



GRANTING TIME: One of 24 recipients of a MacArthur Foundation fellowship, Peterson earned recognition for his scholarship on Africa, where he has focused his attention since his sophomore year.

QUICK CONVERSATION

What Does It Mean to Be Named a MacArthur ‘Genius’?

MacArthur Foundation fellow Derek Peterson '93 hopes that receiving one of academia's most coveted honors will help bring attention to the history of colonialism in Africa.

Historian **Derek Peterson** '93 has been officially conferred with the status of “genius.” At least, that's the shorthand description for people like him who were selected to receive one of the most coveted awards in American academic, social, and policy-making worlds.

Peterson, a professor of history at the University of Michigan, was one of this year's recipients of a John D. and Catherine

T. MacArthur Foundation fellowship—commonly known as the “genius grant.”

One of 24 recipients including musicians, writers, scientists, scholars, artists, and social entrepreneurs, Peterson was recognized for his work in reshaping the understanding of African colonialism and nationalism in studies that emphasize East African intellectual production. Fluent in Gikuyu and Swahili, important

languages in eastern Africa, Peterson draws on a range of vernacular and English-language sources written by Africans, including record books, diaries, religious pamphlets, syllabi and dictionaries, oral histories, and letters.

According to the foundation, the program, which began in 1981, “is intended to encourage people of outstanding talent to pursue their own creative, intellectual, and professional inclinations.” Famous for awarding its grants—for this year’s class, the award totals \$625,000 over five years—with no strings attached, the foundation says the goal is to support “people, not projects.”

What does the grant mean to you?

Africa is a marginal place, when seen from the vantage point of the United States, and African studies scholars usually labor in dignified obscurity. The MacArthur award means a wider readership for my work. I’m currently writing a book about Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, using newly uncovered archival materials to understand how “ordinary” Ugandans dealt with his dysfunctional and violent government. I’m writing that book with the hope of getting it into the hands of a wider audience, outside the university. I think it’s important, in today’s America, that we understand how dictatorships work, how they transform populism into a form of demagoguery.

You’re coordinating an effort to preserve endangered government archives in Uganda—will the grant allow you to do work that you were not able to do before?

For the past 10 years I’ve been working with colleagues in Uganda to rescue, catalog, and digitize endangered archives lying in the hands of local governments. We’ve together created the largest digitized repository of government documents in Africa. The MacArthur grant will allow me to take that work into new media. I’ve just started working with colleagues at the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation on a project to digitize the radio and television archives, which stretch back to the 1960s. MacArthur funds will help pay some of the costs of that work, I hope.


Historian’s History

A double major in history and political science, Peterson received a BA (1993) from Rochester and a PhD (2000) from the University of Minnesota.

A professor in the Departments of History and Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Michigan, he has held positions at the College of New Jersey and the University of Cambridge.

He is coeditor of several books, including *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (2016), *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures* (2015), and *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (2009).

a career in music. In the summer of my sophomore year I went to Kenya for three months as part of a larger group, and the time I spent living with a Maasai pastor in southern Kenya was a life-changing experience. It taught me how much I had to learn.

After I returned to Rochester I took as many courses as I could about Africa, studying with professor emeritus Elias Mandala (about African history) and with the late professor Sam Nolutshungu (about African politics). After I graduated I was fortunate enough to win a Fulbright grant, which took me to Kenya for a full year. That’s where it all started from. 

—SANDRA KNISPEL

In the News



HONOREE: A noted composer for film and television, Beal received his fifth Emmy this fall.

Composer Beal Earns Fifth Emmy

Composer **Jeff Beal** ’85E has scored his fifth Emmy Award. Recognized for his work on the Netflix original series *House of Cards*, Beal was among the honorees during this fall’s 69th Emmy Awards, presented by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. The award is Beal’s second for *House of Cards*. His other awards were for *The Company* (2008), *Nightmares & Dreams* (2007), and *Monk* (2003).

Beal, who has taken his *House of Cards* scores to concert halls around the world, has been widely recognized for his work as composer for TV, film, and other media. He and his wife, University Trustee **Joan Sapero Beal** ’84E, established the Beal Institute for Film Music and Contemporary Media at Eastman.

Study Abroad Leader Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Jacqueline Levine ’80, ’84 (MA), who served as director of the University’s study abroad program from 1991 to 2016, has been recognized with a lifetime achievement award by IES Abroad, a non-profit study abroad organization that administers programs for US college-aged students.

Since 2016, Levine has served as assistant dean and director of special projects in the dean’s office. IES Abroad was founded in 1950 and has provided study abroad and internship programs to more than 120,000 students.

The award recognizes an individual who has served the study abroad field through significant professional and volunteer work and is chosen by IES Abroad’s nominations committee.

Starting Up

Girl Starter's Jeannine Shao Collins '86 hopes to set young female entrepreneurs on a path to success.

For **Jeannine Shao Collins** '86, the "light-bulb moment" for how to help young women become entrepreneurs came from a conversation with her daughter.

After attending a women's forum in New York City hosted by Duke University the then 16-year-old Julia Collins returned home full of frustration—and full of ideas.

"We have to do something about this gender equity issue," she told her mother. "The world has to get behind women when they're younger."

"I knew Julia was right," says Collins, a successful magazine and media executive. "There needed to be a forum for young women who want to be entrepreneurs."

Three years later, the result is Girl Starter, a New York City-based media company whose mission is to give girls the tools they need to develop their potential as business leaders. Cofounded by Collins, the company includes a website (GirlStarter.com), a reality TV show that debuted on the cable network TLC last April, and other media channels.

Collins created Girl Starter with her friend, television writer and Broadway producer Dani Davis. They're also cocreators of the TV show of the same name, which offers \$100,000 seed funding and services to the winner.

Also involved were her husband, Chris, a former executive with the *Wall Street Journal* and ESPN; and Julia, now a student at Duke.

Originally planning to major in engineering, Collins switched to economics during her first year at Rochester. After graduation, she moved to New York City and worked in advertising management positions at *Prevention* and *Women's Day* magazines. In 1993, she joined Meredith Corp., a media company that reaches more than 100 million women through its platforms, serving as chief innovation officer and as publisher of *More*, a lifestyle magazine geared toward an older demographic of women.

The Girl Starter team spent more than two years developing the company, work that included conducting focus groups with women 18 to 24 years old. "We discovered that a lot of women found the word 'entrepreneur' intimidating," Collins says.

With the new company, Collins says she's found a new passion.

"Girl Starter is a place to celebrate people doing the right thing."

Collins offers advice for teenagers (especially girls) who aspire to make it in the business world:

Don't be afraid to fail. "We learn the most through our failures. We can't be so afraid that we don't take the leap. Go for it."

Find your inner circle of support. "No one can do it alone. Figure out the people who can help you—a parent, a teacher, or a store owner—and talk to them."

Listen and ask questions. "You learn the most by doing these two things. If you ask the right questions, your path will open up. Innovation comes when people listen to each other and work toward a mutually exciting goal."




RISK ATTENTION: From her experience in leading the media company Girl Starter (GirlStarter.com), Collins encourages young women and their parents to take more risks when it comes to thinking about how they can be entrepreneurs.

Don't be afraid to change. "If something's not working, make adjustments. People get emotionally attached to an idea. They don't see that it needs to evolve. Adjusting is not a sign of failure."

Have fun. "People do their best when they enjoy what they're doing. The more you put joy and laughter into it, the more you'll want to do it. And work won't feel like work."

Listen to your heart. "Understand why you're doing this and who you're doing it for. Is it for you or someone else?"

Collins says parents can play a vital role in getting children to develop entrepreneurial skills.

"Encourage them to take risks and support them in their journey," she says. "If you're offering constructive feedback, it shouldn't be squelching. Let them be creative. If you're directing it, it doesn't come from them." 

—JIM MANDELARO

FIVE QUESTIONS

‘We Each Have Great Capacity to Learn, Grow, and Work Together’

Tiffany Taylor Smith '91 is the new executive director for inclusive excellence, education, and professional development at the University of Dayton.

Tiffany Taylor Smith '91 was raised in Dayton, Ohio, and attended high school in the predominately white suburb of Kettering. As she was growing up, her parents encouraged her and her siblings to get involved in whatever they could. From softball to Girl Scouts to school plays, they did it all, and it never mattered that they were usually the only black children there.

Being at ease with all types of people came to Taylor Smith at an early age. She credits cultural curiosity as a key aspect of her outlook, contributing to a 25-year career in corporate and academic worlds, where she focused on building diverse and culturally inclusive communities.

This fall, Taylor Smith was named the University of Dayton's inaugural executive director for inclusive excellence, education, and professional development. Returning to her native city, she oversees an effort to promote and enhance intercultural competence, diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence at an institution that has 2,600 full-time and part-time faculty and staff and more than 10,000 students.

A member of Rochester's Diversity Council and former cochair of the University's New York City Metro Leadership Council, Taylor Smith has also served on several metro women's groups.

How do you define your new role?

I create and facilitate professional development programs for faculty and staff around diversity, equity, and inclusion. We're lucky—Dayton's been actively engaged in this work for a while. What we need to do now is to coalesce efforts from across every academic and nonacademic unit.

What was the catalyst for this new position?

Dayton's leadership is one reason. Eric Spina became our president in 2015, and my boss, Larry Burnley, joined in 2016 as Dayton's first vice president for diversity and inclusion. Both leaders were already champions of diversity and inclusion. Another reason I was drawn to Dayton is because of our commitment to the "common good." This principle is rooted in our Catholic Marianist values, which are based on the idea of an education grounded not just in the faith but also in service and justice and change. That reminds me of Rochester's commitment to *Meliora*. Growing our diversity and inclusiveness programs aligns perfectly with doing what is best for all.

How do you define diversity and inclusion?

Diversity is about what we bring to society. Our race, gender,

sexual orientation, and anything in our background, history, or physical make-up add to who we are—they don't take anything away. Diversity is about our individual uniqueness and our multiple dimensions.

Inclusion is action oriented. It's about helping people feel authentically welcomed and valued. I often say inclusion is like this great big house where anyone can open the refrigerator, use the bathroom, or get a cup from the china cabinet. All those inside have equal access to everything.

Why are diversity and inclusion important?

We live in a very interesting time. So many people are seeing that the status quo isn't serving anyone any more, that we have to address racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and other key issues. We can't place value on our differences—we must embrace them and see that, at our core, we all share something essential: our common humanity.

How did being a Rochester student influence you?

My eyes really opened up in college. I was part of the Black Students' Union, a resident advisor, and always looked for ways to help people to get to know each other, get along, and see the best in the other person.


It was at college when I also met Dr. **Paul Burgett** '68E, '72E (PhD), who was dean of students when I was a psychology student and is now vice president and senior advisor to President Joel Seligman. I've stayed in touch with him for 25 years. I remember that he always called his students "Dr." So to me, he'd say "Dr. Taylor." No one had ever addressed me like that before. In his eyes, we all could see what

he thought we could become. That was so empowering. This is what I want for those I work with to see—that we each have great potential and capacity to learn, grow, and work together. And, interestingly, I'm actually planning to start my doctorate in educational leadership in the fall.

Good Reads

Taylor Smith recommends two books:

Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America by Ibram X. Kendi, and *Tribes* by Seth Godin.

"Both are excellent. Kendi, who recently established an institute on racism at American University, offers such an informed perspective, and Godin's book is an all-time favorite. It's about finding community." 

—KRISTINE THOMPSON



COMMUNITY CENTERED: Taylor Smith credits her family's cultural curiosity with piquing her interest in building diverse and inclusive communities, the focus of her career.