

AFRICANA NEWSLETTER

Department of African and African-American Studies (AAAS) @ The University of Kansas

2023

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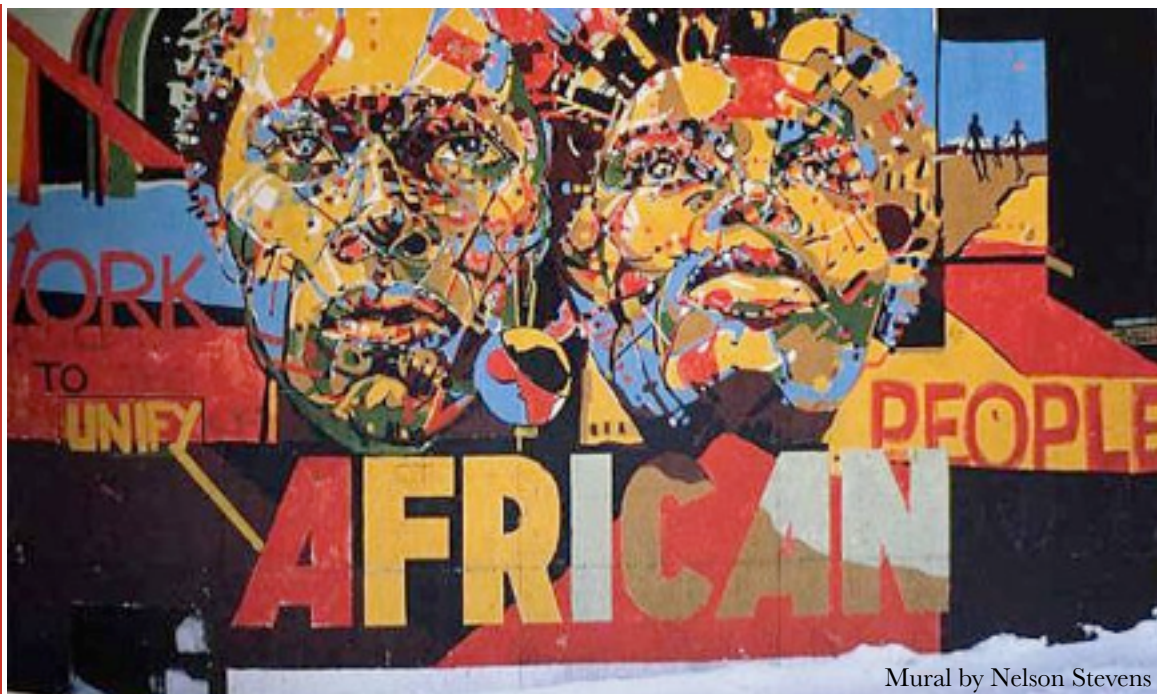
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Mural by Nelson Stevens

About AAAS @ KU

Founded in 1970, the Department of African and African-American Studies (AAAS) provides an interdisciplinary space at the University of Kansas for studying historical and contemporary relationships among African and African-descended people. As a community of scholars and teachers, AAAS offers learning experiences for students to enrich their knowledge of African people on the Continent, as well as people of African descent in the Americas. Our academic wings span the humanities, the social sciences, and some professional fields. The Department's areas of emphasis include art and culture; religion and rhetoric; families, gender and sexuality; and political economy. AAAS boasts concentrations in African Studies, African-American Studies, Arabic and Islamic Studies, and Haitian/Caribbean Studies at the B.A., B.G.S., and M.A. levels.

In addition to our [Undergraduate Major](#) and [Master's Programs](#), AAAS has an [Undergraduate Minor](#) and [Graduate Certificates](#). As part of our mission of developing students' cultural literacy from pan-Africanist, African-centered and Diasporic perspectives, the Department coordinates several languages: Amharic, Arabic, Kiswahili, Haitian Creole, Hausa, Somali, and Wolof, supported by Study Abroad opportunities. The Department also draws strength and vitality from two allied centers and an institute: the [Kansas African Studies Center](#), the [Langston Hughes Center](#), and the [Institute of Haitian Studies](#).

Through scholarship, teaching, campus and community service, and public programming, the Department reflects intellectual and pedagogical practices that recognize the complexity and multiplicity of human experiences; promote critical thinking and creative problem-solving; and expand our understandings of citizenship in a rapidly changing multiracial, global society.

The reality that AAAS is the only department of its kind at a public or private university in Kansas and among the Big XII institutions, and the fact that we genuinely function as both an African *and* African-American studies unit provide a logical explanation for the breadth and depth of all that we offer programmatically and in course work, degrees, research, and service. We demonstrate that a robust racial/ethnic and area studies presence attracts and retains a diverse faculty and student body, creates inclusive learning environments for the campus, produces lifelong learners, and supports KU's leadership in delivering a dynamic, forward-looking Liberal Arts education that (1) encourages an appreciation of different ways of knowing; and (2) prepares informed and productive citizens in Kansas, the region, the nation, and the global community of the twenty-first century.

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Message from the Chair: Dr. Shawn Leigh Alexander

Since our last newsletter, the Department has continued to meet the challenges of today's political landscape with the attacks on the teaching of African American History, race, and other topics related to our field of study. As a relatively small unit we are often asked to do more, not just in the wake of what is going on outside the academy, but also to operate the department on a day-to-day basis. In this climate, our faculty and staff have been generous with their time and expertise and have taken on additional, often unpaid, responsibilities to preserve the quality of what we do and for this I thank them immensely. During times such as these, I am grateful for the support, generosity, and spirit of all the students, faculty, staff, and donors that make up the larger AAAS community. To the donors, friends, and alumni, I give hearty thanks for their support. It is the continuous generosity and goodwill of our donors that have aided our productivity and helped our students throughout the past year.

The success and productivity of AAAS, as you will see in the content of this newsletter, continue to be fabulous. Our faculty and students have continued to work determinedly on their research and service for the unit and the profession. They have won research awards, received research and program grants, and published and presented creative, seminal scholarship that brings pride to the unit and the university. I wish to highlight Distinguished Professor Peter Ukpokodu, who gave his inaugural lecture in the fall and the work that Drs. Ukpokodu and Yékú have put into the unit's new academic journal, *Africana Annual*, which will debut at the start of 2024. Congratulations also goes to Dr. El Haimeur who successfully ran a STARTALK Arabic program for middle and high school

students in the summer and fall. We also want to welcome Asmaha Heddi who joined us in the fall as a multi-term lecturer in Kiswahili and African Studies, and Meghan Allen, our new administrative associate who stepped directly in and took the reins of the office. We could not have survived the year without Meghan's incalculable work in administering our office.

We congratulate Dr. Nicole Hodges-Persley who was promoted to full professor. We also congratulate our students who graduated this year and wish them luck out there in the world. We thank them for choosing AAAS as an academic path and know that the skills they learned in their classes will be transferable to any career path they select. We also extend our gratitude and well wishes to Drs. Katie Rhine and Jessica Gerschultz for their contributions and dedication to the well-being of the Department while they were at KU. Additionally, we thank all those in our community who continue to attend our Final Friday Pizza and Discussions, brownbags, and lectures, and also those who attended and made our new student-initiated monthly Oscar Micheaux Film Series such a success.

Finally, I reiterate our gratitude to our donors and benefactors whose continuous generosity has helped nourish our program and fuel our progress in ways beyond state funding; enabling us to award scholarships and perform other tasks. The Department invites our supporters and donors to establish endowed scholarships in their names or in honor of others. We will need the strong financial support of all our donors, friends, and alumni as we continually strive to improve our Department.



Dr. Hannah Britton (Political Science & WGSS), also included Drs. Peter Ukpokodu (AAAS) and Peter Ojiambo (AAAS).

Alex Koran successfully defended her thesis project "The Impact of Kiswahili and its Varieties on the Accuracy of Translation Services: A Case Study of the World of Translators Without Borders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." Her committee, chaired by Dr. Peter Ojiambo (AAAS), also included Drs. James Yékú (AAAS) and John Gluckman (Linguistics).

Faculty Announcements -- Promotion - Nicole Hodges Persley was promoted to full Professor.

Professor Amal El Haimeur conducted an Arabic STARTALK program for Middle and High school students.

Professor James Yékú received a Humboldt Research Fellowship from the Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation in Germany.

Departmental News:

Asmaha Heddi -- The Department of African & African-American Studies welcomes Asmaha Heddi as a Multi-Term Lecturer in Kiswahili and African Studies. Asmaha was born, raised, and partly educated in Tanzania. She did her undergraduate degree at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. She earned her MA in Applied Linguistics from Ohio University. Her research interests include Second Language teaching, Second Language Acquisition, and Computer Assisted Language Learning.



Other Departmental News:

AAAS MA Program -- Aaron Kuiper successfully passed his MA exams. Aaron is an active military personnel who joined AAAS as a member of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program. After completing his degree, he and his family moved to West Africa, where he is currently stationed. His committee, chaired by

Professor Liz MacGonagle received the George & Eleanor Woodyard International Educator Award.

Professor Peter Ukpokodu, Roy A. Roberts Distinguished Professor of African and African-American Studies, gave his inaugural lecture entitled, "Statements from an Interventionist Theatre Practice."



Professor Dorothy Hines was elected Vice Chair/Chair-Elect for the American Educational Research Association's Classroom Management SIG #19.

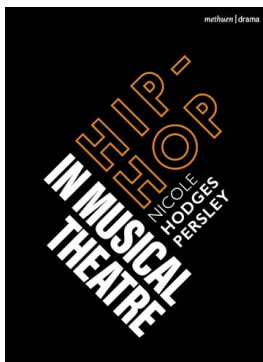
Muwayyid Mohammed joined the Department as a Fulbright scholar for the 2023-2024 academic year. Mr. Mohammed is a multi-linguist who is teaching sections of our elementary and advanced Arabic courses, and is participating in other activities within our African and African Diasporic Language Program.

General Announcements -- AAAS Scholarship/Award -- AAAS awarded \$13,150 in scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students in the 2023-24 academic year.

Title VI & FLAS -- The Kansas African Studies Center (KASC), an allied center to AAAS, was successful in the 2022-26 Title VI National Resource Center and Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) grant competitions, being awarded more than \$2,000,000 over the next 4 years to support the study of African languages and knowledge perspectives.

Faculty News:

Nicole Hodges-Persley, Professor of AAAS and AMS, published *Hip-Hop in Musical Theatre* and a co-edited volume, *Diva: Feminism and Fierceness from Pop to Hip-Hop*. Hodges Persley also published an essay, "Love Actually: Using AUMI to Address Ableist Directing Habits," in *Improvising Across Abilities: Pauline Oliver's and the Adaptive Use Musical Instrument*. Finally, she co-founded a digital humanities project, [Create Ensemble](#) with Monica White Ndounou and Victorien Ndounou. "Create Ensemble is a nurturing and inspiring ethos-



driven platform for emerging and established creatives of color and organizations to support one another by coming together to create artistic projects for the love of the craft and our communities."

Tony Bolden, Professor of AAAS, published an essay on jazz trumpeter Miles Davis's 1971 album *Jack Johnson* which was featured in *The New York Times* on August 2. Bolden's essay, "Yesternow," titled after Davis's twenty-five compositions that include a voice-over by acclaimed actor Brock Peters, appears in "5 Minutes That Will Make You Love Miles Davis's Electric Period," the latest installment of critic Giovanni Russonello's series "5 Minutes That Will Make You Love..." in which musicians, poets, and scholars are asked to weigh in on a different figure or topic in jazz. Bolden argues that *Jack Johnson* signaled the beginning of a new style in Davis's music. Whereas the angularity of bebop and intricate forms of improvisation characterized his recordings from the mid-1940s to the late 1960s, the composition "Yesternow" foreshadowed Davis's experiments with funk music in the 1970s, establishing Davis as an early innovator in jazz-funk.

Liz MacGonagle, Associate Professor of AAAS and History, was selected as the recipient of the [George and Eleanor Woodyard International Educator Award](#) at KU. She also developed and co-directed a study abroad program that took 11 KU students to Salvador, Brazil, for two weeks in January 2023 to examine African and African-descended perspectives about [Race, History, and Health](#) as expressed through religion, art, music, and other avenues.

Amal El Haimeur, Assistant Teaching Professor of AAAS, has successfully completed her ACTFL training and obtained certification as an ACTFL certified OPI tester. She has recently published an article entitled, "[Verb Derivation Patterns among Moroccan Arabic Heritage Speakers in France: Pedagogical Implications](#)," in JNCOLCTL. In addition to her publication, she participated in a panel at KU titled, "Conducting International Research as a Scholar of the Global Majority." She presented her research, "Sayyida Alhurra: A Forgotten Muslim Queen and War Leader," at the 54th Annual Convention of Northeast Modern Language Association (NEMLA, Niagara Falls, New York). Furthermore, she gave a presentation on "The Use of Technology in Teaching Arabic: Evidence of Learning" at NEMLA. El Haimeur also presented another paper titled, "Synchronous and Asynchronous Summer Language Program," at the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL) and "Inquiry-based teaching pedagogy in Arabic classes" at the Kansas World Language Association annual conference. She co-presented with Aya Fayed on "The Use of Animaker and Flipgrid in Learning Arabic" at the Midwest Association for Language Learning Technology (MWALLT). Lastly, she attended STARTALK meetings in Maryland.

Peter Ojiambo, Associate Professor of AAAS, is completing a book chapter entitled, "The History of the Teaching of African Languages in the US and It's Role in Helping African

Immigrant Children Navigate the American Education System.” Dr. Ojiambo recently published a book, a book chapter and an article. The book, *Hujambo: A Standard-Based Approach to Teaching Kiswahili: Volume I* was published as an Open Resource by the University of Kansas. The book chapter titled, “The Influence of Pioneer Schools and Makerere on the Kenyan Colonial Elite,” was published by Palgrave Press. The article entitled, “Effective Intensive Language Programs: The Case Study of a Kiswahili STARTALK Program Model,” was published by the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages journal. Additionally, he has one book chapter, “Shaping African Educational Futures through African Girl-Child and Women Education: The Case Study of Eddah Gachukia’s Work at the Forum for African Women Educationalists,” in press. In addition to these writings, Dr. Ojiambo participated in African Studies Association Conference and two international conferences at the universities of Kenyatta and Lesotho. Furthermore, he led a one-day invited language workshop at Ohio University, Athens, themed, “Social Justice Pedagogy in World Language Instruction.”

Shawn Leigh Alexander, Professor of AAAS, published an essay, “John Bracey — A Black Studies Scholar and Activist,” in the *Journal of African American History*. He also worked on an article with colleagues at the University of Kansas Medical Center, “Evaluating the Impact of an Educational Intervention on the History of Racism in America for Teaching Structural Competency to Medical Academicians,” that will appear in *BMC Medical Education* next year. Alexander also was a consultant and contributor to the PBS documentary, *The Niagara Movement: The Early Battle for Civil Rights*, which premiered in November 2023. Finally, he consulted and appeared in ACLU Kansas’ project, *Some Water Comin’ Round: Quindaro as a Vision for Kansas*, and he continued his consultation and “expert testimony” work for the ACLU’s struggle to end the death penalty in the state of Kansas and throughout the country.

Other Noteworthy News:

2023 Marwa Africana Lecture

On October 5, 2023, Brig. Gen. Mohammad Buba Marwa (Retd.), Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of the National Drug Enforcement Agency of Nigeria, presented the ninth Marwa Africana Lecture. His lecture was entitled, “War Against Substance Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking: The Nigerian Story.”

The Marwa Africana Lecture Series (MALS) was established in 2003 through a generous donation by Dr. Marwa. MALS brings in a speaker annually to address matters related to Africa and/or the African Diaspora.

Previous speakers in the Marwa

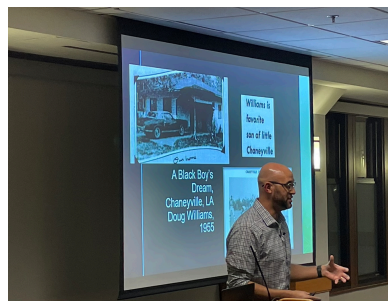
Africana Lecture Series have been: Michael Gomez (2018), Micere Githae Mugo (2017), Fred Harris (2014), Nawal El Saadawi (2011), Amiri Baraka (2009), Martin Bernal, (2008), Molefi K. Asante, (2005), and Ali Mazrui (2004).



Race and Sports in American Culture Symposium

AAAS and the Langston Hughes Center (LHC) have a goal of making the University of Kansas the only university in the Midwest to have a center that studies historical and current issues such as race, diversity, inequality, and other related issues that have social and political importance today. In conversations about the importance of diversity on college campuses with former KU

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Neeli Bendapudi, who was then dean of the School of Business, LHC director, Shawn Alexander, discussed the activities of the LHC and how to make the ideas around the center a reality. One means of accomplishing this goal was to create the



Jayhawk Scholar-in-Residence Program on Race, Sports and Society — a visiting scholar program that would sponsor scholars with a distinguished record of research and undergraduate or graduate teaching in the humanities and humanistic social sciences on race, sports, and society to come to KU and work on their projects and lead a symposium every year on a topic related to the themes of the program. On March 2, 2023, Dr. Louis Moore, presented the sixth annual Race and Sports in American Culture lecture. His lecture was entitled, “The Great Black Hope: Doug Williams, Vince Evans and the Making of the Black Quarterback.” Dr. Alexander also interviewed two former KU student-athletes, Denesha McCuin and Brandon Anderson, as part of the program.

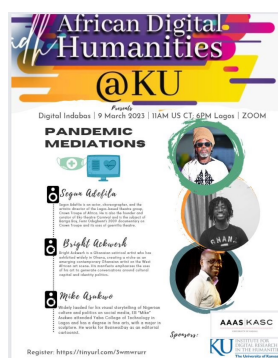
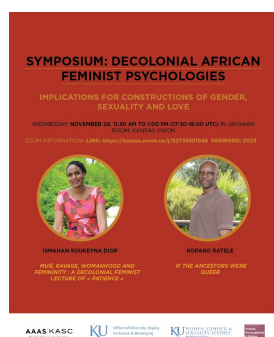
Previous keynote speakers in the [Race and Sports Series](#) have



been: Kavitha Davidson (2019), Claire Smith (2018), Dr. Harry Edwards (2017), Dave Zirin (2016), and William Rhoden (2015).



Other Sponsored and Co-Sponsored events



AAAS sponsors and co-sponsors many educational and cultural programs throughout each academic year and many of them can be watched on our [YouTube](#) channel.

Student and Alumni News:

Joseph Scales, who is completing his African & African-American Studies BA, received a FLAS to study Kiswahili in Kenya and Tanzania at SIT Field Schools during the summer of 2023.

Seville Coker, who is completing her African & African Diasporic Language Minor in AAAS, received a Fulbright-Hays to study Kiswahili at the Daystar and Pwani University, in Kenya, during the summer of 2023.

Owen Wegner, AAAS African Studies certificate student and graduate student in Linguistics, received a FLAS to study Kiswahili at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, during the summer of 2023.

Godson Nwachukwu Fidelis, AAAS MA student, presented a paper, "Oil Exploration and Health Challenge in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," at the African Studies Association's annual meeting in San Francisco.

L. Haley Bajorek, AAAS/Museum Studies graduate alum, joined Bishop Seabury Academy as a full-time faculty member in Social Studies.

Owen MacDonald, AAAS graduate alum, received a Fulbright-Hays fellowship to do research in Brazil. Owen is doing work on his project, "Caribbean Amazon: Race, Migration, Labor, and Gender on the Madeira-Mamoré, 1878-1913." He is doing his doctoral work at the University of Illinois in the Department of History.

Raychel Gadson, AAAS graduate alum, was named an APSA Diversity Fellow by the American Political Science Association. Raychel is doing her doctoral work at Johns Hopkins in the Department of Political Science.

Tarik Black, AAAS graduate alum, signed with Olympiacos of the Greek Basketball League and EuroLeague.

Allison Lewis, AAAS graduate alum and current doctoral student in KU's Department of American Studies, presented her work on Black Opera and institutional racism at the Association of African American Life and History's (ASALH) annual conference. The title of her paper was, "Children with Peculiar Grace: Black Children's Voices in the Golden Age of Black Opera."

Anita Eastwood, AAAS graduate alum, had numerous successes in 2023 in conjunction with her art, including her heart, "Beauty of Grace" being selected as one of the 40 hearts that made up Kansas City's 2023 [Parade of Hearts](#).

Caroline Kastor, AAAS graduate alum, took a position as co-General Counsel of the NWSL's KC Current.

Alyssa Cole, AAAS graduate alum, became an Assistant Professor of African American Studies and History at the University of Florida.



Thank you to our donors and supporters

Because of the generous support from our donors, alumni, and family, during the past few years AAAS was able to create two new endowment accounts to assist our students and faculty for years to come. In conjunction with our 50th anniversary celebration, AAAS launched the [Spearman Family Student Research and Support Fund](#). The fund, named in recognition of the Spearman family's long history of activism and support for the Black community of Lawrence and the University of Kansas, was created to directly support undergraduate majors, minors and graduate students in the Department.

Additionally, with the generous support of Drs. Nolan & Carole Ellison, and their family, the Department has a new endowed research fund, the [Ellison Family Endowed Research Fund for Academic Research](#), to support academic research into the Kansas African-American Experience.

The Department of African & African-American Studies gratefully thanks the Ellisons and the Spearman family, and all those who contributed to these funds. It is because of support like this that AAAS has been able to be one of the country's leading Black Studies departments over the past 50 plus years, and will continue to create scholars, teachers, and transformative research in the field for years to come.

Support AAAS

Why support African and African-American Studies @ KU?

By giving to AAAS, you contribute to the continued development of African and African-American academic activities, outreach, lectures, seminars and research programs at KU and throughout the region. You also strengthen our international outreach.

Your donations will also aid in supporting student scholarships, faculty research, teaching awards, service awards, and overall improvement of the Department.

To support AAAS, please send your donation, clearly marked for the **Department of African and African-American Studies**, to the following address:

Gift Processing Department
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PO Box 928
Lawrence, KS 66044-0928

1-800-444-4201

or go [here](#) and make your donation today.

Thank you for your support.



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