

RINGSHOUT

LET THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN



SYNOPSIS



Ring Shout: Let the Circle Be Unbroken is an intimate personal odyssey of a New York City teacher on a worldwide journey to document the influence of African culture on the dances of its descendants in the diaspora, and how this often hidden but profound connection shapes identity, rootedness, ancestral memory, and cultural resistance—even in the face of attempts to erase Africa’s identity, knowledge, and roots during the Middle Passage.

Her exploration of dances that retained African traditions led her to the Ring Shout, an age-old praise dance rooted in African spiritual practices, where she uncovered the deepest ties to her own African-American cultural heritage. This journey brought her to a rural Georgia museum, where she discovered her Gullah Geechee roots and a long-lost branch of her family. There, she must decide whether to honor her elder cousin’s dying wish and carry his legacy forward, embracing the responsibility of preserving these vanishing traditions.

Through dance, memory, and the voices of tradition-bearers, the film illuminates the resilience of African cultural practices and the unbroken circle that binds Africa and its children across generations and oceans.



OLUBAYO JACKSON



DIRECTOR/WRITER/PRODUCER

Olubayo Jackson is a filmmaker, dancer, and educator whose work brings African and African Diaspora cultural traditions to life through movement and film. With over 20 years as a dancer and educator in New York City, her experience in the arts and teaching shaped her transition into filmmaking, allowing her to tell stories that celebrate heritage, identity, and cultural connection.

Her latest documentary, *Ring Shout: Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, explores African American praise worship and Gullah Geechee culture and is screening at the International Harlem Film Festival. This short is the first step in a larger project she hopes to develop—a documentary series tracing her journeys to New Orleans, Ghana, Mali, Dominica, the Garifuna communities of Honduras and Belize, and the Gullah Geechee communities of Georgia and South Carolina. The series will examine how African culture shaped dance, identity, and resistance across the diaspora, connecting communities and generations through movement and storytelling.

Her previous film, *Akwaaba Dance*, screened at the Panafest Colloquium in Ghana and the Real Sisters Film Festival at Columbia University, and appeared as a work-in-progress at the Fanike! Black History Gala, where she received the Cultural Warriors Award.

A National Endowment for the Humanities “Gullah Voices” fellow and Middle Passage Institute facilitator, Olubayo holds a Master’s in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a Bachelor’s in International and African Studies from City College of New York.

Olubayo sees herself, perhaps unexpectedly, as a griot—preserving her family’s legacy, culture, and stories while contributing to the preservation of our collective history. She hopes this film will inspire community members to document, preserve, and retell their own family stories.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



My name, Olubayo Lindiwe, reflects my parents’ wish that I always be reminded of my African heritage. The title “Nya Amolode Gruiyakona” was given to me after completing the rites of passage into initiated African womanhood in a system rooted in Senegal and Mali. These names shaped my identity and fueled my calling to trace the paths of my ancestors—the places they came from, their stops during the Middle Passage, and their enduring connection to the motherland through dance.

As a New York City-born child of a family deeply rooted in the African-American South during segregation, dance became a way for me to connect with my parents’ lives—lives I did not personally experience but could feel through the music they played: the blues, jazz, soul, and gospel that became our daily history lessons. The dances I performed were my way of interpreting and bridging the gap between their experiences and my own. Dance became my first teaching tool—one my parents gave me and one I have continued to use with my students, now sharing it with the world.

With over 20 years of experience as a New York City public school teacher, particularly as a dance educator for young children, I have long sought to share my passion and experiences with my students. In 2014, I took a sabbatical to study African cultural retentions and dance around the world. During this time, I picked up a camera and became a somewhat accidental filmmaker, determined to allow my students to experience the journey alongside me. This experience became the foundation for my documentary, Akwaaba Dance, which chronicles my travels and explorations during that sabbatical.



As a filmmaker, dancer, and educator, my work brings African and African Diaspora cultural traditions to life through movement and film. Through these mediums, I aim to bridge the gaps between my experiences and those of our ancestral lineage, reconnecting the pieces of history and culture that were lost or fragmented over generations.

My latest documentary, Ring Shout: Let the Circle Be Unbroken, explores African-American praise dance worship and my Gullah Geechee cultural lineage. My family’s museum, Geechee Kunda, is featured, and the film is screening at the International Harlem Film Festival. I hope to expand this short film into a pilot—the first installment of a larger series documenting my travels across West Africa, the Caribbean, and Central America, exploring African cultural retentions through dance and highlighting connections between African and diaspora communities. Through this work, I examine how African culture has shaped dance, identity, and resistance across the diaspora, connecting communities and generations through movement and storytelling.

I aim to merge my documentaries into a series that captures the joy, excitement, and purposefulness of my travels, illuminating the richness of cultural legacies and the transformative power of reconnecting to our African roots—helping us discover, every day, who we truly are and where we come from.

I see myself, perhaps unexpectedly, as a griot—preserving my family’s legacy, culture, and stories while contributing to the preservation of our collective history. I hope this film will inspire community members to document, preserve, and share their own family stories, keeping connections alive across generations and oceans.

CREDITS



KEY CAST

OLUBAYO JACKSON
JIM BACOTE
JAMES SMALL
JOAN ROSS
GREGORY GRANT
GRIFFEN LOTSON
THE GULLAH GEECHEE RING
SHOUTERS
WENDY “BITHIA” BROWN
AATIFA DRAYTON
JAMAL TOURE
C. PATRICK BURROWS

DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

OLUBAYO JACKSON

ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

IYABO KWAYANA
CHRISTOPHER MILES

EDITORS

IYABO KWAYANA
CHRISTOPHER MILES
JORGE AGUILAR
RAFIK KWAKWA
JENNIE BOURNE

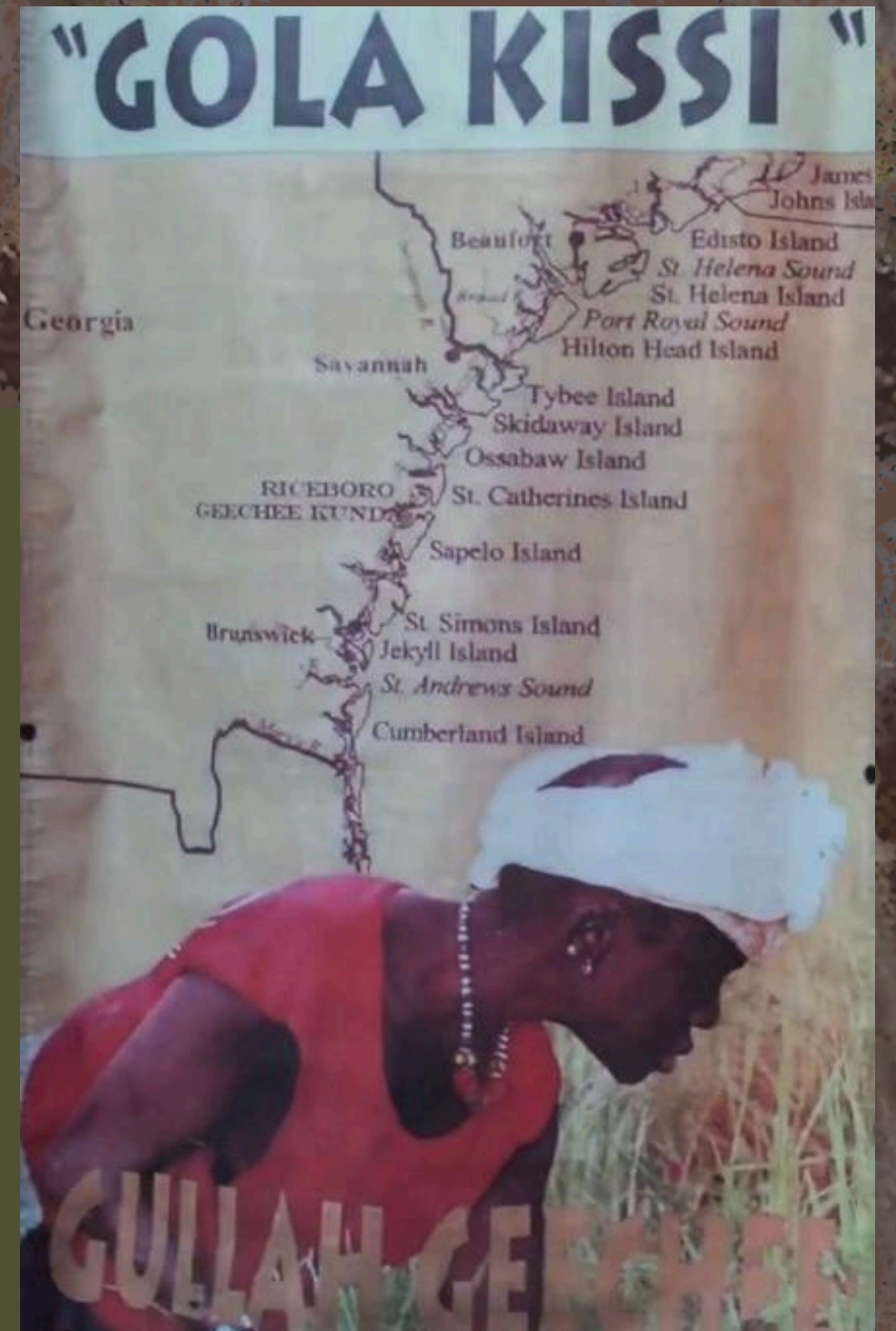
SOUND & POST-PRODUCTION

CHRISTOPHER MILES

ADVISORS

JIM BACOTE
PROFESSOR JAMES SMALL
ANGELA HARMON
ELEANOR JACKSON

SO TO PHOTOS



TRAILER

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FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

RINGSHOUT - LET THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN

- Reel Sisters Film Festival (New York)
- Harlem International Film Festival (New York)

AKWAABA DANCE

- Panafest Colloquium (Ghana)
- Fanike! Black History Gala (New york)
 - Won the Cultural Warriors award



THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANKS TO:

PROFESSOR JAMES SMALL

ELEANOR JACKSON AND ROBERT JACKSON

ATILAH KHADIJAH

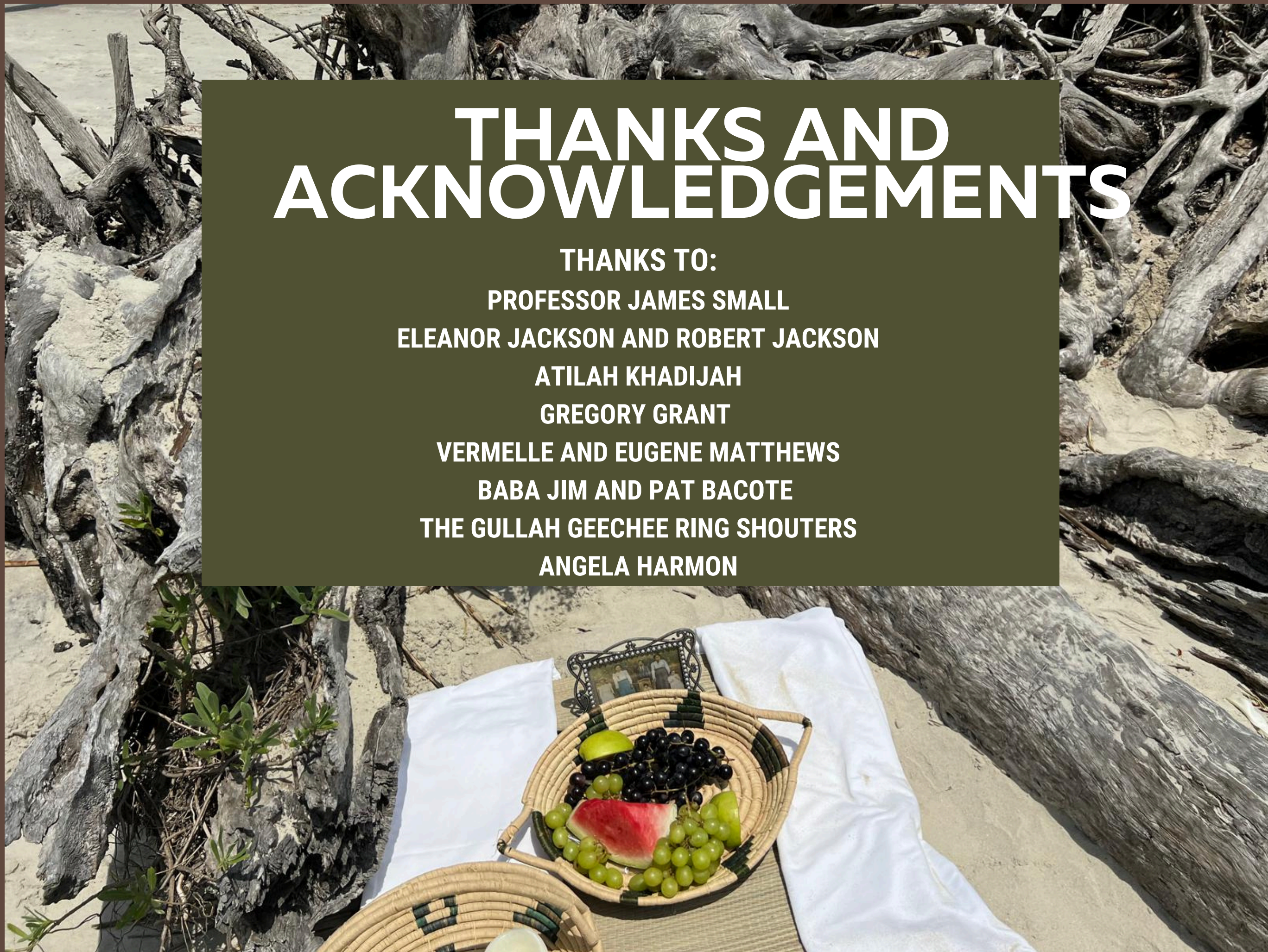
GREGORY GRANT

VERMELLE AND EUGENE MATTHEWS

BABA JIM AND PAT BACOTE

THE GULLAH GEECHEE RING SHOUTERS

ANGELA HARMON





THANK THOSE WHO HOLD YOU UP;



THEIR HANDS SHAPE THE HEIGHTS YOU REACH





**IN HONOR OF "SOMEONE REMEMBERING OLD BRIGHT JIM" (JIM BACOTE)
AND THE COUNTLESS OTHER ANCESTORS WHOSE STORIES WE TELL SO
THEY WILL NEVER DIE**



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