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Historian Terence Keel Receives Plous Award

[Terence Keel](#), an assistant professor of history and of Black studies at UC Santa Barbara has received this year's Harold J. Plous Award.

One of the university's most prestigious faculty honors, the award is given annually to an assistant professor from the humanities, social sciences or natural sciences who has demonstrated exceptional achievement in research, teaching and service.

Presented by the College of Letters and Science, the award was established in 1957 to honor the memory of Harold J. Plous, an assistant professor of economics.

Keel will highlight his research when he delivers the Plous Lecture next spring.

"Professor Keel has established himself as an exemplary interdisciplinary scholar whose unique research interests span the history of science, the study of religion, Western intellectual history and African American studies," noted Javier Read de Alaniz, an associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry and chair of the 2017-18 Plous Selection Committee. "Alongside this scholarly productivity is an outstanding record of teaching, mentoring and service to the profession and to the university."

Said Vilna Bashi Treitler, professor and chair of Black studies: "Our department sees Terence Keel as someone who bridges disciplinary boundaries as he creates new conversations around science, race, religion and gender. He uses historical research

to show how outdated notions of racial difference rooted in early Christian ideology gain new life in public health thinking and, for example, affect the distribution of health and medical programs to African Americans and women. He is also skilled as a teacher, and generous in his contributions to professional activity and university and public service. We are thrilled that Terence Keel was chosen for the Plous Award.”

“It is surely an honor to receive this award and I am grateful for the support I’ve received from my colleagues and the administration since arriving at UCSB,” said Keel. “To my knowledge I am the first African American and first Black studies faculty member to receive the Plous since assistant professors began receiving the award in 1958. So I am delighted to be formally recognized as adding to the rich institutional history of transformative scholarship at UCSB.

“With my research drawing connections between race, science and religion,” Keel continued, “I view this award as a sign of the university valuing scholarly work that pushes conventional views of what it means to be human and rethinks the disciplines we create to study our social world.”

Before becoming a faculty member at UCSB in 2012, Keel completed both his Master of Theological Studies and his Ph.D. in religious studies at Harvard University. A historian and scholar of religion, he has written widely about the concept of the human as well as the history of racism and its connections to modern science, religion and political power.

His book, “Divine Variation: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science,” forthcoming from Stanford University Press, offers an account of the development of scientific ideas about race. Focusing on the production of scientific knowledge over the past three centuries, Keel uncovers the persistent links between pre-modern Christian thought and contemporary scientific perceptions of human difference. He argues that, instead of a rupture between religion and modern biology on the question of human origins, modern scientific theories of race are, in fact, an extension of Christian intellectual history.

Keel is the recipient of numerous research grants, including from the UC Consortium on Black Studies and the UC Center for New Racial Studies. In addition, he recently was awarded the UC President’s Faculty Fellowship in the Humanities in recognition of his impressive record of scholarly accomplishments.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.