

FALL 2026

# DAAS MAGAZINE



DEPARTMENT OF  
AFROAMERICAN AND  
AFRICAN STUDIES





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FRONT COVER: The original Center for  
Afroamerican and African Studies.

BACK COVER: Photo collage by Elizabeth  
James, displayed in the “DAAS@55”  
gallery exhibition.

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Bénédicte Boisseron

**DAAS@55:**  
**Resilience and Radiance** was the department’s theme for 2025–26, marking the 55th anniversary of a center (CAAS) founded in 1970, which became a department in 2011 and is now widely known as DAAS. “Resilience” speaks to what endures; “radiance” to what is projected outward. This year, the department stood at a pivotal moment, looking back on what has been accomplished while stepping forward.

This transition was powerfully captured in a multimedia exhibition at GalleryDAAS, “DAAS@55: A Journey Through Our History.” Co-curated by Program Associate Elizabeth James, the exhibition retraced the past 55 years of DAAS history, marking a half-century milestone whose celebration was delayed by COVID-19.

As James reflected, “It amazes me to think about the people who’ve walked through our doors.” Alice Walker, Walter Rodney, Nelson Mandela, and our own Harold Cruse, the first director of CAAS and author of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967).

Stepping into the exhibit, one could feel the interplay of resilience and radiance most vividly in Professor Cruse’s typewriter, displayed at the center of the gallery. It seemed to carry the energy of the civil rights movement, its material presence conveying a palpable tradition of radical thought in defiance of the elusive immateriality of the new era of artificial intelligence.

“In advanced societies it is not the race politicians or the ‘rights’ leaders who create the new ideas and the new images of life and man. That role belongs to the artists and intellectuals of each generation. ... It is the artists and the creative minds who will, and must, furnish the all important content.”

— Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967)

This is a strikingly new era, yet one that feels cyclical, echoing the time when Cruse himself worked at the keyboard. As we look toward the next academic year, we do so in a moment of turbulence, when values central to CAAS and DAAS are being tested. More than ever, we feel the urge to return to that typewriter, to let our fingers be guided by the words of those who came before us and showed us the way.

The 2025–26 academic year was also one of reflection and introspection. Our inaugural Faculty Forum series provided opportunities to showcase remarkable scholarship, while our unwavering commitment to our students — guiding them in their pursuit of excellence — remained our dearest mission.

May we, as community members, alumni, staff, faculty, and students, continue to look back and learn from the past while also looking ahead and forging uncharted paths. May each step be taken with resilience, radiance, and a determination to take up the DAAS baton and carry it forward.

With gratitude for your support and many contributions,

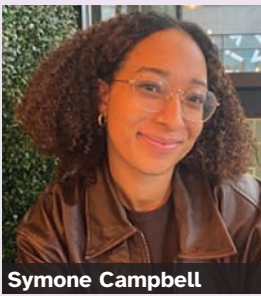
**Bénédicte Boisseron**  
Professor and Chair, DAAS  
Professor, Romance Languages and Literatures

Photo above: Scott Soderberg, Michigan Photography

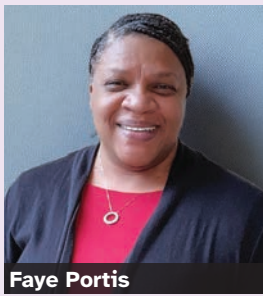
**PICTURED BELOW:** Typewriter used by former Professor and CAAS Director Harold Cruse to write *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967). The cherished DAAS artifact was displayed in GalleryDAAS’ “DAAS@55” exhibition.  
Photo: Ava McKenzie



NEWS IN BRIEF



Symone Campbell



Faye Portis

**Symone Campbell** joined DAAS as administrative/project coordinator. Her prior experience includes work as a GSI for the department and as a graduate student consultant for U-M's Ginsberg Center.

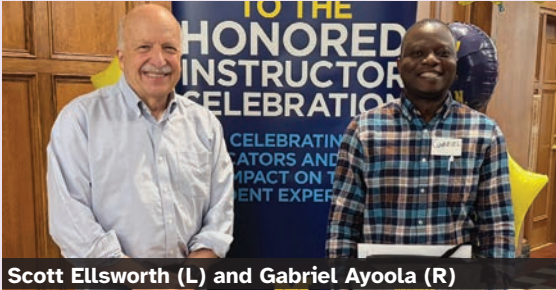
**Faye Portis** returns to DAAS as executive secretary to the chair, a role she previously held for many years. Portis' decades of experience include positions with U-M's Office of the Registrar, Rackham Graduate School, LSA, and Michigan Medicine.

Lecturer II **Gabriel Ayoola** and Teaching Professor **Scott Ellsworth** were recognized as Honored Instructors by U-M Housing, nominated by residential students for their positive impact.

The Rackham Reparative Justice Research Group (RJRG), an interdisciplinary team of students and faculty that includes Associate Professor **Matthew Countryman**, is researching historical and present-day racial harms in Washtenaw County. The team welcomes opportunities to interview community members interested in sharing memories of Black life in the county (email [mcountry@umich.edu](mailto:mcountry@umich.edu)).

Three DAAS professors were recognized at U-M's 2025 Faculty Awards Celebration:

- **Christian Davenport** was named the Charles Tilly Distinguished University Professor of Political Science in recognition of exceptional scholarly and creative achievements, international reputation, and excellence in teaching, mentoring, and service.
- Arthur F. Thurnau Professor **Megan Sweeney** received a Faculty Recognition Award for scholarly contributions, teaching and mentoring excellence, and service.
- Associate Professor **Stephen Ward** received the Regents' Award for Distinguished Public Service for years of community engagement and contributions as faculty director of the Semester in Detroit program. Ward is an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor in DAAS and the Residential College, where he also serves as associate director.



Scott Ellsworth (L) and Gabriel Ayoola (R)



Matthew Countryman (L) and task force members



Christian Davenport

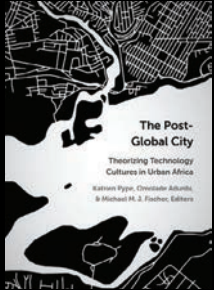


Megan Sweeney



Stephen Ward

PUBLISHED!  
NEW FACULTY BOOKS



**OMOLADE ADUNBI**  
*The Post-Global City: Theorizing Technology Cultures in Urban Africa*  
University of Michigan Press

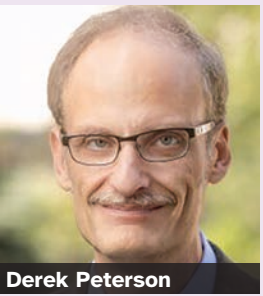
NEWS IN BRIEF

**Derek Peterson** (the Ali Mazrui Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies) was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, one of the nation's most prestigious honorary societies recognizing exceptional academic and professional achievement. Peterson coordinates an ongoing project to organize and preserve endangered government archives in Uganda.

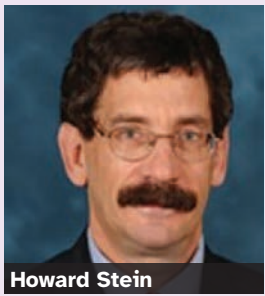
Professor **Howard Stein** co-authored "Climate Change and International Finance: Toward the Creation of an African Green Bank" and "Sovereign Debt in Zambia: Structure, Evolution and Implications" for the IDEAs working paper series and an op-ed for *The Conversation* titled "Why Africa Needs a Green Bank to Fund Climate Action and Build Its Own Renewable Technology."

Professor **Alford Young Jr.** was elected president of the American Sociological Association. He will serve a one-year term beginning in September 2026.

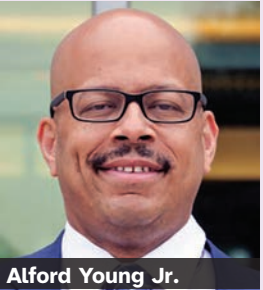
Professor **Magdalena Zaborowska's** book *James Baldwin: The Life Album* received an honorable mention for the Popular Culture Association's John Leo and Dana Heller Award for Best Single Work, Anthology, Multi-Authored, or Edited Book in LGBTQ Studies.



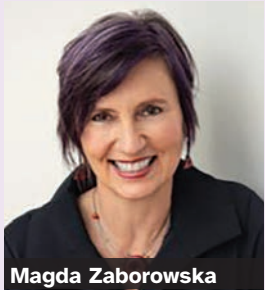
Derek Peterson



Howard Stein



Alford Young Jr.



Magda Zaborowska

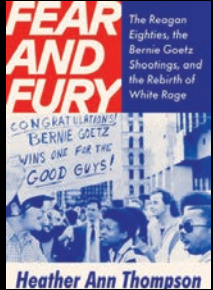
SEND US YOUR NEWS!

DAAS faculty, staff, students, and alumni: Please share your news with us for future magazines via our Google Form: [myumi.ch/8qJzM](https://myumi.ch/8qJzM). We love to hear from you!

ALUMNI NEWS

Check out our special alumni news section on page 12.

PUBLISHED!  
NEW FACULTY BOOKS



**HEATHER ANN THOMPSON**  
*Fear and Fury: The Reagan Eighties, the Bernie Goetz Shootings, and the Rebirth of White Rage*  
Pantheon

# KWANZAA

## RESILIENCE & RADIANCE

Our annual Kwanzaa celebration in December was filled with reflection, community connection, and — of course! — delicious food.

The opening program focused on DAAS' anniversary theme of "Resilience and Radiance." Program Associate **Elizabeth James** spoke about the history and traditions of Kwanzaa, while **Magdalyne Akiding**, DAAS lecturer, provided an overview of the Seven Principles and their pronunciations and meanings. Later, we shared a meal in a beloved DAAS tradition. **Harambee!**

Photos: Daryl Marshke, Michigan Photography



# MLK SYMPOSIUM

## THE MOVEMENT MADE US ALL

This year marked the 40th anniversary of U-M's MLK Symposium, a milestone dedicated not only to remembrance but also to reckoning. Together with the history department, DAAS hosted an event titled "The Movement Made Us All: Historical Legacies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Current Moment."

The evening brought together multiple generations for a conversation with father-son guest speakers David Dennis Sr. (U-M Law '71), a civil rights movement veteran, and David Dennis Jr., an award-winning journalist and author. The two co-authored the book *The Movement Made Us: A Father, a Son, and the Legacy of a Freedom Ride*.

Associate Professor **Matthew Countryman** moderated the discussion, which wove together history, memory, trauma, and hope in a deeply personal reflection on what the civil rights movement was and what it still demands of us.

Photos: Sean Carter Photography

"DO SOMETHING, AND YOU'LL BE SURPRISED HOW MANY PEOPLE COME."

— David Dennis Sr. on making a movement

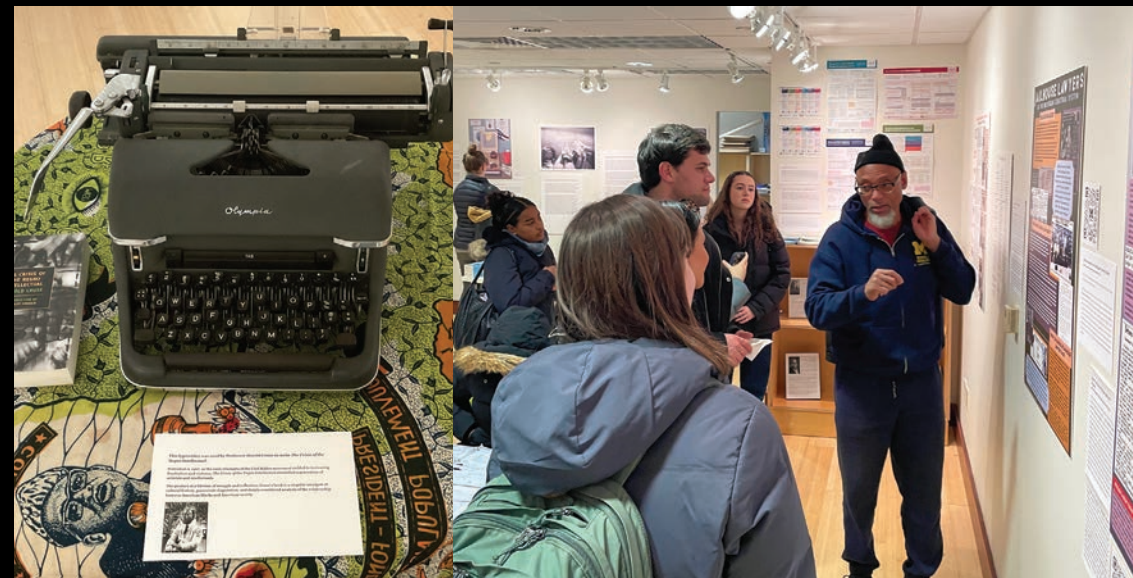


# DAAS GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

## "DAAS@55: A Journey Through Our History"

A multimedia exhibition celebrating the department's 55th anniversary, "DAAS@55" brought history to life through photographs, artwork, books, and archival materials. Guests explored artifacts representing departmental milestones and visual timelines tracing the history of activism on campus, nationally, and globally.

Photos: Ava McKenzie



# DAAS GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

## "Archives of Resistance: Visuals and Voices from Carceral State Project Research"

A Carceral State Project (CSP) showcase highlighting stories of resistance and hope in the face of mass incarceration, police violence, immigrant detention, and racial criminalization through art, prison correspondence, research, and archival documentation.

Photos courtesy of Katie Pieper and the CSP



FACULTY FORUM SERIES

In celebration of its 55th anniversary, DAAS launched a Faculty Forum series during the 2025–26 academic year. These monthly talks, each presented by a different DAAS faculty member, offered opportunities for colleagues, students, and community members to learn about the wide variety of research topics, creative projects, and intellectual pursuits within the department.

“The DAAS Faculty Forum series has been an amazing initiative this year, offering an invaluable opportunity to take the pulse of the department’s intellectual life,” said Department Chair **Bénédicte Boisseron**. “It has revealed the true gold mine of ideas that exists right here within DAAS. In the midst of demanding teaching schedules, ongoing research, and national and international commitments, the forum has allowed us to reconnect and fully appreciate the vibrancy of our collective work.”

This year’s forum speakers and topics were:

- Associate Professor **Stephen Ward**, “Free Your Mind and DAAS Will Follow”



- Professor **Magdalena Zaborowska**, “James Baldwin’s Black Queer Humanism as a Track and Tune on His Life Album”
- Assistant Professor **Jessica Walker**, “Styling the Soul Food Imaginary”
- Professor **Alford Young Jr.**, “Who Speaks for African Americans?: Harold Cruse, Black Scholars, and the Politics of Representation”
- Associate Professor **Aliyah Khan**, “‘Is Black Brown?’ Digitizing Islam and Independence at the Walter Rodney National Archives of Guyana”
- Teaching Professor **Scott Ellsworth**, “Trade Publishers, Literary Agents, and Opinion Pages: Bringing Scholarship to Popular Audiences”
- Assistant Professor **SaraEllen Strongman**, “Cultivating Black Feminist Community at Azalea”
- Associate Professor **David Doris**, “A Natural History of Immortality (Fragment)”

Photos: Ava McKenzie



EQUIPPED TO ENGAGE

SaraEllen Strongman’s “Black Feminist Thought and Practice” Course Thrives on Discussion

By Olivia Thompson, Editorial Assistant



SaraEllen Strongman

“Black Feminist Thought and Practice” (AAS 323), taught by Assistant Professor **SaraEllen Strongman**, is a popular course. Strongman, who began teaching it in 2019, encourages students to examine the history and evolution of Black feminism through topics such as health, sexuality, gender,

motherhood, education, and media.

“I try to give students a peek into places where they might not think there is scholarly work or activism related to Black feminism, but it is showing up in all of these different areas,” said Strongman.

Strongman’s personal interest in Black feminism was ignited as a doctoral student working on her dissertation in Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She noticed that many of the scholars whose work she was reading had also engaged one another in conversations about Black feminism. Letters revealed that they knew each other, read each other’s essays, and debated ideas.

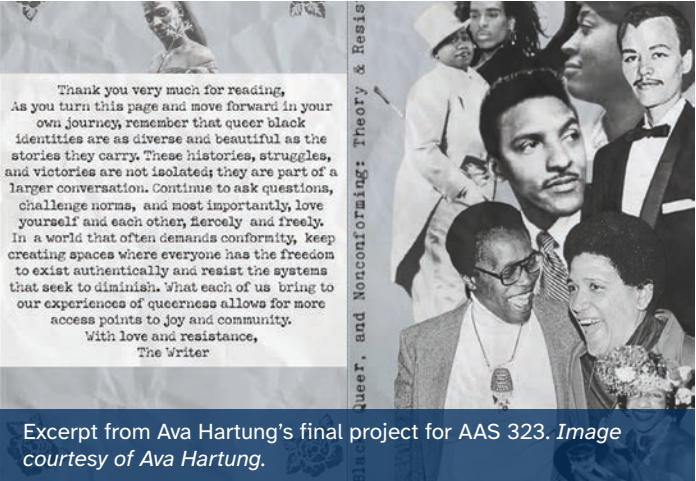
“They were doing activist work,” said Strongman. “Many of them were critics and scholars in Black women’s literature, doing this work not just because they wanted to fill a gap — to write the books that they wanted to read — but also because they felt that they had a sort of duty to push back against this history of negative portrayals of Black women [and] replace those with their own self-definitions that were truer to their experiences.”

Today, Strongman prompts her students to engage with Black feminist perspectives through discussion, readings, and projects, including analyses of music videos such as Nicki Minaj’s “Anaconda,” and a final creative project.

For her final project, **Grace Jiang**, a junior studying history and economics, wrote a paper accompanied by a hand-knit child’s hat with the word “Re-member” on it.

“I read this article about Black motherhood as this concept of remembering and restitching the community,” said Jiang. “My research led me down this route of looking at maternal heritage and thinking of the memory that’s been passed down, so that’s what I chose [to create].”

Jiang attributes her enjoyment of the course to Strongman. Senior **Ava Hartung** agreed.



Excerpt from Ava Hartung’s final project for AAS 323. Image courtesy of Ava Hartung.

“[Strongman] always came in with a lot of energy, and she acted like a person,” Hartung said. “She was very approachable and engaging.”

Strongman’s demeanor and the smaller class size (about 25 students per semester) create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable speaking freely, Hartung explained, which is important for such a discussion-heavy course.

“Pretty much everybody talked openly — not just for participation points,” Hartung said. “I don’t even like talking in class that much, but that was a class that I really felt like it was helpful and enjoyable.”

Discussions function less as reading quizzes and more as opportunities for students to learn from one another. Strongman encourages exchange by posing questions such as, “How were Black women a part of experiencing that?” and “How does environmentalism intersect with issues of race, gender, and sexuality?”

“We talked about how young Black women are expected to be more mature than white women, and how that is inflicted on people,” said Hartung. “A lot of people from class shared their experience. That was something I had seen but not fully recognized, and I think that changed my perspective a lot.”

Ultimately, Strongman hopes students leave her class with a more robust understanding of who belongs in feminism and conversations about women’s rights, and “to think about feminism as things that show up in all different areas of their lives.”

“My greatest hope is that students leave this class better equipped to engage with the world around them,” she said.

Prof. Strongman’s Recommended Reading:

- “A Black Feminist Statement” by the Combahee River Collective
- Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins
- Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde
- When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* by Joan Morgan

THE DAAS DIFFERENCE

Students in Teaching Professor **Scott Ellsworth**’s course, “Nonviolence: From Montgomery to the World,” met with living history in the form of Ron Ginsburg, 91, a former attorney with the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division who traveled the South working on voter registration efforts in the 1960s.

During a classroom visit, Ginsburg shared his personal experiences from that period, including the Selma-to-Montgomery March and prosecuting the “Mississippi Burning” murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

Scott Ellsworth (back left) and Ron Ginsburg (front right) with AAS 104 students. Photo: Sacred Overstreet-Amos



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:  
MALIKA N. PRYOR

By Rebecca Jackson, Communications Coordinator

*Malika N. Pryor (’00) is the chief learning and engagement officer at the International African American Museum (IAAM) in Charleston, South Carolina. She earned her B.A. in organizational studies and Afroamerican & African studies at U-M and a J.D. from Wayne State University Law School. A native Detroiter, Pryor’s career path includes work in entertainment law, heritage organizations, and museums. She joined us for a conversation that spans art and intellect, past and future, and the personal and universal.*

TELL ME ABOUT GROWING  
UP IN DETROIT.

As a young Black person, I was able to grow up in an environment where I had examples — good, bad, beautiful, and indifferent — of people who looked like me and were engaged in the business and work of life. In Detroit, you could see yourself in all sorts of possibilities. That was quietly powerful in a way I don’t think I fully appreciated until I walked into other spaces, including the University of Michigan, where for the first time I was immersed in an overwhelmingly white space. I attended a small, African-centered community school. That early portion of my childhood was so culturally enriching. For me, everything about being Black was beautiful, and it didn’t take away from my capacity to see or appreciate others. If anything, it was liberating because I knew who I was, so it freed me. [Detroit] was home. Not a utopia — my childhood was the apex of the crack cocaine epidemic, which ravaged families and communities. There was certainly a dichotomy. However, it was a full life. I went to the music hall and the opera theater, saw the Dance Theatre of Harlem, went to the Detroit Institute of Arts and saw Rivera Court, and had dinner in Mexicantown.

HISTORY, MUSEUMS – WAS THAT PART OF YOUR  
CHILDHOOD? IS THAT HOW YOU CAME TO IT?

The seeds, I’m sure, were being planted, but I didn’t have any consciousness of that. I really stumbled into museum work when I realized that I didn’t want to be a lawyer. I’d consulted for nonprofits, and I’d been enriched by cultural arts and community-based organizations my entire life. I realized that if I was going to thrive, then I needed

to also be making an impact. I came across a position at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, and it was the first time I’d read a job description where I thought to myself, “This role is asking me to use everything I’ve ever done in some sort of capacity, both personally and professionally.” I got the job, and the rest is history.

WHAT DAAS MEMORIES STAND OUT TO YOU?

I was one of several “good trouble”-making students at a moment where U-M would face two Affirmative Action lawsuits. There was a lot of conversation and at times demonstration. I was a member of the Students of Color Coalition (SCC), which occupied the Michigan Union tower in 2000. It could be heavy at times, being a student, striving to make change and wanting it to be fast, in contentious discourse with administrators and striving

to move things forward, expand budgets, get accessibility. But you could go into the CAAS library, and Beth [Elizabeth James] would be there, and whatever heaviness was happening on campus would fall away. It was like our own little oasis where I didn’t have to explain myself. Being able to walk into the library and have Beth — sometimes it was like air.

I have a story from the library: the late Brother Ahmad Rahman, former Black Panther [and UM-Dearborn professor], he’s talking to someone and I hear one of them say, “Pac.” I know exactly who Pac is: Tupac. Brother Ahmad says, “This is my friend, Geronimo.” It dawns on me: that’s Geronimo Pratt, former Panther. Johnnie Cochran defended him pro bono so he could be released from prison after being falsely

accused. Geronimo Pratt [was] the godfather of Tupac Shakur. No wonder he knew about Tupac! That’s what could happen at CAAS. You meet civil rights, human rights, Black Power icons at the computers.

HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ROLE AT THE IAAM?

I lead seven mission-animating teams: the center for family history (our genealogy center), our faith-based education and engagement team, curatorial collections, exhibitions, education, public history, volunteers, and community relations. These are the teams that make the museum a museum and offer multiple points of entry that allow people to better understand what they’re experiencing. My number one metric in terms of measuring my success is whether I’m putting my team in a position to make those things happen — making sure they have what they need so that they can work in a way that

is sustainable, freeing and inspiring. That is what matters most to me.

IN MUSEUM WORK, YOU DON’T NECESSARILY  
“DO” WHAT’S ON DISPLAY – YOU CURATE THE  
EXPERIENCE. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES THERE?

It’s about embracing oneself as a generalist. You need to know enough to be a little bit more than dangerous, know when you don’t know, and ask good questions. It’s like being conversationally fluent in a few different languages; that’s the nature of the work. The space where I have to be an expert is in creating infrastructure that allows people to thrive in the ways that they’re specialists. That does require having some knowledge of what they do. I think most importantly, though, one must possess a voracious appetite for learning, because the ways in which history, culture, art, and even technology are contemplated are evolving. I need to learn everything I can so I can be in service to the present. It puts me in a position to anticipate a future that someone else will inherit.

SPEAKING OF THE FUTURE, WHAT ARE YOUR  
THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF MUSEUMS?

Few institutions are held as highly in the public trust as museums. A few years ago, we had a bit of a rocky road in terms of being questioned about whether or not museums themselves should exist. As a sector, we began doing some work. Museums remain a space where folks get to learn and discover. I think that is more necessary perhaps than ever. When contemplating collecting museums, it is the collective memory of a people. We will never consciously remember everything. Museums keep what we decide as a society is important, and what we decide is important is what we remember. That is the work of museums: holding memory and being impeccably responsible with what it looks like to be inclusive, because truths exist that are equally valid simultaneously and differently. I think for first-voice institutions like the IAAM, especially in a moment where we find ourselves bearing witness to active erasure, museums like ours become all the more necessary.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE EXHIBIT/PIECE YOU  
WANT EVERYONE TO EXPERIENCE?

Can I do two? **(YES!)** Okay. The beauty of the IAAM is that it’s located in Charleston, which often is not contemplated as a diasporic or international port city, but that’s exactly what it was. So, we’re able to frame stories within an international or diasporic context. That brings me to my two favorite spaces. One is part of an exhibit titled “Arrival and Departure.” It is this all-black wall space that features the names and ages of African captives who were loaded into ships. We are able to access their names as a result of a digital slave ship database. The names themselves are designed like the ebb and flow of foam at the beach. You have this high concentration of names in one section, and then you have this disbursement of names as they’re being pulled back, figuratively, into the water. So many of the

people are children. It’s a reminder that these aggregated millions were individuals with names. Those names had meanings, told stories, were tied to clans and traditions. The youngest is two years old. I always ask when I’m facilitating a tour for folks to tell me what they see. Almost invariably, it is how young the people are.

My second [favorite] is our Gullah Geechee Gallery, which speaks to this regional culture. So much of what makes [Black] Charleston unique is the direct tie to West African lineages in the language, foodways, and cultural and spiritual practices, which also ties the Gullah Geechee to the Afro-Caribbean and Central and South America. We are connecting the literal place of Gadsden’s Wharf — which we’re located on — to this larger, more expansive story.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR STUDENTS?

Embrace your winding road. A full life is not always a standardized one, and that’s okay. If you’re at U-M, you already know how to think, but you’re learning how to criticize, consider, and engage with your own thoughts and those of others. It’s okay to change your mind — or not. That doesn’t mean it isn’t important to take good advice, but use the filter of your gut and your heart to discern what needs to be true for you. Sometimes folks will want to project their truth onto your reality, and it’s not necessarily true for you. It’s okay to walk in your truth, even if it is an unpopular one. The winding road is interesting.

QUICK Q&A

TOP CHARLESTON RECOMMENDATIONS? OTHER  
THAN THE MUSEUM, OF COURSE.

Visit the Avery Institute. Eat at Ma Daisy’s in Bluffton: delicious, Gullah Geechee-owned. Visit Mitchellville in Hilton Head, the first settlement of newly emancipated African people (1862). It was the model for what freedmen communities would have looked like before Reconstruction even began and the Civil War was still waging.

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

I have committed myself to writing a biography of my great-grandfather. There is a book that structurally is really inspiring to me, so I’m revisiting it: *The Black Count* by Tom Reiss. It’s a really well-written story of the General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas (the author’s dad), who was the inspiration for ostensibly every book [his son] wrote. As it turns out, D’Artagnan is Black.

...WATCHING?

Not much, but when I am, probably *Abbott Elementary*.

... LISTENING TO?

I’ve been on a Cleo Sol and Olivia Dean kick lately. I like both of their music a lot. And I’ve been revisiting siR.

Photo: Courtesy of Malika Pryor

ALUMNI UPDATES



**STEPHANIE J. ROWLEY (1992)** is dean of the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia. Previously, she was a psychology professor at U-M for nearly 20 years.

**SHERISE STEELE (2005)** is a financial advisor and mother of two.

**DANIELLE BUSBY (2010)** is an associate professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University School of Medicine and co-founder of Black Wellness Corp.

**LAUREN SEALE (2012)** is a board-certified dermatologist in mid-Michigan, specializing in skin of color and hair disorders.

**OLIVIA VIGILETTI (2013)** is an attorney and clinical fellow with the Michigan Innocence Clinic at Michigan Law.

**PHYLLIS GAYDEN-ROBINSON (2002)** is practicing law and running her own law office.

**MARK GREER II (2013)** earned an MBA from Wayne State University and works as a philanthropic advisor. He is married to **JAMEJA JOHNSON GREER (2013)**.

**JONATHAN ROBERTS (2014)** is a pediatric anesthesiologist at U-M's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital and a clinical instructor in the Medical School.

**BRIE STARKS (2016)** is an attorney and social worker.

**BRITTNEY WILLIAMS (2016)** earned an MSW from U-M and is directing the social work division at the Washtenaw County Public Defender's Office while working toward a Ph.D. at Wayne State.

**TATIANA M.F. CRUZ (GRAD. CERT. 2017)** is a tenured professor and chair of the Department of Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Simmons University, where she has revitalized the Africana Studies program.

**JULIE BUSER (GRAD. CERT. 2018)** is a senior research area specialist at U-M's Center for International Reproductive Health Training, focused on several sub-Saharan African countries.

**OMOLARA MINO (2015)** is teaching 12th-grade fine arts through an Afrocentric lens and published a book titled *A Black Children's Story*.

**ASHLEY HAYER (2021)** is a Ph.D. candidate in African American and African Diaspora studies at Indiana University Bloomington.



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Elizabeth James

DAAS@55

Reflections on the Department's 55th Anniversary

By Elizabeth James, Program Associate

**1970:** a year to remember. The first Earth Day is observed. PBS begins broadcasting. The Environmental Protection Agency is created. Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix die. The Kent State and Jackson State shootings occur during student protests. Concorde makes its first Mach 2 flight. *American Bandstand* introduces a new act: the Jackson 5. An estimated 100,000 people in Washington, D.C., demonstrate against the Vietnam War. The Aswan High Dam, across the Nile, is completed in Egypt. Scientists synthesize the first artificial gene. Cyclone Bhola, the deadliest tropical cyclone ever recorded, kills approximately 500,000 people in present-day Bangladesh. The first march of the Gay Liberation Front takes place in London. The North Tower of New York City's World Trade Center is topped out. President Richard Nixon signs the Occupational Safety and Health Act into law. And the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan is established.

Forged in the fire of the first Black Action Movement at U-M, the Center emerged during a transformative time in American history. Across the nation, Black studies programs were being established as a result of the civil rights and Black Power movements. Student-led strikes arose, demanding a curriculum of Black-centered courses on predominantly white campuses to counter existing academic structures. The Center flourished as an interdisciplinary program of research, instruction, and community outreach. In 2011, we became a department with the ability to grant tenure independently. The three-pronged approach of teaching, research, and community engagement, as well as a commitment to encompassing the entire African diaspora, gives DAAS a unique distinction among other Black studies programs.

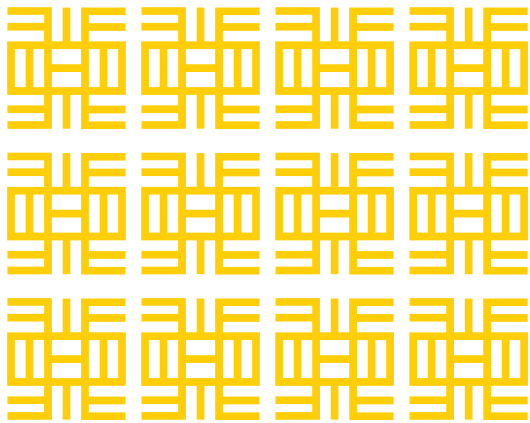
While the unit's location has changed five times over the years, it has remained an important part of ensuring that our community members feel valued, respected, and included, regardless of their background or identity.

The theme for our 55th year was "Resilience and Radiance." Our students, faculty, and staff exemplify that radiance. DAAS' mission is its North Star, guiding our commitment to reflecting on and helping define emerging directions in the study and representation of the cultures, experiences, and societies of Africans and people of African descent. DAAS occupies a place in the firmament of university units that aim to welcome all those who seek a multidisciplinary approach to inclusive education. DAAS has always sought to build connections and nurture the souls of those who are part of our community.

DAAS' students are our greatest asset. Whether they enroll in one course, choose to major or minor, or pursue graduate-level courses and certificate programs, you need only look at the contributions they have made — locally, nationally, or across the globe — to witness their brilliance. We seek to train not only informed and productive citizens but also the next generation of scholars in these fields. An example of this is our study-abroad programs, which have long played a pivotal role in providing students — both undergraduate and graduate — with unique and valuable opportunities for intercultural exchange and experiential learning.

DAAS is like the mighty sequoia tree, whose branches reach up to the sun and whose roots connect beneath the surface. In its presence, it is difficult not to think of resilience. These trees can survive challenges and disasters that would destroy almost anything else, despite having relatively short roots for their height. However, sequoias don't survive alone; their root systems spread and interweave with one another. Some people try to build resilience by building themselves up; they hoard resources, construct boundaries, or attempt to do it alone. But the most resilient systems in nature are interconnected. DAAS' relationships and respect for our past, present, and future are our greatest strength.

Photo: Leisa Thompson, Michigan Photography



# ENCOUNTERING GLOBAL BLACKNESS

## Global Course Connections-Brazil

By Ava McKenzie, Editorial Assistant

Many U-M students encounter the concept of the African diaspora in the classroom. But for those who participate in the Global Course Connections Global Blackness Program in Brazil, learning extends far beyond campus. Led by **Frieda Ekotto** (the Lorna Goodison Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies, Comparative Literature, and Francophone Studies), GCC Brazil invites students to explore the complexities of Afro-Brazilian life and the meaning of “global Blackness.” Students take what they study during winter term and apply it during a three-week field experience in Brazil in May, engaging directly with the communities, histories, and cultures that shape the global Black diaspora.

“The GCC Brazil program is intellectually serious, culturally immersive, ethically grounded, and transformative,” Ekotto said. “It does not simply expand students’ geographic horizons; it expands their intellectual and moral imaginations.”

For Ekotto, the expansive potential of travel is personal. Having grown up in Switzerland and studied and worked across multiple continents, she understands how international experiences shape lives.

“As someone who first came to the U.S. as an international student, I know how transformative global education can be,” Ekotto said. “These experiences changed me: London, Paris, Dakar, Ghana, and now São Paulo. I love to support those students; that’s my calling.”

A central focus of GCC Brazil is how the histories of slavery and colonization across Latin America created a collective memory of endurance and resistance linking people of African descent around the globe. Students witness that lived reality in São Paulo, a city that reflects the cultural, political, and social spirit of Brazil. Their experiential learning takes many forms: lectures at the State University of Campinas and visits to museums, cultural centers, and neighborhoods that reflect the country’s layered social and political histories.

“We saw the preservation of culture, the matriarchal power in African traditions passed on, and a reverence for Africa in their heritage,” program participant **Jerianne Clarke** (’26) said. “I left with reverence and gratitude for the experience. No matter how far we are in distance, we are still one collective people.”

One program highlight is a visit to a **quilombo**, one of many settlements in Brazil founded by Africans and African-descended peoples who escaped enslavement and built independent communities. GCC Brazil students learn from the residents about their community traditions and daily life. For Ekotto, these moments of encounter are central to the program’s mission.

“Students do not simply observe; they participate,” she



Photo courtesy of Frieda Ekotto

said. “They meet artists and activists, engage with scholars and community leaders, and witness firsthand the ongoing conversations around race, inequality, democracy, climate, and memory. Brazil becomes a site where theory meets lived reality.”

In Brazil, home to one of the largest populations of people of African descent in the world, students often realize the concepts of race, diaspora, and history are far more complex than they initially imagined.

“Through this immersion, students can see themselves as part of a much larger diasporic community,” said Ekotto. “They move beyond focusing on their own experiences and start recognizing the shared struggles, resilience, and cultural continuity across Black people worldwide. It transforms the way they look at themselves and other Black people.”

Ekotto hopes that participants leave Brazil not only with memories of travel but with a new way of seeing the world.

“My dream is that students will look back five or 10 years later and recognize the GCC Brazil program as a turning point,” she said. “If the program succeeds, it will not simply broaden their horizons; it will reshape how they inhabit the world as global citizens.”

For more information about GCC Brazil and related programs, visit [mcompass.umich.edu](https://mcompass.umich.edu).



Frieda Ekotto

### PROF. EKOTTO RECOMMENDS

#### BOOKS

***Race in Another America*** (Edward E. Telles), a powerful sociological comparison of race in Brazil and the U.S.

***The Black Atlantic*** (Paul Gilroy), essential reading on transnational Black modernity and circulation across the Atlantic world

#### FILMS

***Cidade de Deus*** (dirs. Meirelles/Lund), essential for discussing race, poverty, and representation

***Atlantics*** (dir. Mati Diop), a haunting love story about growth, loss, grief, and acceptance



Photos: Dianna Oatridge, Michigan Photography



## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2026!

### MAJORS

Miles Abusabib  
Madysen Casey  
Jerianne Clarke  
Dennis Morrison  
Jordan Williams

### MINORS

Rayna Carreathers  
Liliana Coker-Rodriguez  
Simone Conley  
Ellie Crespo  
Trinity Franklin

Holden Hughes  
Aniyah League  
Shakirah Lieffers  
Madison Ramsey  
Audrey Roche  
Fatima Zaidan

Commencement 2026 was a memorable one! Our traditions remained: Graduates processed into the auditorium to “Celebration” by Kool & the Gang and selected sashes (**aso oke**) from Ibadan, Nigeria, as they received their diplomas. The Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences children’s choir stole the show, and our post-graduation luncheon felt like a family meal.

There were new features, too. “Words to describe DAAS,” submitted by members of our community, were read aloud during the ceremony, and a photo booth entertained graduates and guests. We were especially proud to present the following students with our annual departmental awards:

**Josievet Moss Student Award**, recognizing a senior who contributes significantly to DAAS’ educational and community-building mission: **Madison Ramsey**.

**Josievet Moss Rising Star Award**, recognizing a student in a DAAS first-year seminar program who exemplifies the spirit of Black studies scholar-activism: **Ka’Marion Blocker**.

**Wangari Maathai Essay Competition Prize**, awarded for the best original essay on any topic in African American, Caribbean, or African studies: **Holden Hughes**.

**Dr. Jonathan I. Kidd Senior Prize**, awarded to a senior DAAS major or minor whose project, capstone, or thesis involves serious engagement with a significant intellectual, social, political, or practical problem related to the African diaspora and DAAS’ educational mission: **Jerianne Clarke**. *Congratulations to the class of 2026!*



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# 2026-2027 DAAS EVENTS SAVE THE DATES!



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MONTHLY FACULTY FORUMS



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