

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Contact:** Katherine M. Finley, Executive Director  
Office: 812.855.7311 | E-mail: oah@oah.org



**LASHAWN D. HARRIS, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, RECEIVES 2017 DARLENE CLARK HINE AWARD FROM THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS**

BLOOMINGTON, IN—During its annual meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Organization of American Historians (OAH) announced that **LaShawn D. Harris, Michigan State University**, received their prestigious 2017 **Darlene Clark Hine Award**, which is given annually for the best book in African American women’s and gender history.

**Darlene Clark Hine Award**

*Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City’s Underground Economy* (University of Illinois Press) is our first choice for the Darlene Clark Hine Award. This book is a groundbreaking labor and black women’s history centered on the lives of African-descended women whose intersectional marginality—race, gender, class, labor profile, and criminal status—place them far beyond the “typical” subject of historical analysis. Harris has meticulously excavated these women’s lives, exploring their social and labor histories so that her readers understand not only who they are, where they came from, how they came to work on the other side of the law and what were the intended and unintended consequences of their labor, but also the raw agency and struggle for “freedom” that they grasped for, and often obtained, if only temporarily, through their illicit work.

Harris’s use of police records, newspapers, prison records, commissioned employment studies, gendered prescriptive literature, sociological studies, immigrant passenger lists, and private papers provide her with a diverse and comprehensive primary-source base for her important work. Embedded in Harris’s monograph as well is an enlightening description of black urban life across class, gender, and labor lines. Readers learn almost as much about the clientele base of these women (female, male, and white) as about the women themselves; how black extended families and fictive kin supported, and disappointed, one another; and how the “white law” and social agencies interacted with the urban black community.

Significantly, Harris challenges the notion of distinct classes in black urban society by demonstrating how many women were able to push themselves or their children up the social ladder by working in extralegal businesses and, as well, how these businesses provided services and income for much-needed social services, for blacks of all classes. While this book really is centered on New York City, it indicates what must have been occurring in other large (and small) cities across America where black women negotiated the terms of their survival and “uplift” in overwhelmingly racist and sexist work and social environments by working on the margins of and clearly outside the law. *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners* is our choice for this award because of its important and unexplored topic, the rich archive that the author has amassed and utilized fully, and its strong narrative tone. Harris’s book is a joy to learn from and read.

The award was announced on April 8 by OAH’s 2017–18 President Edward L. Ayers.

For more information, visit [oah.org](http://oah.org) or call 812.855.7311.

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## **ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS**

Founded in 1907, the Organization of American Historians (OAH) is the world's largest professional association dedicated to American history scholarship. With more than 7,500 members from the U.S. and abroad, OAH promotes excellence in the scholarship, teaching, and presentation of American history, encouraging wide discussion of historical questions and equitable treatment of history practitioners. It publishes the quarterly *Journal of American History*, the leading scholarly publication and journal of record in the field of American history for more than a century. It also publishes *The American Historian* magazine. Formerly known as the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA), the association became the OAH in 1965 to reflect a broader scope focusing on national studies of American history. The OAH national headquarters are located in the historic Raintree House on Indiana University's Bloomington campus. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.