

# Dedication



Mwalimu Professor Dr. Harold Isaacs  
December 19, 1936—July 10, 2015

## Introductory Notes

“Professor Isaacs was a founding Member of the African Studies and Research Forum (ASRF). He was a participating member of the discussion group that led to the founding of the association and actively participated in its activities until his death. He supported the group financially, professionally, and morally and saw it as an important outgrowth of the Association of Third World Studies, (ATWS) which he founded” (Mwalimu Professor John Mukum Mbaku, E-mail correspondence, August 11, 2025). Note: The ASRF was an associate organization of the ATWS.

Anyone interested in learning about Mwalimu Isaacs’ African-centered thoughts can read the following article:

Bangura, A. K. (2013). A pluridisciplinary analysis of the fractal complexity in Mwalimu Harold Isaacs’ magnum opus, *United States-Mexico Relations During the González Administration, 1880-1884*. *Journal of Third World Studies*, xxx(1), 121-147.

## Tribute Essay

### **Dr. Harold Isaacs: Visionary Leader and Founder of the Association of Third World Studies (now known as Association of Global South Studies)**

*Doyin Coker-Kolo*



## **Abstract**

This article pays tribute to the late Dr. Harold Isaacs, Professor Emeritus of History at Georgia Southwestern State University and founder of the Association of Third World Studies (ATWS), now called Association of Global South Studies (AGSS). It explores his enduring legacy in academia, his contributions to global education, and his profound impact on scholars from the Global South. Through personal reflections and historical context, I highlight Dr. Isaacs' visionary leadership and commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship.

## **Tribute:**

It is both a profound honor and a privilege to dedicate this tribute to Dr. Harold Isaacs, the late Professor Emeritus of History at Georgia Southwestern State University and the visionary founder of the Association for Third World Studies—now called Association of Global South Studies (AGSS). Established in 1983, the organization was conceived “to provide for the humane and scientific study of peoples, problems, and issues in the world’s developing countries” (Kline, 2018, v). This dedication is especially timely, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of Dr. Isaacs’ passing, providing a moment to reflect on the transformative impact of his work. His legacy in encouraging revolutionized thinking in interdisciplinary collaborations around issues and problems impacting the Third World linked African Studies Research Forum (ASRF) to the ATWS and the impetus for this dedication.

Dr. Isaacs was a scholar of exceptional intellect, a compassionate humanitarian, and a leader of rare vision. Affectionately known by colleagues as “Harry” or “Sir Harold,” he possessed a remarkable ability to make others feel at ease, despite his many accomplishments. In a previous tribute, I cited the following quote that encapsulates his leadership ethos:

Leadership is not having a magnetic personality; that can just be a glib tongue. It is not making friends and influencing people, which is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a person’s personality beyond its normal limitations” (LeadershipNow.com, 2015, quoted in Coker-Kolo, 2015, 19).

Indeed, Dr. Isaacs exemplified the preceding definition. He was deeply committed to empowering others, fostering intellectual growth, and cultivating a spirit of empathy and selflessness. His warmth, humility and respect for others were hallmarks of his character.

Over the course of more than five decades in academia, Dr. Isaacs taught courses in History, Latin American Studies, and African Studies, leaving an indelible mark on students and colleagues alike. He was revered not only for his scholarly contributions, but also for his ability to inspire personal transformation. His students often credited him with helping them discover their identities, chart their futures, and broaden their worldviews. As a nationally recognized scholar, he elevated his discipline and the institutions he served to both national and international prominence.

Dr. Isaacs devoted the majority of his academic career to Georgia Southwestern State University. Upon his passing, he bequeathed a portion of his estate to the university to fund need-based scholarships for students in History, Political Science, and study abroad programs. His legacy also includes the “Third World in Perspectives” seminar series, initiated in 1981 and sustained through his generous estate gift.

In addition to founding ATWS, Dr. Isaacs launched the *Journal of Third World Studies* in 1984, serving as its editor until his death in 2015. Both the Association and its journal significantly expanded their influence, achieving consultative status with the United Nations and reaching audiences across the globe. The Association maintained active chapters in South Asia and Africa (AGSS, 2018). Members of the ASRF benefited significantly from their affiliation with ATWS and the journal, contributing to its editorial leadership and using it as a platform to advance their scholarly and professional trajectories.

My own journey with Dr. Isaacs began during my graduate studies in the late 1980s, when I first encountered his work through the ATWS. Our professional relationship deepened when I joined the faculty at Georgia Southwestern State University, where he became both a mentor and a sponsor. He encouraged my involvement in the Association’s leadership and gave me the opportunity to serve as Treasurer—a role I held for nine years. During this time, I witnessed firsthand his unwavering dedication to scholars from the Third World/Global South. He invested his time, resources, and energy in nurturing academic talent, whether in the United States or abroad. Many ASRF members can attest to his support, which often included writing letters of recommendation, facilitating publication opportunities, and connecting emerging scholars with mentors.

Dr. Isaacs also fostered a close partnership between ASRF and ATWS, enabling joint conferences and collaborative scholarship. Although the ASRF and AGSS do not operate under a unified structure, some of their members continue to convene at AGSS’s annual conferences—a testament to the enduring spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration and boundaryless human connection that Dr. Isaacs championed. His legacy is one of visionary leadership, global engagement, and profound humanity. May this dedication serve not only as a tribute to his life and work but also as a call to continue the mission he so passionately pursued.

## References

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<https://apps.gsw.edu/agss/index.php/about-us/>
- Coker-Kolo, D. (2015). An authentic leader, scholar, and teacher: The man—Dr. Harold Isaacs. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 32(2), 19–25.
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