

# DIASPORA CALLING

SPRING 2025

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### DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN & AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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## CHAIR'S NOTE

Dear Friends of AAAS:

Welcome to the Department Chair's Corner.

We have made lots of exciting progress since last year, too much to mention in this short note, but I want to highlight a few things of significance.

First, Fall 2024 was the 30<sup>th</sup> year of African & African American Studies at Louisiana State University, and the Department celebrated this anniversary on October 25<sup>th</sup>. The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, Drs. Casey Patterson, Ashley Mack, Cassandra Chaney, Herman Kelly, Ms. Ashley Bailey (LSU Foundation), Ms. Taylor R. King, and I, and co-chairs, Drs. Ashan Winfield and Catherine Jacquet, put together an incredible program. The theme for the event was "This Is How We Do It: 30 Years of Transcendence," and our special guest and keynote speaker was the world-renown, Hollywood costume designer and two-time Academy Award winner, Ms. Ruth E. Carter. The event also augmented our student scholarships, especially the Dr. Thomas Durant, Jr. Scholarship and the Dr. Troy D. Allen Service Award. We invited contributions to the LSU Foundation African & African American Studies fund in support of this worthy cause. At this program, we bestowed the Department's highest honor, The Transcendence Award, upon a stellar group of individuals: Mr. Collis Temple, Jr., Dr. Lori Latrice Martin, Dr. Joyce Marie Jackson, Dr. Thomas Durant, Jr., Mr. Clint Odom, and Ms. Ruth E. Carter.

The rigorous work of building the Department (since 2021) continues, and I want to thank the faculty for electing me to another term as Chair. I offer a special acknowledgment to Dr. Sarah Becker for managing the nominations and voting processes. The hiring of our first full-time Academic Program Manager, Ms. Taylor R. King. I could not have maintained the challenging administrative work without her, Ms. Taylor Armer, who helped me expertly for eight months, and AAAS's Graduate Assistant, (The Future Dr.) Jazmin Robinson-Smith.

Regretfully, we started this academic year without Dr. Rogers Orock, our African Studies expert, who took a position at another college at the end of last year. Rogers and I worked well together, and we remain close. The Department was fortunate, however, to have recruited Dr. Mathias Iroro Orhero, whose dissertation at McGill University focused comparatively on Africana protest literature and poetry in the Niger Delta and Canada.



*Photo of Dr. Stephen C. Finley*

## CHAIR'S NOTE (CONT.)

We are also pleased to continue our faculty search for an Assistant Professor, whose work focuses on Public Health & Wellness. The highly qualified scholar we select will conduct public-facing research that will connect the scholar and the Department to research institutions and public-health agencies in the state and give attention to ameliorating health disparities. We are excited about this position, and we are grateful to the wonderful members of the search committee: Drs. Cassandra Chaney, Teaira Evans, Raquel Robvais, and committee co-chairs, Drs. Jas Sullivan and Sarah Becker.

We have lofty goals for this year, including raising funds for scholarships and programing, establishing our Executive Committee, expanding and revising our bylaws to support our greater attention to high level administration, recruitment of new students to the major and minor, and renewed attention to our eight operating committees, and expanding our faculty.

AAAS faculty publish at the highest level of productivity, including perhaps the highest rate of book publication. We do this while teaching and mentoring students and engaging in the heavy lifting of institution building. AAAS is, indeed, an example of transcendence.

Cheers,  
Professor Stephen C. Finley

## DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN & AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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### INAUGURAL CHAIR

**Stephen C. Finley**

Associate Professor, African & African American  
Studies

### CORE FACULTY

**Teaira Evans**

Assistant Professor, Psychology

**Lori Latrice Martin**

HSS Associate Dean and Professor, African & African  
American Studies

**Sophie Moore**

Assistant Professor, Geography and Anthropology

**Mathias Iroro Orhero**

Assistant Professor, African & African American  
Studies

### AFFILIATE FACULTY

John Bardes, History

Sarah Becker, Sociology and WGSS, CCELL

Michael Bibler, English

Eldon Birthwright, AAAS

Peter Cava, WGSS

Cassandra Cheney, School of Social Work

Brittany Cook, Geography and Anthropology

Bastien Craipain, Francophone Studies and Comparative  
Literature

Melissa Crawford, Office of Strategic Initiatives

Jonathan Earl, Dean, Honors College

Serap Erincin, Performance Studies

Sarah Franzen, Geography & Anthropology

Tina Harris, Mass Communication

Narcissa Haskins, Librarian

Joyce Jackson, Geography & Anthropology

Catherine Jacquet, History and Women's, Gender, and  
Sexualities Studies

Benjamin Khan, History and Women's, Gender, &  
Sexualities Studies

**Jas M. Sullivan**

Professor, Political Science, Psychology and African &  
African American Studies

## PROFESSOR EMERITUS

**Thomas Durant Jr.**

## OFFICE STAFF

**Taylor King**

Academic Program Coordinator

## EDITOR

**Jazmin K. Robinson-Smith**

Graduate Assistant, Sociology

Touria Khannous, English

Herman Kelly, AAAS

Ashley Mack, Rhetoric & Culture

Bryan McCann, Rhetoric & Cultural Studies

Ruth Moon, Mass Communication

Roland Mitchell, Dean, College of Education and Human  
Sciences

Casey Patterson, English

LaKeitha Poole, Sports Psychology

Helen Regis, Geography & Anthropology

Raquel Robvais, Communication Studies

Mark Schafer, Sociology

Jonathan Snow, Geology

Sonya Wiley, Business

Asha Winfeld, Mass Communication

Alison Young, Art & Design

## SPECIAL THANKS: TAYLOR ARMER



*Photo of Taylor Armer*



*Photo of Dr. Mathias Orhero*

## NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: DR. MATHIAS ORHERO

Mathias Iroro Orhero is primarily interested in postcolonial, Black, and African literatures and cultures, with a special focus on Nigeria's Niger Delta and the Black diaspora in North America. He researches minority subjectivities and how they respond to the nation-state through literary and cultural production. He is also interested in African history, philosophy, and folklore. His work has appeared in journals like *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, *Safundi*, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *Matatu*, *Acadiensis*, *Imbizo*, *Postcolonial Text*, *Ariel*, *Journal of Comparative Literature and Culture*, and *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, in book series like *African Literature Today*, and books like *Literature and Arts of the Niger Delta*, *African Battle Traditions of Insult: Verbal*

*Arts, Song-Poetry, and Performance*, and *The Routledge Handbook of the New African Diasporic Literature*. He is the co-editor of a recently published [special section](#) of the *Nordic Journal of African Studies*. Before joining LSU, he had taught at McGill University, Concordia University, Delta State University, and the University of Uyo.

### ***Recent publications include:***

Orhero, M.I. "Negotiating Home in the Long Poem: Amatoritsero Ede's Transpatiality." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2025, pp. 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.53228/vy7dwj21>

**Orhero, M.I.** and Chikezirim Nwoke "Theorizing the Hypeman in Nigerian Popular Culture: Poetics, Performance, and the E-Fraud Economy." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (2025): 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2025.2462217>

Orhero, M.I. "The Development of Monica Popescu's Research." *Safundi* pp.1-7. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2024.2405081>

Orhero, M.I. "Stubborn Beauty": Africadian Women and Black Consciousness in George Elliott Clarke's *Where Beauty Survived*." *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region*, vol 52. no 2, 2024, pp. 96-106. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aca.2023.a925081>

Orhero, M.I. "Negotiating Home in New African Diasporic Writing: The Niger Delta and Black Canadian Geographies in the Poetry of Nduka Otiono and Amatoritsero Ede." *The Routledge Handbook*

of the New African Diasporic Literature, edited by Lokangaka Losambe and Tanure Ojaide. New York: Routledge, 2024.

**Orhero, M.I.** and Chikezirim Nwoke. "Violence-as-Norm in the Postcolony: Reading Statist Violence and Civic Dissent in Nigerian Literature." *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2023, pp. 341-361. doi: [10.1163/18757421-05402009](https://doi.org/10.1163/18757421-05402009)

Orhero, M.I. "Niger Delta Subaltern Agency and Resistance in Obari Gomba's *The Ascent Stone* and Stephen Kekeghe's *Rumbling Sky*." *Imbizo*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2023, doi: [10.25159/2663-6565/12532](https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6565/12532)

Orhero, M.I. "Epistemic Recuperation and Contemporary Reconfiguration of the Verbal Battle Tradition in the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Kofi Anyidoho." *African Battle Traditions of Insult: Verbal Arts, Song-Poetry, and Performance*, edited by Tanure Ojaide. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 263-280.

Orhero, M.I. "Child Narrators, Conceptions of Reality, and Minority Identity in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2022.

### STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: AMAREY MCKINNEY



Photo of Amarey McKinney

My name is Amarey McKinney, and I am from Stockton, California. I am a Senior at LSU, and my major is African and African American Studies. When I first came to LSU my major was in Art History but once I took African American Studies courses for the first time in my life, I decided to change my major. I was very grateful for this scholarship because I am an out-of-state student and college is costly. I came from a single-mother household, and it has been difficult. I am currently the Vice President of the Society of African and African American Studies, a part of the Black Student, and Black Artists Union. Being a part of these organizations and the Department of African and African American Studies has shaped me into a mindful and constructive woman. I started my college career at a much smaller university, Louisiana State University- Eunice.

There I was the Women's Basketball manager. It was a huge change when I got to LSU's main campus in Baton Rouge. I have my struggles with mental illness but, many professors in my department have helped me overcome my obstacles and stay on the right track. I am very excited about what is to come of the Department of African and African American Studies because of the great things I have seen while at LSU. LSU has a sort of culture like no other when referring to the Department and it is what makes LSU special in many cases.

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## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: RODRICK JOSHUA WILSON II



*Photo of Rodrick Joshua Wilson II*  
career.

Meet Rodrick Joshua Wilson II. Josh is a Senior at LSU majoring in African & African-American Studies/3+3 Pre-Law program. His hobbies are traveling, playing sports, and fellowshiping with his fraternity brothers. He enjoys lively discussions about history, politics, and law, for Josh has aspirations to be a lawyer.

Josh currently works for the AAAS program under the leadership of Dr. Stephen Finley and Ms. Taylor King. For these two previous years, Josh was offered and accepted an internship with the Conrad Leadership Program of Dallas, a program created by State Senator Royce West to give undergraduate and graduate students the ability to gain experience in their field of study. Josh believes majoring in African & African-American Studies was one of his best academic decisions, as it has expanded his understanding of underrepresented topics and provided perspectives he plans to apply in his future legal career.

## ALUMNI IN THE NEWS

LSU Ph.D. and AAAS graduate minor alumnus **Dr. Ifeyinwa Davis** is a Policy Analyst for Louisiana Appleseed, an area nonprofit that focuses on law, legal advocacy, and policy change. Dr. Davis puts her social science training in data collection and analysis to use in her work with Appleseed.

Recently, Dr. Davis interviewed two Louisiana families and helped produce a short documentary about the issue of heirs property, where according to current law, property with multiple heirs lacks protections from being auctioned off at lower-than-market-value prices—often to developers—when those heirs are in disagreement and/or cannot afford legal resources needed to put protections on the property. This issue impacts many families, but is disproportionately impacting Black families in Louisiana who are losing generational wealth.

If you are interested in the issue, you can see the documentary here. It highlights two Baton Rouge families and the work Appleseed is doing to help keep property in heirs' hands and/or to ensure they get fair market value when it is sold:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KdxCu1Qsdo>

## HOW TO MAJOR IN AAAS

The B.A. in African & African American Studies requires a total of **33 credit hours** including:

- A required core of nine **(9)** hours: AAAS 2000; AAAS 3024 or 3044 (CxC); & AAAS 4020.
- A minimum of six **(6)** hours must focus on a geographical area outside of the U.S.
- Three **(3)** hours in a Service Learning or Communication across the Curriculum (CxC) course
- Only twelve **(12)** hours from courses numbered below 3000-level may count towards a degree.

Sign up today to get started!

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### AAAS CORE VALUES

1. Equity. AAAS practices and advocates fair distribution of resources, opportunities, labor, and reward and advocates for the distribution of such in accordance with degree of past harm and present needs.
2. Excellence: AAAS strives for the highest distinction and outstanding achievement in scholarship, instruction, professional service, administration, and leadership
3. Justice: AAAS works for the transformation of structures, practices, policies, and ideas that inhibit and curtail human flourishing by engaging in self-conscious and ethical treatment of individuals and communities.
4. Respect. AAAS shows regard for the humanity of others and honors human difference and sameness.
5. Scholarship: AAAS seeks the creation and dissemination of knowledge and socially transformative ideas at highest level of intellectual attainment.

## Summer 2025 Course Offerings

### First Summer Term

Course Number	Course Type	Course Title	Instructor
AAAS 2000.1	SEM Web Based	African & African Studies	Dr. E. Birthwright

### Second Summer Term

Course Number	Course Type	Course Title	Instructor
AAAS 2000.1	SEM Web Based	African & African Studies	Dr. J. Sullivan
AAAS 2410.1	Web Based	Black Pop-Culture	Dr. E. Birthwright
AAAS 2511.1	SEM	Race Relations	Dr. S. Becker

## Fall 2025 Course Offerings

Course Number	Course Type	Course Title	Instructor
AAAS 2000.1	SEM	African & African Studies	Dr. H. Kelly
AAAS 2000.2	SEM Web Based	African & African Studies	Dr. E. Birthwright
AAAS 2000.3	SEM Web Based	African & African Studies	Dr. J. Sullivan
AAAS 2000.4	SEM	African & African Studies	Dr. Z. Williams
AAAS 2410.1	Web Based	Black Pop-Culture	Dr. E. Birthwright



## AAAS 3024 to AAAS 4900

Course Number	Course Type	Course Title	Instructor
AAAS 3024.1	In Class Lecture	African Diaspora Intell.	Dr. Z. Williams
AAAS 3044.1	In Class Lecture	Black Rhetorical Traditions	Dr. R. Robvais
AAAS 3120.1	In Class Lecture	TOPS HST AFR & AFRN DIASPORA	Dr. M. Orhero
AAAS 3902.1	In Class Lecture	TOP IN AAAS	Dr. T. Evans
AAAS 3902.2	In Class Lecture	TOP IN AAAS	Dr. S. Finley
AAAS 4001.1	SEM	Environmental Justice	Dr. S. Moore
AAAS 4900.1	SEM	Civil Rights	Dr. H. Kelly

## AAAS 4323 Graduate Offering

Course Number	Course Type	Course Title	Instructor
AAAS 4323.1	In Class Lecture	Studies in African Lit.	Dr. M. Orhero

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## 10-POINT PROFILE PLAN PROGRAM

1. Develop the Center for Race, Community, and Culture in Louisiana.
2. Offer a Master's Degree Program.
3. Offer a Doctoral Degree Program.
4. Recruit ten new majors and ten new minors every academic year.
5. Raise \$5 million for the new department.
6. Expand course offerings to include additional cross-listed course and non-U.S. courses.
7. Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and students.
8. Increase profile of the department within the university, city, region, state, and nation.
9. Enhance office space.
10. Increase community engagement efforts.

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*MAJOR WHERE YOU MATTER! ®*

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