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Xavier University of Louisiana’s African American & Diaspora Studies Program and Performance Studies Lab Present “Black Tea Rhapsody: An Homage to African American Tea Culture” Exhibit

New Orleans, La – Part of the culture of Xavier University of Louisiana is highlighting the traditions and history of the diverse foundations on which the college was founded. Focusing on a certain aspect of Black culture, the university’s African American and Diaspora Studies (AADS) Program, in conjunction with its Performance Studies Lab (PSL) and in partnership with Alternative Education Research Institute present “Black Tea Rhapsody: An Homage to African American Tea Culture.” The exhibit will open with a panel discussion on July 3, 2023, at 5 p.m. in the Qatar Pharmacy Pavilion Atrium on Xavier University of Louisiana’s campus.

“Black Tea Rhapsody: An Homage to African American Tea Culture” will be a week-long installation celebrating the history and practices of tea cultivation and consumption in the Black community. It is the culmination of a multi-year research project by Dr. Rolanda JW Spencer, a lecturer in Xavier’s AADS Program. By enlisting scholarly texts, oral interviews, and artwork, Dr. Spencer was able to explore themes related to African American tea culture and its aesthetic.

“We are thrilled to bring ‘Black Tea Rhapsody’ to the campus and larger community,” said Dr. Spencer. “The event will provide a platform for insightful discussions and artistic expressions that highlight the cultural significance of African American tea culture and its impact on community wellness.”

Emphasizing enjoyment, community, and wellness, “Black Tea Rhapsody” follows an earlier installation, “Imagining Grace,” curated by Xavier faculty Dr. Robin G. Vander, Ron Bechet, and MaPó Kinnaord in Spring 2022. That month-long installation centered around embodied practices promoting wellness after the recent years of challenges to health, safety, and ability to congregate. Being the only Catholic HBCU in the country and approaching its historic centennial, the rich traditions of Xavier and its communities should be studied and celebrated. “Black Tea Rhapsody” seeks to follow the “Imagining Grace” installation with specific cultural inspection and curation of its own.

“Black Tea Rhapsody” will open with a panel discussion and tea ritual. The discussion will feature a diverse group of esteemed panelists, comprised of doctors and professionals from across the country who can share their expertise, who will share their unique perspectives on various aspects of African American tea culture. Participants include Dr. Dana Nettles, pharmacist and founder of Dr. Nettles Natural Beauty; Kim Johnson, director of Georgettes Tea Room House; Roy Handy, a designer, photographer, and hip-hop artist; Rev. A. Todd Jackson, senior pastor and founder of House of Purpose Spiritual Center; Derrick Fleming, managing director of strategic engagement for Chicago Scholars; LaTonia Cokely, owner of Adjournal Tea Room; and Chantrelle Edwards, founder and owner of HellaTea.

The AADS Program at Xavier University is an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary program that explores the experiences, ideas, and interactions of people of African descent within the political, economic, and cultural history of the United States and on a transnational and global level. Likewise, as the only performance studies program at an HBCU in the country, Xavier’s PSL is a humanities-based interdisciplinary academic program that views performance as an object to be studied, a creative method of scholarly inquiry and representation, and a tool for community engagement. Together, the two programs, along with the Alternative Education Research Institute, have worked to bring to life this art installation that focuses on an aspect of Black culture and the performance of it.

For more information about “Black Tea Rhapsody: An Homage to African American Tea Culture,” visit www.blackteatheexhibit.info. The event is free and open to all. Through the art exhibition and panel discussion, attendees will better understand the rich heritage of African American tea culture, its enduring legacy, and its role in promoting community wellness. Other events at Xavier can be found at www.xula.edu.



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About Xavier University of Louisiana

Xavier University of Louisiana, America’s only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate

from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier's College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.

Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African American and Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master's programs, have provided Xavier students (3,419 students) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.xula.edu or contact Regi Reyes at (504) 520-5240 or rreyes@xula.edu.