DIVERSITEA

honoring black lives and black champions
MOYO B. TILLERY PT, DPT, OCS, FAAOMPT

Dr. Tillery graduated from Duke DPT in 2011 and is now an assistant professor and director of clinical education at Elon University. While at Duke, she took on a role as the Diversity Task Force president. She has since served as a Summer Discovery Program alumni mentor and continues to bring awareness to DEI issues in our profession, engaging in the NABPT (National Association of Black Physical Therapists), and participating in the Rizing Tide selection committee to support BIPOC students seeking residencies in the profession. She holds a number of memberships within the APTA including the Manual, Education, and Occupational Health interest groups.

VILMA EVANS, PT, ED.D

Vilma Evans was one of the first black physical therapists in America. At a time when black students were not allowed to enroll in physical therapy programs, Evans went on to obtain her physical therapy certificate, master’s in physical therapy, and a doctorate in education. She has been recognized as advocate for minority representation in our profession. She held a number of leadership positions within the field including 26 years as Director of Physical Therapy at St. Elizabeth Hospital, Danville, IL. She served on committees within the APTA and was a member of the APTA sections for education, geriatrics, and health policy and administration. She believed getting involved within an organization was the best way to bring about change. “If you want change in your organization, you have to get involved.”

DEANDREA BULLOCK, PT, DPT, CCI, CDP & REMI ONIFADE, PT, DPT, M.ED.

Dr. Bullock and Dr. Onifade are the co-founders of the National Association of Black Physical Therapists. The NABPT was founded to support underrepresented minorities in the physical therapy profession with the hopes of increasing representation within the field, fostering leadership, and creating community. Dr. Bullock is a graduate from Emory’s DPT program, works in the neuro setting and enjoys mentorship and service opportunities. Dr. Onifade is also a graduate of Emory’s DPT program, is currently a clinic director, and was integral in creating a bridge program between Spelman College and Auburn University for students to pursue allied health.
Jerry Bentley is the co-founder of AOTA’s Black Occupational Therapy Caucus in 1974 and has been advocating for issues related to social justice for decades. The NBOTC focuses on fostering representation, creating avenues for communication, and promotes and encourages leadership and equal employment opportunities for black occupational therapy practitioners and students. She continues to champion for student growth through leadership development and addressing minority recruitment in the profession.

Gillian Rai Ms.Ed., OTR/L, RYT

Dr. Rai is an occupational therapist, educator, consultant, coach, and speaker. She is a community and social service advocate and is passionate about diversity and inclusion and addressing inequities in education and health. She owns and founded a holistic occupational therapy practice and is also an adjunct professor at NYU. She has a passion for empowering families and creating opportunities for improved quality of life through coaching, advocating for occupational justice, and promoting self-efficacy. Dr. Rai has provided advisory assistance to both domestic and international health associations.

Adam Cisrooe Pearson, OTD, OTR/L

Dr. Pearson is an instructor at Washington University and the chief operating officer at Peter and Paul Community Services (PPCS). He previously held a position leading clinicians in efforts to provide occupational therapy to unhoused individuals and he now oversees the 7 other programs at PPCS. He is an advocate for local and national policies that advance affordable housing for those seeking it. His publications center around housing, disability and policy. He applies an OT lens toward housing equity and parity.
CHECK OUT THE DUKE DPT AND OTD BLACK HISTORY MONTH VIDEO CREATED BY HOLLEY BROUGHTON WITH THE HELP OF DUKE DPT AND OTD STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FACULTY!
There are two folks that have inspired the most along my journey to PT school: Alexis Lacewell and Morgan Nettles. Both are Appalachian State grads and alumni of the Appalachian and the Community Together (ACT) student organization like myself. Alexis was the one who originally mentioned her involvement in ACT to me- I never heard about it until late sophomore year. By my senior year, I held a leadership position and considered the organization my favorite and most impactful portion of my collegiate career (side note: also met my gf of 2+ years through ACT lol) I thank Alexis for outstanding work at App State and look up to her. I did everything I could those final two years to be just like her: ACT leader, PT SIG leader, potential Duke student, EVERYTHING. She is an icon and I can't wait to reconnect with her.

Morgan was the ACT leader the year I joined and instantly became one of my best friends, especially when I found out she was pre-PT as well. She inspired me to stay active in my communities and always consider outlets for social justice in whatever position I end up in. Morgan is now a second-year DPT student at Winston-Salem State University and I was ecstatic to see her at the APTANC Fall Conference last year (pictured below). I just know she's going to do amazing things in her career.

Morgan and Alexis are impressive people just from their credentials alone. When you factor in the reality of being Black women in white-dominated spaces, both at App State and in PT school, they become superstars. They are role models, heroes, agents of change; regardless word you choose to describe them, I'm just happy I've been able to know and learn from them.

Lucas Saacks
An influential Black leader that has inspired me is Nikole Hannah-Jones, acclaimed journalist and author of the 1619 project. During a time when teaching Black history is being legislative out of schools, she has created multiple forms of media to educate and teach that Black history is American History. She has also stood up to public and political backlash with professionalism and determination and I admire that so much!

What does black history month mean to me? To steal a quote, "Black history is celebrated all year, February is just our anniversary!"

Lunar New Year: I always think of the word "New" as a time to change, shake things up and progress. Set new goals and find new challenges.

- Dr. Gary Johnson
If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality”, one of the many empowering quotes from an influential Black leader that has inspired me, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Desmond Tutu was a South African anti-apartheid campaigner who earned the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, and who lived from 1931-2021. I was introduced to Desmond Tutu through a book he co-wrote with the Dali Lama, The Book of Joy. This is when I began to add his quotes to my collection and learn about his values, his resilience. Tutu took on HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, climate change and the right of the terminally ill to die with dignity. He was an outspoken supporter of the LGBTQ+ community – even if this introduced conflict within his own church. In 1984 he wrote a statement to the US congress stating, “You are either in favor of evil, or you are in favor good. You are either on the side of the oppressed or on the side of the oppressor. You can’t be neutral.” He influenced my mindset by helping me see that in order to stand out amongst a crowd and leave people in awe – it requires you to be willing to stick your neck out there. To gather courage and jump off that “cliff” and to do what may bring me discomfort or even scare me and do it with bravery. We are all aware that when we do things that scare us, we train our brain to believe in our own resiliency. Tutu has inspired me to trust my own ambition, to cast away my self-doubt because it’s merely my ego trying to protect me, to practice finding this confidence in myself and my abilities to be the change I want to see, and to continuously take situations and learning opportunities to practice my resilience and courage. As Dr. Hoder always says, “perfect practice makes perfect”.

Tutu has influenced me to advocate and act for diversity in my life through education and leading by example. Educating myself, educating others in my life, and listening and learning from others. The adventure of going into the healthcare field outside of our classroom walls will ask a lot of me and require me to jump off numerous cliffs to make change happen. To be willing to shake things up and jump into the unknown with pure bravery to see what awaits on the other side of that choice. This is a man who has been described to always have a “voice for the voiceless”, use religion as a platform to advocate for equality, and truly tried to heal this world. His story paints the picture that there will be times in life when you don’t get what you want, or people will not always agree with your opinions. In times like these you may not have gotten what you wanted, but what matters most is the fact you showed up or used your voice in the first place. Tutu has helped me on my personal journey in defining resiliency as my own ability to believe in myself and the scariest part of “favoring the good” isn’t taking the action itself but trusting in my ability to get it done.

-Melanie Grady
The Rookie and The Vet: Dr. J

By: Amanda J. Clarke

Often when we reference Black History or Black Leaders, we defer to the “BIG” names, like the MLK, Malcolm X or the Shirley Chisholm’s. Although, there are many black leaders that walk among us daily. They do so effortlessly and usually unbeknownst to them. Today I acknowledge Dr. Gary Johnson. It has truly been an honor to watch Dr. Johnson grow professionally and settle into his role as a natural born leader. If the rookie and the vet were a person, he’d be your guy. Dr. Johnson has the unique ability to speak excellence into his students, uncovering abilities they probably never knew they had, or were never acknowledged for. He sees you so you can see yourself. He pushes himself daily to be better and welcome uncomfortable situations solely for his students, particularly the students of color. We learn from our leaders through their actions. A good man he is. We don’t deserve him, but we need him.

Below are remarks regarding Dr. Johnson’s impact on the Duke DPT program from students and colleagues.

“From the time I began my pursuit of a career in Physical Therapy, the ONLY Black male clinician I ever met was Dr. Gary Johnson. Growing up without seeing a single person who looked like me, in a role I wanted to be in was hard. I never thought I was good enough and when I did, others had no problem discouraging me that the only reason I am in the position that I am, is because I am the token black male. As many of us know, Dr. Johnson may not say as much, but when he does we listen. Having this strong, black man as a leader and a role model is something I never even dreamed of. Watching Dr. Johnson’s growth has inspired me to do much more than just be a clinician. I want to be a role model and advocate, making things easier for those to come after me, just like him!”
- DarShawn Armstrong

“Dr. Johnson reminds me that representation matters. I had the opportunity to learn from him during Introduction to Patient Exam. Dr. Johnson was able to demonstrate his expertise in the Sports Medicine aspect of Physical Therapy.”
- Jessika Barnes

“Dr. Johnson and I have collaborated in musculoskeletal practice management and cultural determinants of health coursework across the curriculum. Dr. Johnson is honest, dependable, and passionate. He brings these characteristics to every interaction he has with students and is the type of educator and person who wants to help all individuals realize their potential. Dr. Johnson has internalized essential values of inclusivity and has incorporated them into both his teaching and his clinical care. He is an incredible example of this and I hope to continue our collaboration for years to come so that I can continue to grow and learn with him and be witness to all of the amazing contributions he will continue to make for the field of physical therapy and physical therapy education.”
- Dr. Bethany Buzzell
The Rookie and The Vet: Dr. J

“With displaying his passions for inclusion, diversity, and mentorship, Dr. Johnson is a reminder of the importance of representation. As a black individual, seeing Dr. Johnson present in class in a leadership/professorate position helped me feel a sense of belonging and motivated me to achieve leadership roles in educational spaces. Thank you, Dr. Johnson, for empowering all of us and instilling the belief that we can all make great change in any space.” ~ Alexis Franks

“Dr. Johnson has taught me that daring to be brave is about daring to lead. To show up, to be honest, truthful, and kind. It is all about doing the hard things even when we could so effortlessly choose the easy ones. Continuing to strengthen bravery, like all else in life, allowing to gain a keener perspective, able to spot situations where we can show up better. Getting to know Dr. Johnson has been an honor, he has been a huge support and role model leading by example - to stand in your bravery and to lead with your heart. Thank you, Dr. Johnson, for empowering my soul during my personal journey, through the joys and the struggles. Thank you for speaking your truth and creating a space for others do to the same.” ~ Melanie Grady

“Dr. Johnson was the first Black faculty member I came into contact with at Duke and has been an inspiration to me ever since. Not only is it inspirational to have a Black man be a part of the core faculty, but his desire to help out in the community has inspired me to think about ways in which I can positively impact Duke and the Durham community as well.” ~ Maria Hamilton

“If there was ever a person that embodies the spirit of being a healthcare provider, it is Dr. Johnson. Dr. Johnson is incredibly generous with his time and knowledge. From a student perspective, Dr. Johnson is a gifted listener and an example of how to help those who need it most. Encounters with Dr. Johnson have always made me feel more confident in my own knowledge, and I think this is a wonderful testament to his extraordinary interpersonal skills that make him such a wonderful educator.” ~ Trent Haffler

“It has truly been a breath of fresh air to see Dr. Johnson on a daily basis while matriculating through the Duke DPT program. His tremendous ability to build rapport with students has made him an effective teacher as well as a positive role model for everyone he comes in contact with. Dr. Johnson’s presence and commitment to excellence frequently pours the cold water of sense of pride upon the heads of all students of color within the Duke DPT community.” ~ Michael Hoggatt
“As a black male physical therapy student, it was extremely comforting to see the caliber of someone like Dr. Johnson as one of our faculty members. He is an exceptional physical therapist that cares deeply about his patients, his students, and contributing to increasing diversity and inclusion in the field of medicine.” ~ Jamell Joseph

“Dr. Johnson has continued to impact my life as a student here at Duke University. I will never forget the first conversation I had with Dr. Johnson. It was my first year in the program, he approached me in class and asked if I was from Robeson County and a part of the Lumbee tribe. He continued to say that he has previously treated patients from my hometown and he enjoyed learning from that experience. It was my interaction with Dr. Johnson where I first felt recognized and accepted for being a student with a diverse background.” ~ Genna Locklear

“I first met Dr. Johnson in 2019 during the summer discovery program. I have seen his growth over the years and admire his strong work ethic. Dr. Johnson is always ready for the challenge and he has been a great role model! I am excited to see him in more leadership positions because we can all learn from him.” ~ Edgar Lopez

“There are so many positive things that can be said about Dr. Johnson. He is, of course, an exemplary mentor, generous with his knowledge and expertise; always willing to share clinical pearls and demonstrate hands-on skills. Moreover, he is also a compassionate, caring, and thoughtful person. He has an incredibly warm and calming presence; a lighthearted and relatable friend to all lucky enough to meet him.” ~ Holland Rausher

"Dr. Johnson teaches and practices with respect to other people's lived experiences. His commitment to learning, reflecting, and uplifting the stories of underrepresented communities reminds me that one person can make a difference in the lives of those who don't yet have a seat at the table. He inspires me to explore spaces and conversations that are out of my comfort zone because that is where growth happens." ~ Nancy Rodriguez
"Dr. Johnson has been a foundational instructor and mentor for myself and my DPT classmates. He is always willing to continue to teach students outside of class and brings a refreshing breadth of knowledge and experience that we all appreciate. He always pushes us to do better, and never shies away from hard conversations. I especially valued the screenings of "Why Not Us", a documentary on NC State's push for March Madness, that Dr. Johnson led, and the resulting small group discussions about HBCU's and collegiate men's basketball, and associated barriers and challenges. A true gem, if Duke wants to know where the future of PT is, it's right here in an influential black man and expert clinician." ~ Charlotte Selters

"Dr. Johnson meets colleagues & students at their level with patience, modesty, & humor. His authenticity is contagious which deepens connection with students/staff and makes any collaboration enjoyable. He is the exemplar of compassion, genuineness, and candor in & out of the classroom. The addition of his character & clinical expertise at Duke is essential exposure for SPTs and a rarity in the program." ~ Dr. Jeff South

"Dr. Johnsons presence in Duke DPT was personal for me. Being a black man in this space can sometimes feel isolating - but have a familiar face is one of the many things that he provides. He has been more than welcoming and supportive throughout my journey at Duke DPT." ~ Marcus Taylor

"Dr. Johnson makes it his mission to create spaces where underrepresented students are respected and valued in the classroom as well as the clinic. I have had the privilege of receiving his support and mentorship since SDP 2019 to now a professional student. His efforts never go unnoticed and my success as a student will be forever indebted to his service!" ~ Melissa Trujillo