

You are invited to a second Day of Discussion on  
**Extreme Weather and Inequality**



A man walks down his street after Hurricane Harvey in Port Arthur, Texas, Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017. AP Photo/David Goldman

**What do Southeast Texans think?  
And what do we do?**  
Beaumont—Port Arthur—Jefferson County

**Saturday, October 28, 2023**

Mary and John Gray Library, 8th floor, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas

Organized by the Ancient to the Future Project and hosted by the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Criminal Justice



Wifi name is LUEvents, there is no password



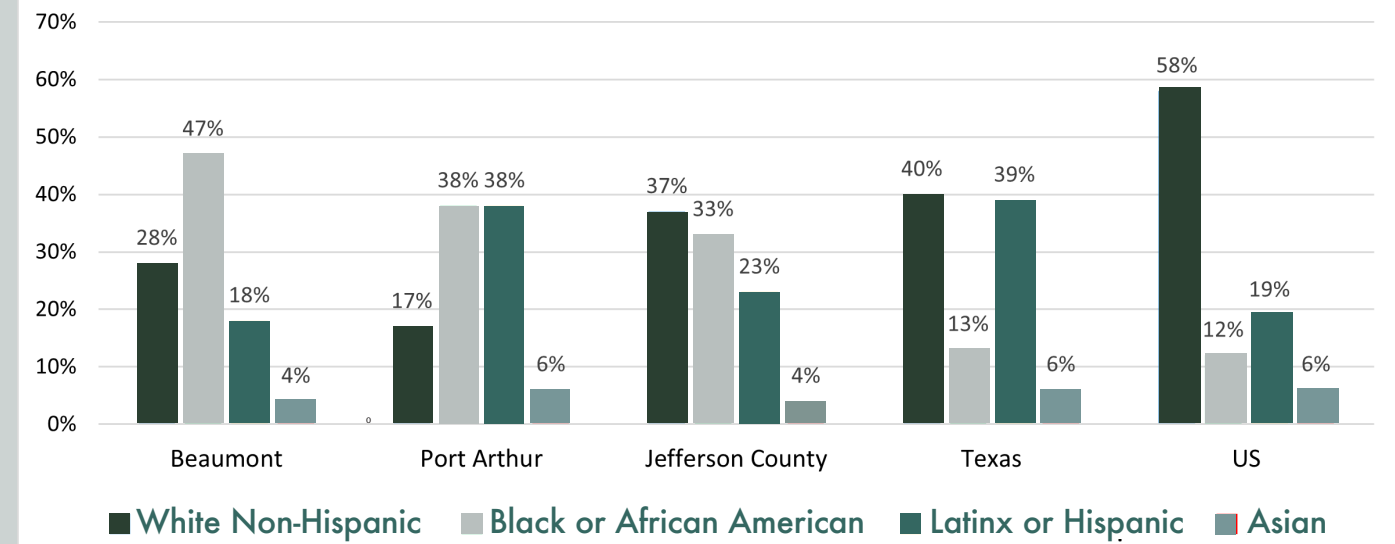
A man believed to be Atakapa, in winter. Painted in 1735 by Alexandre de Batz. Image courtesy of Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

We endorse the land acknowledgement below from the Lamar University Center for History and Culture. And we keep in mind is that it was Mirabeau Lamar—politician, poet, slaveholder, and remover of Native Americans—who observed: “The cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy.”

“Lamar University is located on the traditional territory of the Atakapa-Ishak Nation, and we recognize that the region our university serves includes the homelands of the Akokisa, Bidai, Karankawa, Alabama-Coushatta, and other nations. We further acknowledge that, as president of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar, the namesake of our university, oversaw the forced removal of Caddo, Cherokee, Comanche, Delaware, Kickapoo, Shawnee, and other peoples from their homes. We affirm and respect tribal sovereignty in this land and in all territories.”

## Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Jefferson County By the numbers\*

Who are we? These population numbers are a foundation for thinking about the local area.



	Beaumont	Port Arthur	Jefferson County	Texas	US
Population	115,000	56,000	257,000	30 million	331 million
Median household income**	\$48,168	\$37,794	\$50,840	\$63,826	\$70,784
People in poverty	19%	27%	18%	14%	12%

\*U.S. Census 2020.

\*\* Half of households are below this number and half above.

# Schedule

## 9:00-9:25 Welcome

- Katie Hoerth, poet, editor-in-chief at LU Literary Press and Lamar University associate professor of English
- Jaime Taylor, Lamar University President
- Roy West, Beaumont Mayor
- Ginger Gummelt, Lamar University associate professor and chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice
- Judy Linsley, former director, Lamar University Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast
- Kate Williams, chair

## 9:25-10:40 Business, science, social science

- Andy Bowman, businessman, lawyer, and author
- Chanelle Stigger, lead meteorologist, National Weather Service Lake Charles Office
- Stuart A. Wright, Lamar University professor of sociology
- Kate Williams, chair

## 10:40-10:55 Break

## 10:55-12:10 Local institutions

- Ronald Parker, David Gorsich, and Kristy McCarty, ExxonMobil
- Jeff Darby, president, Sabine Area Central Labor Council
- Airon Reynolds, Jr., senior pastor at Borden Chapel Baptist Church, Beaumont
- Dave Williams, chair

## 12:10-12:45 Lunch

## 12:45-2:00 Research, infrastructure, teaching

- Chung-Fang Chang, Lamar University associate professor of sociology
- Wallace "Butch" Wilson, chief engineer, Drainage District 6
- Wiley Johnson, principal, Beaumont United High School
- Mark Porterie, superintendent, Port Arthur Independent School District
- Abdul Alkalimat, chair

## 2:00-2:15 Break

## 2:15-3:30 The rising generation

- Jesse Garcia, Lamar University assistant professor of sociology
- Katie Hoerth, poet, editor-in-chief at LU Literary Press and Lamar University associate professor of English
- Justin Cooper, IBEW Local Union 479 Business Manager
- High school student winners of the \$5,000 Extreme Weather and Inequality Writing Prize
- Chanelle Stigger, chair

9:00-9:25

# Welcome

**Katie Hoerth** poet, editor-in-chief at LU Literary Press and Lamar University associate professor of English

**Jaime Taylor** Lamar University President

**Roy West** Mayor of Beaumont

**Ginger Gummelt** Lamar University assistant professor and chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice

**Judy Linsley** former director, Lamar University Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast

Welcome to this Day of Discussion on Extreme Weather and Inequality!

Beaumont and Port Arthur are majority Black-and-Brown cities with high levels of inequality. The same pattern holds across Jefferson County. It's a global petrochemical hub with attendant environmental impacts. It's got a strong culture and identity. And it's facing heavy storms and too much water.

The Ancient to the Future project works to combine and amplify local voices. The Lamar University Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice works on understanding and teaching about the wellbeing of human communities, often focussing on many aspects of inequality. We think the speakers today will make new connections and generate new ideas to address both inequality and extreme weather.

So please listen, speak up, and learn!

9:25-10:40

# Business, science, social science

**Andy Bowman** businessman, lawyer, and author of  
*The West Texas Power Plant That Saved the World*

**Chanelle Stigger** lead meteorologist, National Weather Service Lake Charles Office

**Stuart A. Wright** Lamar University professor of sociology

**Kate Williams** Ancient to the Future Project (chair)

This day is designed to help our community think about and prepare to deal with the linked issues of extreme weather and inequality. Plus, especially as a petroleum processing county, we need to know about new energy sources and businesses.

1. What is extreme weather, here and elsewhere? Have we seen the worst of it?
2. What is inequality, here and elsewhere? Have we seen the worst of it?
3. What do new energy sources offer and how could that impact our county?

10:55-12:10

# Local institutions

**Ronald Parker** Business Team lead for Oil Movements  
**David M. Gorsich** Safety, Security, Health and Environmental Manager  
**Kristy McCarty** Global Business Development Advisor for Low Emissions Fuels  
ExxonMobil

**Jeff Darby** president, Sabine Area Central Labor Council

**Airon Reynolds, Jr.** senior pastor at Borden Chapel Baptist Church, Beaumont

**Dave Williams** Ancient to the Future Project (chair)

Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Jefferson County are longtime home to the largest refineries in the country. The workforce is more unionized than many places. And the population is majority African American and Latinx and becoming more so. All these constituencies have to be in the discussion for a safe and secure future for everyone.

1. What is the relationship between the refineries and extreme weather and inequality?
2. What is the relationship between the trade unions and extreme weather and inequality?
3. How does the Black community experience extreme weather and inequality?
4. How can all three parties work together to deal with extreme weather and inequality?

12:45-2:00

# Research, infrastructure, teaching

**Chiung-Fang Chang** Lamar University associate professor of sociology

**Wallace "Butch" Wilson** chief engineer, Drainage District 6

**Wiley Johnson** principal, Beaumont United High School

**Mark Porterie** superintendent, Port Arthur Independent School District

**Abdul Alkalimat** Ancient to the Future Project (chair)

The future depends on facing people's health issues and the risks they experience day by day. The future includes understanding how the county manages and plans for the flooding that comes with rain and storms. And young people: What we say and do with them with respect to extreme weather and inequality, and what they say and do, is the future.

1. What do we know about the environmental health crisis of living in Jefferson County? Why is it happening?
2. Is it possible to control water risk and damage in the coming extreme weather? Is it the same for all neighborhoods?
3. How are K-12 educational institutions preparing the youth to understand and deal with extreme weather and inequality?

2:15-3:30

# The rising generation

**Jesse Garcia** Lamar University assistant professor of sociology

**Katie Hoerth** poet, editor-in-chief at LU Literary Press and Lamar University associate professor of English

**Justin Cooper** IBEW Local Union 479 Business Manager

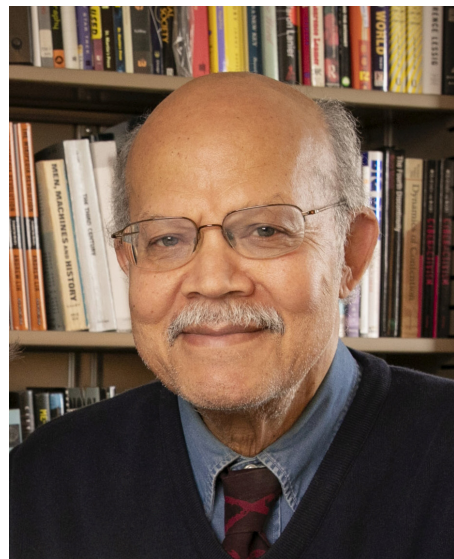
**High school student winners** of the \$5,000 Extreme Weather and Inequality Writing Prize

**Chanelle Stigger** lead meteorologist, National Weather Service Lake Charles Office (chair)

Now we get a first indication of how youth in Beaumont see extreme weather and inequality. A juried competition is awarding \$5,000 to the best writing from each large public high school in Jefferson County. This session announces and hears from the winning writers. They will get a \$1,000 check today and later \$4,000 for college or post-high-school training program. Additional writers will see their words published.

1. How have these young people, their families, friends and neighbors lived through extreme weather and inequality?
2. What do they think should be done?
3. Let's celebrate them all, and those who got them here!

# Panelists and Chairs



**Abdul Alkalimat** is Emeritus Professor of African American Studies and Information Science at the University of Illinois. His background reflects decades of work in the social justice movement in civil rights, electoral politics, and global struggles to end colonialism. He wrote the first textbook in the academic field of African American Studies that is now on display at the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. His recent books are *The History of Black Studies* (2021) and *The Future of Black Studies* (2022). He is an active part of the Ancient to the Future Project.

**Andy Bowman**, Chief Executive Officer of Jupiter Power LLC, has been a serial clean energy entrepreneur since the late 1990s. Over his 25 year career in renewables he has had executive responsibility for more than 3,600MW of wind and solar projects and 1,400 MWh of

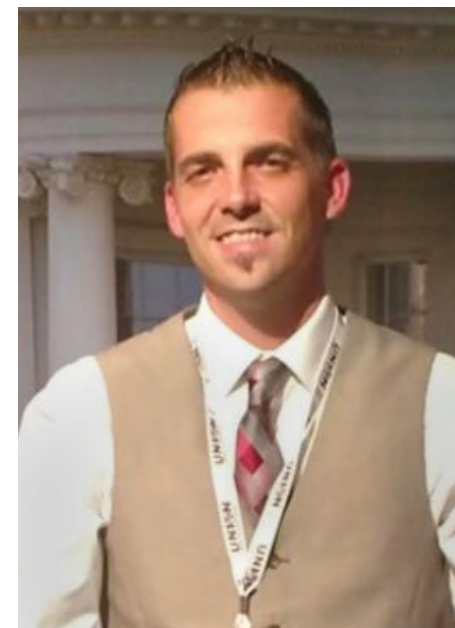
energy storage projects now operating or in construction. Bowman is currently CEO and founder of Jupiter Power LLC, a pioneering energy storage company with 11GW currently in development. Prior to Jupiter, Bowman was CEO and founder of Pioneer Green Energy (2009-15), Chief Development Officer at E.On Climate & Renewables (2007-2009), SVP Development at Airtricity (2004-2007),



and CEO and founder of Renewable Generation Inc. (2001-2004). He is author of *The West Texas Power Plant That Saved the World*, the updated second edition of which is being published in November.

**Dr. Chiung-Fang Chang** is an accomplished sociologist, currently serving as an Associate Professor of Sociology at Lamar University. Holding a doctoral degree from Texas A&M University, she has made significant contributions to various fields, including social demography,

family studies, Chinese studies, and race/ethnic relations, with a prolific publication record. Dr. Chang's commitment extends beyond academia, as she has pioneered community-driven initiatives like the Recovery and Resilience Academy (RRA). This initiative addresses health and social support disparities among vulnerable populations in Jefferson County. Her recent focus on mental health, particularly for mothers and children, and her dedication to enhancing public health data systems and addressing community concerns are exemplified through her role as Co-Principal Investigator for the project titled "Community-driven Geospatial Approach to Improving Public Health Data Systems in Beaumont-Port Arthur, Texas," funded by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Dr. Chang's work reflects her unwavering dedication to advancing knowledge and improving community well-being.



IBEW Local Union 479 Business Manager **Justin Cooper** has held every kind of job with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, AFL-CIO in Beaumont, Texas over the last several years. He joined the apprenticeship program in 2006, a few years after quitting high school. Academia was not for him. Cooper became a journeyman electrician in 2011 at the end of the five-year apprenticeship program, graduating with no student debt (the entire five-year program today costs around \$3,000 total). After working as an electrician on residential, commercial, and industrial projects for a number of years, he volunteered to become a field organizer in 2017. He was elected President in 2018 and Business Manager in 2023. So today he is the chief executive officer of a local labor union with 1,100 members, 11 officers, five employees, and a large amount of pension funds. Not bad for a guy with a GED.

**Jeff Darby** worked as a Wage and Hour Investigator from 1989 until 2023, or 33 years and 4 months. For 25 of those years, Darby was an elected union officer for employees of the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) locally, regionally, and nationally, and for union members in Texas and Southeast Texas; he thinks he won 41 elections and lost one. People asked him why those who enforced Federal labor law needed a union. His answer was invariably, "Do you always trust the Federal government to do the right thing?"



After sort-of retiring January 27, Darby resigned from the two union offices in which he represented DOL employees but remains President of the Sabine Area Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO (the AFL-CIO in eight counties of Southeast Texas) and Vice President for District 2 of the Texas AFL-CIO (the District covers 18 counties in Southeast and East Central Texas); he will not run for reelection in either. He wishes all politicians would know when to quit. He started JP Darby Services, LLC around the first of 2023 and began operations the week following

his retirement. JP Darby Services, LLC offers mediation and consulting services. Clients include individuals, labor unions, and attorneys. He will also do a wide variety of jobs including translation of documents written in French and Spanish, researching your family tree, or requesting documents under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or the Texas Public Information Act. JP Darby Services, LLC filed a pro se lawsuit in U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas in September because DOL ignored a FOIA request made in May. DOL must have forgotten that Darby won countless arbitration cases against them for 20 years. Jeff met his wife Christy in October 1987 at Lamar University and they have been married close to 35 years. She has taught mathematics for over 20 years, now at Nederland High School. All eight adult members of their family have earned ten degrees at Lamar.



**Dr. Jesus (Jesse) Garcia** is a faculty member of the department of Sociology, Social Work, Criminal Justice and Anthropology department at Lamar. He is a 2011

graduate of Texas A&M with specializations in the study of Race/Ethnic Relations, Sociological Theory, and Cultural Studies. Research publications have investigated cross-border crimes and integration along the South Texas/Mexico border, the history of immigration, Mexican American/Latino sociology, health and elderly populations, modernity, and sociological theory.



**David Gorsich** is the Beaumont Area Safety, Security, Health and Environmental (SSH&E) Manager for ExxonMobil Beaumont Manufacturing Facilities. David is responsible for providing and overseeing SSH&E functional support for the Beaumont Manufacturing Complex and the Beaumont Polyethylene Plant. David holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science from Lamar University, and joined ExxonMobil in 2007 as an experienced hire with prior experience from the Lower Neches Valley Authority (LNVA) and the Huntsman Petrochemical Corporation's Performance Products facility in Port Neches, TX (now

owned by Indorama). Upon joining ExxonMobil, David held several positions in the Environmental Department,



transitioning to and holding several leadership positions in the Beaumont Area SSH&E organization, most recently the area SSH&E Manager for Beaumont Facilities. David is a proud Native of Beaumont, and a third generation Beaumont Complex employee. His parents and grandparents made their way to Beaumont, TX from the mid-West. His Grandfather relocated from a Mobil Oil Lubes facility in East Saint Louis, IL to the Beaumont Refinery as a Coker Operator, and retired from Mobil Oil in 1978. David's Father retired as a Light Ends Console Supervisor from ExxonMobil in 2008. David married his High School sweetheart after graduating from Lamar University and is the proud father of two boys. Whether backpacking in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in New Mexico with his boys, or Scuba Diving the warm Caribbean with his family and friends, David enjoys spending his free time in the outdoors.

**Dr. Ginger Gummelt** is the Chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Work, Criminal Justice, & Anthropology at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She is an Associate Professor and has more than twenty years of clinical experience working at-risk populations. She is a current member of the Executive Team for the Center for Resiliency at Lamar University, Past President for the Board of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Southeast Texas, a board member for Recovery Council of Southeast Texas, member of the ExxonMobil Community Advisory Panel, and member of the Lamar University Community Relations Advisory Council. She also serves as lead researcher for the National Campaign to Stop Violence's local initiative of Do the Write Thing. Dr. Gummelt's current research focuses on vulnerabilities and resiliency among vulnerable populations.

**Katherine Hoerth** is the author of five poetry collections. Her work has appeared in *Literary*



*Imagination* (Oxford University Press), *Valparaiso Review*, and *Southwestern American Literature*. She is an associate professor at Lamar University and director of Lamar University Press. Her book, *Pandora's Prairie*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press in 2025.



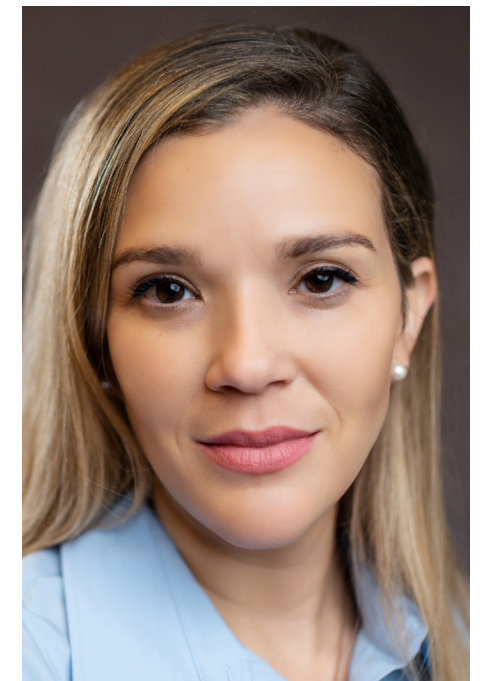
**Dr. Wiley L. Johnson, III**, earned a Doctorate Degree in Professional Leadership with an emphasis on Special Populations from the University of Houston. He acquired a Master's Degree from Prairie View A&M University. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Houston. He is a graduate of the legendary Phillis Wheatley High School in Houston, Texas. Dr. Johnson holds professional educator certifications in School Leadership, Mid-Management Administrator (PK-12), Special Education (EC - 12), and Elementary Self-Contained (PK-6). Dr. Johnson has been a professional educator for over 30 years. He has served as a teacher, assistant principal, elementary

school principal, middle school principal, and a high school principal in various schools throughout Southeast Texas. Dr. Johnson has experience working as a Field Supervisor for a local university in preparing aspiring principals within their practicum course. Dr. Johnson is a dedicated lifelong long learner who has a proven track record of success at all levels. He has received numerous awards. He has been honored as a Region 4 Principal of the Year, a Wheatley Feeder Pattern Secondary Principal of the Year, and as an Assistant Principal of the Year. Dr. Johnson feels privileged and humbled to work collaboratively with students, staff, parents, alumni, and the school community as the current Principal of Beaumont United High School.



**Historian Judith W. Linsley** has deep roots in Southeast Texas. She was formerly Curator of Interpretation and Education at the McFaddin-Ward House Museum and Director of the Center for History and Culture at Lamar

University. She has authored or co-authored numerous historical works, including the prize-winning *Giant Under the Hill: A History of the Spindletop Oil Discovery* and *Charlton-Pollard: The Story of a Neighborhood*, a history of Beaumont's oldest African American neighborhood. Her interests are in 19th- and early 20th-century Texas history, focusing on African Americans and women. She and her sister Ellen Rienstra have recently completed a Centennial history of Lamar University.



**Kristy McCarty** is Global Business Development Advisor for Low Emissions Fuels for ExxonMobil Product Solutions Company. Kristy is responsible for helping to develop business opportunities that help ExxonMobil manufacture and supply finished biofuels to the global market, which offer lower emissions solutions for hard-to-decarbonize sectors. Kristy holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from

Lamar University, and joined ExxonMobil in 2007. Upon joining ExxonMobil, Kristy held several positions in the Technical and Environmental Departments, transitioning to and holding leadership positions at the ExxonMobil Beaumont Refinery. Since 2022, Kristy has worked at the ExxonMobil Houston Campus for her current role. Kristy is a proud native of Beaumont and vocal advocate of Lamar University. Kristy serves on the Lamar University Chemical Engineering Advisory Council and still actively works to recruit engineers from Lamar University. She also remains active in promoting many inclusion and diversity initiatives through her involvement with Society of Women Engineers and through ExxonMobil's Black Employee Success Team organization. Kristy has been married to her husband Robert McCarty (of Beaumont) since 2001 and together they have two sons. They love spending time with their boys, the rest of their friends and family, and their dogs.

**Ronald A. Parker** is Beaumont Refinery Business Team Lead for the Oil Movements organization within ExxonMobil. Ronald is responsible for providing and overseeing the procuring and distribution of the Raw crude feed into the Refinery, as well as the feed distribution of the crude by products to it's respective unit. Also, Ronald oversees the blending and shipping of all the Refinery gasoline, jet, diesel, lubes, and other motor vehicle

gasoline components to buyers world wide. Ronald holds an Associates Degree from Lamar University Institute of Technology, and joined ExxonMobil in 2000. Upon joining ExxonMobil, Mr. Parker has held several positions in the Process Organization stemming from Lubes Plant, Power Plants, Water Treatment, Emergency Response, Shift Team Supervisor, Console Supervision, Hydrocarbon Controls Practice / Foreign Trade Zone, Mechanical Coordination, Process Unit Lead, and most recently the Business Team Lead for the Oil Movements Department. Ronald is a proud Native of Beaumont, and a second generation ExxonMobil employee. His parents and grandparents are from Beaumont, TX as well. Ronald's Father retired as the Hydrocarbon Controls Coordinator for ExxonMobil pipeline in 2015. Ronald is married and is the proud father of two amazing kids Billy & Avery. Ronald enjoys spending



his free time exercising, cooking, traveling, and with his family.



**Dr. Mark Porterie** currently serves as Superintendent of Port Arthur's Public Schools. Prior to being selected to serve as superintendent, he served as Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Assistant to the Superintendent, Principal and Teacher. Dr. Porterie has over 30 years of dedicated service toward instructional practices. He holds the distinction of being the first superintendent in PAISD's history to be named Region 5 Superintendent of the Year, named in 2018 from among a pool of leaders from 35 school districts in Southeast Texas. Dr. Porterie was also one of five finalists for Superintendent of the Year for the State of Texas. Since assuming the role of our local school district's top educator, Dr. Porterie has overseen the passage of a \$195 million dollar bond, which allowed the construction of several new schools, and the renovation of other campuses. A notable

decision after assessing the school buildings was to rebuild some of the schools instead of renovating them. This decision ultimately enhanced our entire community. Additionally, Dr. Porterie's leadership in the decision to purchase and rebuild a significantly sized property on Ninth Ave. and Hwy 73 in order to relocate the maintenance, custodial, receiving, printing, and technology departments will again be an asset to the entire community. Dr. Porterie has led and worked with school and community leaders to create a five-year strategic plan for the district. Dr. Porterie has led the district through 2017's major hurricane, Harvey, ice storms and the COVID-19 pandemic. The district has earned an unmodified opinion from Whitney Penn Audit, Assurance, Tax and Consulting Services during the district's most recent financial audit, which means the district's fund balance remains healthy and PAISD has a strong financial foundation that is a crucial component in educating the children of Port Arthur's public schools. Dr. Porterie serves on a number of boards in several organizations. He and his wife are the proud parents of one young adult daughter who became a proud graduate of PAISD's Memorial High School during her father's tenure as Superintendent.

**Reverend Dr. Airon Reynolds, Jr.** serves as a unique herald for the Word of God and is anointed to preach God's Word to all generations. This faithful man of God is leaving a spiritual mark in the name of Jesus the Christ that can not be deleted. Dr. Reynolds has a passion to teach people how to fulfill their God-



ordained purpose and walk in the destiny God has designed for them. With his God given powerful uncompromising conveyance, Dr. Reynolds fervently elucidates the word of God. Throughout Dr. Reynolds' life and ministry, God continues to show Himself as the Lord of all and demonstrates to and through him that there is nothing too hard for God to do. In Port Arthur, Texas the evidence of God's hand upon his life was witnessed by his parents, the late Annie B. Reynolds and the late Airon Reynolds, Sr. He is married to First Lady Edna M. Reynolds; he is the father of three children and grandfather of nine. This humble servant of God has been called to preach the

kingdom agenda and operate under Kingdom Authority. Dr. Reynolds is poised and equipped by God to deal with the struggles that accompany being pregnant with the Holy Spirit yet handicapped by tradition. God is using him to usher the church into a new level. Dr. Reynolds is serving as pastor of the Borden Chapel Baptist Church of Beaumont, Texas since February of 1997; Moderator of the Eastern Progressive Missionary Baptist Association; Executive Director of the HELBIG Community Development Corporation, 1st Vice President of the Baptist Missionary & Educational Convention of Texas; President of the People's Political Action Committee (PPAC), member of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., Baptist Ministers Union of Beaumont & Vicinity and the Beaumont Area Alliance of Black School Educators. He believes in the holistic concept of building the total man. He has committed himself to the economic empowerment of people in the community where he serves. The radical unpretentious preaching and teaching style of Dr. Reynolds has transformed the lives of countless men, women, boys and girls that were sick within, broken, in bondage, rejected and unreachable. He has earnestly committed to demonstrating unconditional love to all that God sends his way.





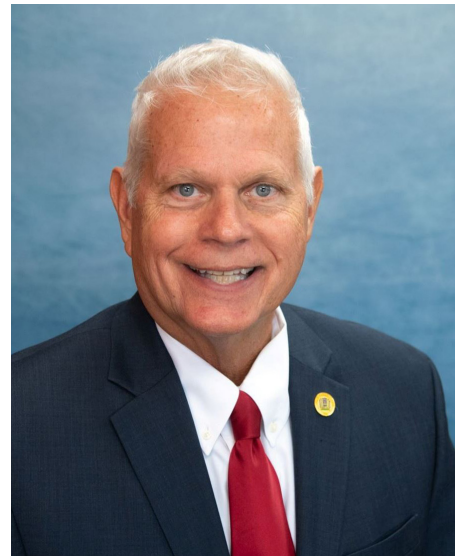
**Chanelle Stigger** serves as a 29-year-old lead meteorologist with nearly 5 years of experience working with NWS Lake Charles (started in Dec 2018). Graduated from North Carolina A&T State University in Dec 2016. Majored in Atmospheric Sciences and Meteorology; double minored in Physics and Applied Mathematics. Has a passion for outreach, especially getting children interested in science. Grew up all over Georgia before moving to Las Vegas, Nevada as a teen. International traveler and can hold a conversation in a few different languages. Lived and worked in Japan between graduation and getting into the Weather Service.

**Dr. Jaime R. Taylor** is the 16th president of Lamar University, which serves more than 17,000 students in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Before his appointment in July 2021, Taylor served as Marshall

University's provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. Signature achievements during his time at Marshall include the development of a fixed-wing aviation program and the doubling of university-wide research expenditures, the latter leading to a new Carnegie classification for Marshall as an R2 research institution. Prior to his work at Marshall, Taylor spent a significant portion of his career at Austin Peay State University, where he served two years as interim provost and vice president for academic affairs, eight years as dean of the College of Science and Mathematics and eight years as chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Taylor is an award-winning teacher of physics and was honored as an Austin Peay State University Outstanding Alumni. Taylor received his Ph.D. and M.S. in engineering from the University of Tennessee Space Institute, his B.S. in physics and mathematics from Austin Peay State University and an A.A.S. in industrial engineering technology from Nashville State Technical Institute. He also spent



four years as a NASA Faculty Fellow working on applications of soft computing.



Mayor of Beaumont **Roy West** is a proud, lifelong Texan, born and raised in Beaumont. Roy is married to his lovely wife, Trisha. He has five children; a son, daughter, three bonus daughters, and eight wonderful grandchildren. Roy graduated from Lamar University with an undergraduate degree in Sociology. Shortly after graduation, Roy began work for the Houston Police Department as a Peace Officer. A few years in he felt a new calling on his life and began to attend Southern Methodist University, where he later graduated with a Master of Divinity. Roy has over 30 years of experience as a business owner in SETX. Roy's business knowledge includes years of experience in team management, marketing, and money management. His personal philosophy is people deserve to be treated well. In addition to the mortgage business, Roy has hosted "The Roy West Show," a weekly one-hour radio show, since 2010, winning several awards from

the Press Club of Southeast Texas in the "Talk Show" category. Alongside his private sector background, Roy has spent a lifetime volunteering his time working for the public. Roy is also active in his home church, Praise Church, serving in the men's ministry. He believes giving back to the community is essential and has served on several local community organizations and charitable boards. Roy was proud to be elected Mayor of the City of Beaumont in May 2023 and looks forward to working alongside his fellow citizens to create a thriving, united Beaumont.



**Dave Williams** was born in Beaumont and grew up and attended public schools in Austin. He graduated from the University of Texas, served in the U.S. Navy, worked as an engineer at Esso's Baton Rouge refinery, and earned an MBA at Harvard Business School. His career in investment management spanned forty years on Wall Street. He has two daughters, Kate Hardin and Mary Vaughn. He and his

wife live in Greenwich, CT and New York City, and he helped start the Ancient to the Future Project.



**Kate Williams** is an associate professor emeritus at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. With my doctoral students I study community in the digital age. I helped create the Ancient to the Future Project to listen to people across a community and foster sharing, clarity, and solutions. My family includes Neches Lumber manager J. V. Hardin, Magnolia Oil chemical engineer Henry H. Hardin, and a Tyrrell Public librarian, my grandmother Minnie Williams.



**Stuart A. Wright** is College of Arts & Sciences (COAS) Research Professor in Sociology at Lamar University. He is a former NIMH Research Fellow at Yale, a Rockefeller Foundation Scholar in Bellagio, Italy, and Visiting Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies, part of the Norwegian Academy of Science & Letters, in Oslo, Norway. He has authored over sixty publications in scholarly books and journals, including seven books. Dr. Wright is known internationally for his research on religious and political movements, conflict and violence.

# Lamar University Department of Sociology, Social Work and Criminal Justice



**Sociology** is the study of social life, social change, and the causes and the consequences of human behavior. Sociology's subject matter ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob, from crime to religion, from the division of race and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture, from the sociology of religion to the sociology of education. Students are prepared to critically consider social problems such as crime, unemployment, violence, urban decay, poverty, discrimination, and social inequality.

**Social Work** is an action-oriented profession that helps individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities identify and develop strengths and resources to address personal, social and societal problems. Social workers make a fundamental difference.

**Criminal Justice** covers all facets of criminal behavior, from the psychological and sociological aspects of crime to law enforcement, criminal investigations, and corrections.

The department's minor in **Anthropology** adds cultural breadth to almost any major field. Anthropology is highly relevant to modern life in a multicultural, global community.

The department's **Center for Death Penalty Studies** takes as its mission to strengthen the international dimension of the fight against the death penalty and to help campus and communities develop an informed position on capital punishment.



The Ancient to the Future Project (<http://ancienttothefuture.org/>) works to tackle inequality and climate crisis by combining and amplifying local voices. This means discussions, publications, and where possible, art. Our first locale is Jefferson County, Texas. Questions? Email Kate Williams at [katewill@illinois.edu](mailto:katewill@illinois.edu).



Residing on the imperiled coast and within a global hub of petrochemical production, the region's diverse and economically vulnerable population will bear a disproportionate burden. This conference brings together community leaders, business members, scholars, and other stakeholders who seek to amplify local voices and advance solutions toward a sustainable and equitable future.