vice President, Organizational Financial Wellness, NC Bank; Caroline (Vang) Polly, Chief Marketing Officer, Thai Feast and Bangkok 96 Restaurant; (back row) William Colburn, Freer House Director; Grace Lee, CEO, Ashford Connex, LLC; Liseann Gouin, President, Japan America Society of Michigan and South-west Ontario; and Henry Duong, Legislative and Political Director, Rising Voices

Community Leaders Gather at Freer House

A group of stakeholders representing the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities met with WSU President Espy as part of her commitment to engaging with multiple constituencies of the Detroit area. Attendees also toured the Freer House and learned of the significant Asian and Middle Eastern cultural history of Charles Freer and the house.

A Beautiful Day in the Garden

Members of the Garden Club of Michigan (GCM) toured the house May 22 and reveled in the garden's spring bloom. GCM has been a sustaining sponsor of the garden since its inception; members expressed delight at the garden's progress. Co-president Libby Candler said, "It was an amazing morning. Having you (William Colburn), Fred Knight, Dr. David Michener and everyone involved share your knowledge with us was extraordinary. How have I not known about Mr. Freer and the Smithsonian? Detroit's impact on the Smithsonian should



be celebrated." GCM has been involved with important horticultural

projects and initiatives across the state for more than a century.

Thank You!

Many thanks and congratulations to everyone who helped with our Spring Freer House Garden Fund campaign. We raised \$9,000 from 36 donors including generous matching gifts from Lillian & Walter Dean and the Garden Club of Michigan.



We invite you to visit the beautiful and tranquil Freer House garden. It is open to the public daily. Enter through the west side gate.

Celebrating Women Past and Present

Wayne State University Government and Community Affairs, Center for Gender and Sexuality, and the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute hosted “The Women of Ferry Street: Then & Now” on Thursday, May 16, at Wayne State’s historic Freer House. The program and reception highlighted the significant role historical women played in the development of Ferry Street and how modern-day women are inspired by them and continue their legacy.

Notable historical women on Ferry Street such as Josephine Harreld Love, Lizzie Merrill Palmer, Violet Temple Lewis, Bertha Hansberry Phillips, Judith Levin Cantor, Dr. Rosa Slade Gragg, Eleanor Clay Ford and Mary Chase Perry Stratton drove the efforts for arts and culture; health; early childhood learn-



Honorees display their awards at the Women of Ferry Street event. From left: VP for Government & Community Affairs Patrick Lindsey, Dir. of Community Affairs Stacie Clayton, Angela Calloway, Dr. Sonia Hassan Duggan, Jodee Raines, Monique Marks, Liseann Gouin, Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy, CEO of Michigan Women's Commission Dr. Geneva Williams, and Freer House Director William Colburn.

ing; and Black business, social life, leadership, and education.

Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy, President of WSU; Dr. Sonia Hassan Duggan, WSU Professor of OB/GYN; Angela Whitfield Calloway, Detroit City Council Member; Monique Marks, President and

CEO of Franklin-Wright Settlement; Liseann Gouin, President of the Japan America Society of Michigan and Southwestern Ontario; and Jodee Raines, COO of New Detroit, Inc., were honored for their achievements by an audience of 85 guests.



College for Creative Studies (CCS) Students Visit

Students from the History of Modern Design class at the CCS walked over to neighboring Freer House for an introduction to Charles Freer’s home and art. The class, led by instructor Jennifer Baross (in white scarf) marveled at the light-filled rooms, intricate woodwork and custom designed chandeliers styled after climbing vines.

FREER HOUSE MEMBERSHIP

Help protect and preserve one of Detroit’s great historic landmarks and raise awareness of Freer’s legacy in Detroit and the nation. Join us as a Freer House member and supporter today.





**Merrill Palmer
Skillman Institute**
71 E. Ferry St.
Detroit, MI 48202
313-664-2500

Non-Profit
US Postage
PAID
Detroit, MI
Permit #3844

SPRING 2024
NEWSLETTER



Editor: Cheryl Deep
Design: Catherine Blasio

WSU Board of Governors

Mark Gaffney, Chair
Shirley Stancato, Vice Chair
Danielle Atkinson
Bryan C. Barnhill, II
Michael Busuito
Marilyn Kelly
Anil Kumar
Terry Lynn Land
Kimberly Andrews Espy, PhD, *ex officio*

MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE, WSU, DETROIT MI | www.mpsi.wayne.edu



Vanessa Rorai (It) program coordinator at the Institute of Gerontology assists an older adult volunteer as he reads a children's book. More than 100 preschoolers, parents, teachers, college students and older adults came together to celebrate National Reading Month in Wayne State's undergraduate library.



Early Childhood Center

Serving thousands of metro Detroit children since 1922

Our Early Childhood Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and 5-star rated by the Michigan Quality Rating and Improvement System.

We offer **FREE** childcare through the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) and the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant whose parents are Pell Grant eligible WSU undergraduate students.



If you'd like your child to be part of our Early Childhood Center, scan the QR code.