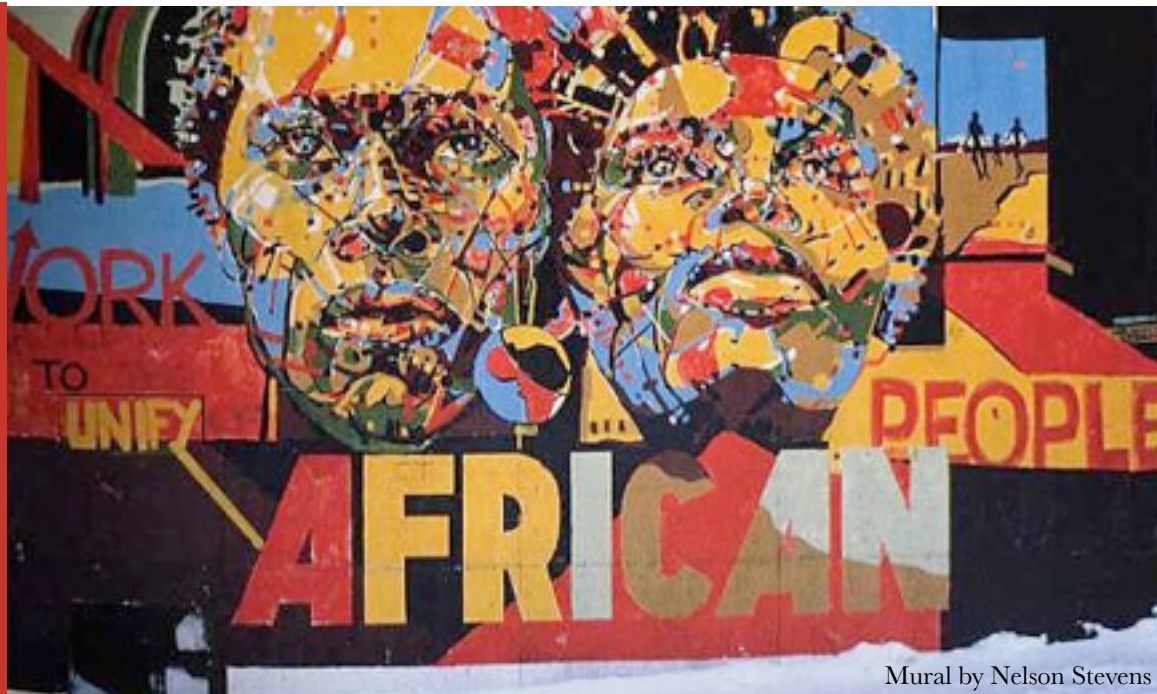


# AFRICANA NEWSLETTER

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

2021



Mural by Nelson Stevens

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## 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.

Given the breadth and depth of all that we offer, in course work, degrees, and programmatically, and the fact that we function genuinely as both an African and African-American studies unit, AAAS is the only department of its kind at a public or private university in Kansas and among the Big XII institutions. 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 globalizing community of the twenty-first century.

### Contact AAAS

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Volume 9, Number 1

## Message from the Chair: Dr. Shawn Leigh Alexander

I am pleased to bring back the AAAS Africana Newsletter after a six-year hiatus. 2021 was a wonderful, yet trying year. All of our students, faculty and staff adjusted as best as they could to the ever-changing environment within the current COVID pandemic. During this time we have not only struggled in the wake of COVID, but we have also been hit hard by both temporary and permanent budget cuts. In this period of economic distress and budget reductions, the generosity of our donors has been uplifting. It is to these donors, friends, and alumni that I give a hearty thanks for their support, including the creation of two new funding streams, the Spearman Family Opportunity and Research Fund and the Ellison Family Academic Research Fund. It is the continuous generosity and goodwill of our donors that have stimulated our productivity and helped our students throughout the past year.

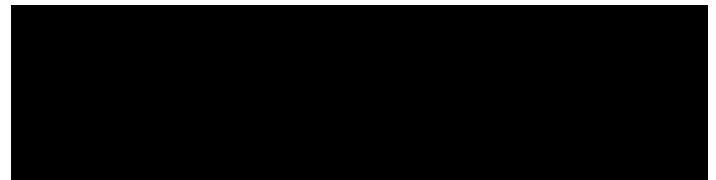
In 2021 we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Department of African & African-American Studies, delayed a year because of the pandemic. I want to express my gratitude to those who helped create the Department, and all those students, staff, and faculty who have steadfastly supported the Department throughout its fifty-plus years. I wish to also highlight the work of Dr. Pennington and the anniversary committee in bringing together such a wonderful program.

Throughout the year, as you will see in the content of this newsletter, our faculty and students have continued to work steadfastly on their research and service for the unit, and the profession. In 2020-21 AAAS

successfully completed its mandatory departmental review, which was forwarded to, and approved by the Kansas Board of Regents. We had numerous scholars publish work, produce films, and speak virtually, throughout the country and the world. Again, it has been heartening to see how our colleagues have persevered, and in some cases thrived, in our current global situation.

I want to extend special thanks to Dr. MacGonagle for her years of service, not only to the Department, but also its allied center, the Kansas African Studies Center, from which she stepped down from being director in 2021, after eight years of leadership. We also thank Dr. Glenn Adams (Psychology) for stepping in as the interim director, and for his work and collaboration in writing the new Federal Title VI and FLAS grants.

We congratulate Drs. Dorothy Hines and Abel Chikanda on their promotion to Associate Professor with tenure, and Dr. Tony Bolden on his promotion to full Professor. We also are indebted to Shelly Buerman for her assistance in putting this newsletter together and all of her immeasurable work in administering our office to keep the unit running smoothly. Finally, we congratulate our students who graduated this year, and wish them luck out there in the world.



## Departmental News:

**Asmaa Ben Baba** -- The Department of African & African-American Studies welcomes Asmaa Ben Baba as a Multi-Term Lecturer. Dr. Ben Baba earned her Ph.D from Auburn University and is the co-author of the recently published essay, "TESOL Teachers' Attitudes Toward Learning Management Systems in Online Teaching in Alabama and Mississippi". Her research and teaching areas cover Arabic and Islamic Studies and the African Diaspora.



## Other Departmental News:

**AAAS MA Program -- Raychel Gadson** successfully defended her thesis, "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing: 50 Years of Broken Promises and Forced Failures," and completed her MA program with an African American Studies concentration. Her committee consisted of Dr. Shawn Leigh Alexander and Dr. Dorothy Pennington (AAAS), and Dr. Charles Epp (School of Public Affairs & Administration). After completion of her thesis Raychel joined the Political Science PhD program at Johns Hopkins University.

**Owen MacDonald** successfully defended his thesis, "Revolutionary TransNationalism: The Revolutionary Action Movement, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers & the Black Power Movement in the United States & Brazil, 1961-1972," and completed his MA program with an African Diaspora concentration. His committee consisted of Dr. Shawn Leigh Alexander (AAAS), Dr. Elizabeth Esch (AMS), Deborah Dandridge (KU Libraries), and Dr. Luciano Tosta (Spanish and Portuguese). After completion of his thesis, Owen joined the University of Illinois' History Department's PhD program.

**Allison Lewis**, successfully defended her thesis “Singing My Way Back: An Autoethnographical Examination of the African American Musician,” and completed her MA program with an African American Studies concentration. Her committee consisted of Dr. Shawn Leigh Alexander and Dr. Peter Ojiambo (AAAS), Dr. Nicole Hodges-Persley (Theater- now AAAS/AMS), and Dr. Sherri Tucker (AMS). After completion of her thesis Allison joined KU’s Department of American Studies’ PhD program.

**L. Haley Bajorek**, a dual MA student in AAAS & Museum Studies, presented a paper, “Black Family History, Museum Collections and Preservation”, at the 2021 annual convention of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

**Faculty Announcements -- Promotions --** Tony Bolden was promoted to full Professor. Abel Chikanda and Dorothy Hines were both granted tenure and promoted to Associate Professor.

**Professor Dorthy Pennington** was honored at the Central States Communication Association’s annual meeting for her contributions to the Association and the field of Intercultural Communication.

**Professor Peter Ojiambo** was one of the recipients of the 2021 University Scholarly Achievement Awards.

**Professor Jessica Gerschultz** received a Hall Center for the Humanities Fellowship for fall 2021.

**Rania Rafraf** joined the Department as a Fulbright scholar for the 2021-2022 academic year. Ms. Rafraf is a multi-lingual linguist who is teaching our advanced Arabic courses, and is participating in other activities within our African and African Diasporic Language Program.

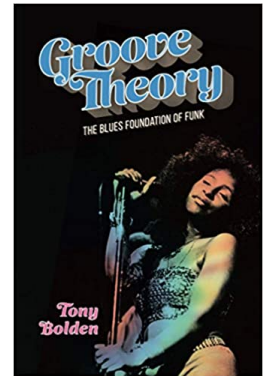
**General Announcements -- AAAS Scholarship/Award --** AAAS awarded \$23,000 in scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students in the academic years of 2020-21 & 2021-22.

## Faculty News:

**Peter Ukpokodu**, Professor of AAAS had a dramatic reading of his play [The Migrants](#), as part of the Department’s 50th Anniversary celebrations. The reading was produced by AAAS faculty member Nicole Hodges-Persley. Dr. Ukpokodu was also granted one of the University’s [Racial Equity Research, Scholarship & Creative Awards](#), to write and produce his play “The Search for Anno Domini MMXXI-I-VI”. He will again

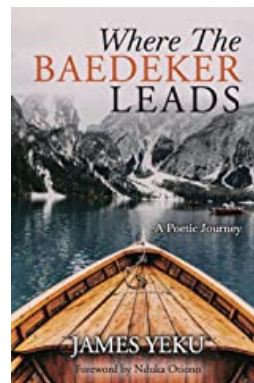
collaborate with Dr. Hodges-Persley and KC Melting Pot Theatre for the production of this play.

**Tony Bolden**, Professor of AAAS, published *Groove Theory: The Blues Foundation of Funk* with the University of Mississippi Press. Dr. Bolden also published his essay, “Reflections on Black Visual Artist Doug Redd,” in *Journal of Foreign Languages and Cultures*. Additionally, as editor of *The Langston Hughes Review (LHR)*, Professor Bolden continued his revitalization of the journal. *LHR* devoted two special issues celebrating the centennial of Langston Hughes’s famous poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” published in 1921.



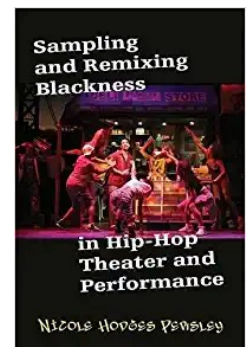
**Liz MacGonagle**, Associate Professor of AAAS and History, stepped down as director of the Kansas African Studies Center in August 2021 after serving for eight years and bringing in over \$3 million in federal grant support from the U. S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is the interim director of graduate studies in AAAS for 2021-22 and will be on research leave next year as a faculty fellow in the Hall Center for the Humanities.

**James Yékú**, Assistant Professor of AAAS, published a collection of poetry entitled, *Where The Baedeker Leads*. He also completed work on his first monograph, *Cultural Netizen-ship: Social Media, Popular Culture, and Performance in Nigeria*, which is scheduled to come out in spring 2022. Additionally, Dr. Yékú directed the African Digital Humanities initiative, which convened a number of programs, including the Second Annual African Digital Humanities Symposium and Digitizing Onitsha Market Literature. Yékú also published a number of essays in both popular and academic journals. Finally, Professor



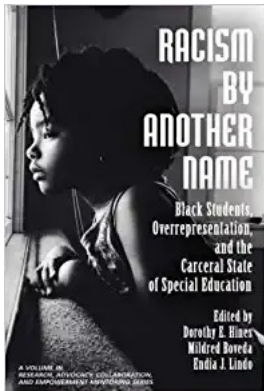
Yékú was elected to the board of the Kansas African Studies Center.

**Nicole Hodges-Persley**, Associate Professor of AAAS and AMS, published *Sampling and Remixing Blackness in Hip Hop Performance* (University of Michigan Press). She also authored a book with Monica Ndounou entitled, *Breaking It Down: Auditioning for Artists of the Global Majority*, for Rowman and Littlefield. Additionally, Professor Hodges-Persley directed the Lewis J. Morrow written short film, [Epiphany](#), which was selected for a number of film festivals.



**Amal El Haimeur**, Assistant Teaching Professor of AAAS, published an article in the *Journal of Arabic Language and Literature*. Dr. El Haimeur was also invited to participate in a workshop for the regional Arabic Language Council and she presented a paper, “Gender Stereotypes in Arabic Videoclips,” at the 4th International Conference on Gender and Sexuality. Finally, she co-presented, with other KU colleagues, at the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages.

**Peter Ojiambo**, Associate Professor of AAAS, is completing a book chapter entitled “Making the Dream a Reality in Women and Girl-Child Education: The Story of Starehe Girls Centre, Kenya.” Additionally, he recently completed a book chapter titled “Leading the Way in Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Africa: Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Ghana Chapter”. The chapter will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in Fall 2022 in an edited volume by Felix Kuma-Abiwu and Sabella Abidde. Apart from the writings, Dr. Ojiambo also participated in Kenya Scholars Association Conference in September, 2021, where he presented a paper titled “Making the Dream a Reality in Women and Girl-Child Education: The Story of Starehe Girls Centre, Kenya.” Additionally, during the summer, 2021, Dr. Ojiambo gave two talks at the universities of Botswana and Ghana-Legon.



**Dorothy E. Hines**, Associate Professor of AAAS and School of Education, co-edited the book, *Racism by Another Name: Black Students, Overrepresentation, and the Carceral State of Special Education*. The book examines how Black students, their parents and guardians advocate for a just and equitable education. Additionally, it is about the role that race and dis/ability play in shaping the educational experiences of Black students in schools.

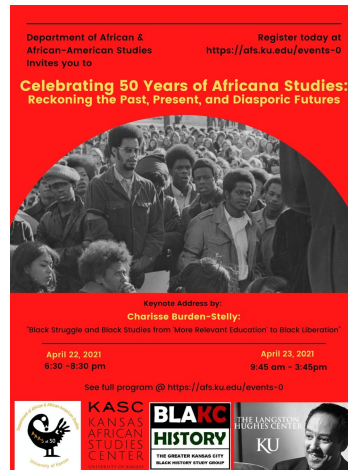
**Dorothy Pennington**, Associate Professor of AAAS and Communication Studies, is a part of an ongoing Humanities Kansas grant through the Department of Religious Studies at KU on Faith in the Free State- Religion in Kansas- Black Churches in Northeast Kansas. She is research director for the student interns and is also serving as podcast editor. The grant continues into 2022.

## Other Noteworthy News:

### Celebrating 50 Years of Africana Studies: Reckoning the Past, Present and Diasporic Future

On April 22 & 23, 2021 AAAS celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a virtual symposium entitled “Celebrating 50 Years of Africana Studies: Reckoning the Past,

Present and Diasporic Future.” The event consisted of a series of panels chronicling the history of the Department, from the student activism that led to its creation in 1970-71 to its current existence as the only university in the Big 12 Conference offering a master of arts program in African and African-American studies. In addition to reviewing the Department’s history, the symposium stimulated an interdisciplinary dialogue concerning the practice, the state, the history and the future of African and African-American studies in the academy and beyond.



KU’s Department of African and African-American Studies is one of a few such academic departments that were created in the late 1960s and early 1970s throughout the country. The panels included:

#### **AAAS Chairpersons Speak**

**Commentators:** Jacob Gordon, John Janzen, Peter Ukpokodu, & Shawn Leigh Alexander (Former chairs Arthur Drayton, Clarence Lang, and Cécile Accilien were unable to attend)

**Moderator:** Dorothy Pennington

#### **“Tilling the Soil” – Former KU Student Activists**

**Commentators:** Walter Bgoya, Alferdteen Harrison, Darryl Bright, Linda Loubert, John Spearman, Jr. & Brenda Vann

**Moderator:** Shawn Leigh Alexander

#### **Black Struggle and Black Study from ‘More Relevant Education’ to Black Liberation - Keynote Address**

**Moderator & Respondents:** Amal El Haimeur, & Abel Chikanda

#### **Art and Activism: 50 Years of Africana Studies at KU**

**Commentators:** Tyler Allen, Jenny Welden, Angela Watts, Cassandra Mesick Braun

**Moderator:** Jessica Gerschultz

#### **What AAAS Meant and Means to Me**

**Commentators:** Maria Beg, Azja Butler, Derrais Carter, Jacoby Hawkins, Owen MacDonald, & Niya McAdoo.

**Moderator:** Tony Bolden

You can see the full program and links to the videos [here](#).



Images from our virtual symposium. On the left: former student activists: Darryl Bright, Brenda Vann, Dr. Linda Loubert, Walter Bgoya, and John Spearman, Jr.

On the right: current MA student Tyler Allen, former MA student Owen MacDonald, former BA students Dr. Derrais Carter, Maria Beg, esq., and current AAAS major, Azja Butler.

## Other Sponsored and Co-Sponsored events

In addition to our anniversary symposium, AAAS sponsored and co-sponsored a number of events in 2021. Many of them can be watched on our [YouTube](#) channel. Below are the flyers of just a couple of the many events we had in 2021.

ALL EVENTS ARE AT 7:00 CST AND YOU MUST REGISTER PRIOR TO THE EVENT!

**diversity**  
ITS HISTORY & PURPOSE

February 25  
Dr. Roderick Ferguson,  
Professor of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and  
African Studies, Yale  
Author of *We Demand*

ASFP: <https://kuafstudies.com/969692>

March 4  
Dr. Riisaboo Wallert,  
Professor in the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the  
University of Toronto  
Author of *On Property*

ASFP: <https://kuafstudies.com/969692>

March 18  
Dr. Barbara Ruzby,  
Professor History, Gender and Women's Studies and African  
American Studies, University of Illinois Chicago  
Author of *Making All Black Lives Matter*

ASFP: <https://kuafstudies.com/969692>

Has diversity, as an idea, reached its end? These three speakers will share their thoughts on the history of the idea of 'diversity', its current status and where our next steps should take us.

FREE COPIES of each book are available to the first 50 KU students who register. We will send directions on how to pick up the book(s) upon registration.

KU  
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

**Muslim Identity  
in France**

Dr. Camille Harrison  
Associate Professor, Modern Languages,  
Coker Community College, Chicago

Join Dr. Camille Harrison for a discussion of issues surrounding Muslim identity in France. The recent comments about Islam made by the French president and the reactions from Muslim citizens and leaders highlighted, once again, the complex relationship between secular France and its Muslims. Dr. Harrison, a French Muslim, will provide insight into this relationship and how it is conditioned by the colonial history of France.

Wednesday, March 17, 2021 at 5:00 pm Central

Register in advance for the zoom

AAASIKASC  
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

## 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  
KU Endowment  
PO Box 928  
Lawrence, KS 66044-0928

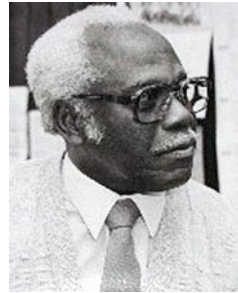
1-800-444-4201

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

**Thank you for your support.**

## Passing of Arthur Drayton

The Department of African & African-American Studies mourns the passing of our former colleague and chair Dr. [Arthur Drayton](#) (1928-2021).



## Thank you to our donors and supporters

Because of the generous support of our donors, alumni, and family, 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.



DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN &  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

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