

Freedom Stories

Social Impact Report

International Storytelling Center

July 26, 2021

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



Black/White Dialogue



HISTORIC JONESBOROUGH TENNESSEE



Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association (NETTA)



This Freedom Stories Report was created by the International Storytelling Center in partnership with the National Humanities Alliance. Special thanks to Dr. Cecily Hill and Emily McDonald for their contributions.



INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING CENTER



National Humanities Alliance

Introduction

About Freedom Stories

Alex Haley, famed author and fellow Tennessean, came to Jonesborough to tell at the 14th National Storytelling Festival in 1986. When he was here, he said, “Without storytelling, we’d have no roots.” That’s something to think about. Imagine your life, and all our lives, as trees. When you imagine a tree and the roots below the tree, there isn’t one root, but rather multiple roots. These roots overlap and cross and double back on one another. It’s a part of what gives the tree its strength.

So it is with us. The stories we have and the stories we tell are part of what give us our strength. They give us our identity and help us make sense of the world. This is true of individuals, of families, of communities, regions, and whole countries. To understand the story of a nation, is to understand the myriad roots which have made up the stories of that nation to the present day. But historically, there are some stories which have been heard, appreciated, and retold, while other stories have been repressed, suppressed, and ignored despite the fact all these stories—these roots—are an inextricable component of the tree’s health and strength. If you only care for half the roots, the tree will suffer. If we only tell and retell half the stories, the nation will suffer. We can’t fully understand who we are, where we came from, or ultimately where we’re going unless we are willing to engage with all the stories, the whole narrative.



Sheila Arnold opens Freedom Stories at the 2019 National Storytelling Festival.

ISC’s Freedom Stories initiative aims to foster more of this intentional engagement with the whole narrative. It is, for the first time, bringing storytelling performance and humanities scholarship into direct dialogue in the planning and delivery of public programs and development of educational resources focused on unearthing the stories of Black heritage of Appalachia. Our goal is to support ongoing collaboration between storytellers and humanities scholars that will lead to a deeper public appreciation of the roles that stories have played in struggles for freedom, equality, and justice—bridging divides and strengthening our democracy.

Supported by funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Freedom Stories takes a novel approach to weaving art, scholarship, and public discourse into an inclusive and diverse medium for addressing silenced histories and our roles in those histories. Activities include hosting a series of public discussions about the Black heritage of Appalachia; recording these public discussions and making them available on our website and social media pages; and creating a toolkit, with information and discussion guides based on discussion topics.

With this project, we provide a foundation for ongoing engagement and communication across communities, disciplines and specializations that will contribute to informed, community-driven solutions to contemporary challenges. Storytelling invites examination of storytelling itself as a form of cultural heritage and as an art form that has sustained marginalized communities. Stories serve as powerful analytic tools, helping us grapple with complex and difficult experiences in equitable and accessible ways. Storytelling is truly democratic, requiring neither wealth, status, nor formal education to access, making it readily available to those who have traditionally been denied these very things.

From the outset, ISC has sought to promote equality and diversity through its flagship event, the National Storytelling Festival, and represent all communities touched by the storytelling revival. The Freedom Stories project continues this legacy by not only intentionally and strategically engaging diverse, long-silenced narratives, but also by allowing us to critically examine the role we, as an institution, have played in either the silencing or the uplifting of these narratives.

About this Report

As part of receiving funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH,) grant beneficiaries are required to submit progress reports and culminating reports over the life of their project. While this report does serve in that capacity and provides the quantitative and qualitative results of the social impact survey compiled and analyzed by our colleagues at the National Humanities Alliance, it also offers an overview of the Freedom Stories project as a whole which can be utilized by others for teaching, learning, and building cultural awareness.

This report reflects data which was collected and collated both by International Storytelling Center (ISC) staff and by the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), a coalition of organizations dedicated to advancing humanities education, research, preservation, and public programs. The NHA created an [exit-survey](#) in partnership with ISC which was made available to all public discussion participants on a voluntary and confidential basis. The survey measured participant feedback on the Freedom Stories program specifically, the humanities in general, links to the Appalachian region, and feelings towards ISC. ISC staff also collected data related to views of live streams and discussion recordings on both Facebook and YouTube.

The following report, including appendices, includes sections of the initial interim report submitted to the NEH on November 30, 2020, and data from the NHA surveys, collated on July 22, 2021. It reflects findings from all twelve public discussions.

It is our hope that the information here will be studied, drawn upon, and utilized to help build similar initiatives in other places. The results here are by no means comprehensive—indeed, in many ways they serve only to scratch the surface—but they do offer a summary of events and will hopefully act as inspiration for others. We recognize, also, that this project does not represent the complete story of Black heritage in Appalachia. However, it is our attempt to open the door to these important narratives, and explore them more through storytelling. This is an ongoing voyage, and we invite you to use these resources in your own journey to a more complete understanding of who we are.

About the Project Director



Alicestyne Turley, Ph.D.

Born in Hazard, Kentucky, prior to becoming an educator and public historian, Dr. Alicestyne Turley has worked in law enforcement, as a community organizer, and was the first African American administrator for the City of Toledo's first woman mayor, Donna Owens. Also, the founding Director of the Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education at Berea College, Dr. Turley is a long-time scholar of history, political science, sociology and anthropology. She obtained a master's degree from Mississippi State University in public policy and from the University of Kentucky in American History, where she remained and graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy in American History. During that time, she also became the founding director of the Underground Railroad Research Institute at Georgetown College.

"Storytelling is as American as apple pie, and very much a part of African American and Appalachian life, culture and community," says Turley. "I am excited and feel extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with the professional staff of the International Storytelling Center and professional storytellers from around the country, to share African American *Freedom Stories* with other storytellers, scholars, and the nation." (Read ["Room in the Tent"](#), an interview with Dr. Turley published by ISC.)

Freedom Stories Report

Accomplishments

Originally conceived as a regional program based in Central Appalachia, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a major revision in plans outlined in the original NEH grant application. The major revision was the move from twelve in-person public performances and discussions hosted at various locations within the Appalachian region, to online public discussions hosted via the ISC Zoom, livestreamed to the ISC Facebook, and later uploaded to the ISC YouTube channel and Freedom Stories Toolkit located on the ISC website.

Within the Revised Plan of Work, the following major goals and activities were scheduled and accomplished:

- Hiring a Freedom Stories Project Director to develop, budget, publicize, and critique eleven Freedom Stories performances and public discussions. (The initial public performance was completed prior to finalizing a Project Director.)
- Development of a Revised 2020-2021 Freedom Stories Work Plan
- Hosting Freedom Stories Planning Meetings with the selected Project Advisory Committee:
 - **Dr. Alicestyne Turley**, Director, ISC Freedom Stories Project
 - **Kiran Singh Sirah**, President, International Storytelling Center
 - **Mama Linda Goss**, Co-Founder, National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS)
 - **Joy Fulkerson**, Director of Leadership and Civic Engagement, East Tennessee State University
 - **Michelle Treece**, Member, International Storytelling Center Board of Governors; Member, Johnson City School Board
 - **Dr. Darin Waters**, Chancellor for Community Outreach and Engagement, University of North Carolina at Asheville
 - **Adam Dickson**, Director, Langston Centre; Town of Jonesborough Alderman
 - **William Isom, II**, Director of Community Outreach, East Tennessee PBS
 - **Ron Carson**, Founder/Director, Appalachian African-American Cultural Center
 - **Dr. William Turner**, Education Director, Appalachian African-American Cultural Center
- Between October 2019 and June 2021, twelve *Freedom Stories* Public Discussions and Storytelling Performances were planned, scheduled, publicized, and completed. The initial performance by Sheila Arnold at the National Storytelling Festival was presented to Festival-goers in Jonesborough; a recording of the performance was uploaded to the ISC YouTube channel and is available in the Freedom Stories Toolkit. The other eleven public discussions were all presented online via a live stream to the ISC Facebook page. Recordings of these discussions are also uploaded to the ISC YouTube channel and are available in the Freedom Stories Toolkit.

While these revisions came with their own set of unique challenges, they also provided an incredible opportunity. We were able to reach far more participants than we ever thought possible, and make more resources available much more quickly.

Public Discussions

Public-facing events were developed with the aid of regional partners, ISC audiences, and longtime International Storytelling Center followers by association with the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS,) community scholars, academic institutions, members of the media, and public media broadcasts to members of the general public. While the entire Appalachian region has been the target of this project, special attention was paid to the incorporation of previously overlooked histories and communities whenever possible, particularly encouraging the involvement of young people, African Americans, and Appalachian mixed-race populations.

Results of the program have been disseminated largely via social media, specifically Facebook and YouTube. Announcements of public discussions and invitations thereto were made on the ISC website, in press releases to local media, and created as “events” in Facebook. These events were all free and open to the public, and interested parties could share these events with others. By making such events public and shareable, communities who might not otherwise be aware of our projects or aware of the subject matter covered were encouraged to attend.

During actual discussion times, the artists, scholars, and other panelists joined the Program Director in a Zoom video conference which was then live streamed to the ISC Facebook page. Public audiences could watch the presentation in real-time (even without a Facebook account) and participate via the comments section on the video. This is also how patrons offered questions which were then addressed as time allowed during the discussion. All live streams were also recorded and then uploaded to the ISC YouTube channel following each discussion, and made available in the Freedom Stories Toolkit.

As a continuing resource, all twelve of the Freedom Stories public discussions and performances have been made available in the [Freedom Stories Toolkit](#). The toolkit includes these recorded performances and discussions, along with auxiliary resources such as discussion PowerPoints, information about each contributor, links to external resources, and an [interactive multimedia Story Map](#). More resources will be available in the near future including curriculum guides for educators, book lists, mini-documentary style extension videos, and other resources prepared by scholars and experts that organizations and individuals across the globe can use for facilitating similar community collaborations. We hope these materials will help these urgent humanities discussions reach larger audiences in and beyond Central Appalachia. Like a story, which often changes over time, the online multimedia toolkit will continue to grow and adapt in response to participants’ changing needs and demands.

Discussion Descriptions

[Freedom Stories, at the National Storytelling Festival, 1-2 p.m. Saturday, October 5, 2019](#)

Master storyteller Sheila Arnold brings to life the story of Elihu Embree, Nancy, and Frames. Embree was a Quaker abolitionist who published the nation’s first newspaper dedicated solely to the abolitionist cause, *The Emancipator*, despite owning enslaved people himself. Arnold also tells stories of Nancy, one of Embree’s enslaved individuals, and her son, Frames, along with stories of the Underground Railroad.

[Do Black Lives Matter in Appalachia?, 1-2:30 p.m., Friday, July 3, 2020](#)

This first online discussion includes performance from National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellow and co-founder of the National Association of Black Storytellers, Mama Linda Goss, and conversation with Alona Norwood, founding member of the New Generation Freedom Fighters; Dr. Sandra Weissinger, Professor of sociology and author from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville; Dr. William Turner, renowned Black Appalachian scholar and author; Dr. Darin Waters, Assistant Professor of History and Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Community Outreach and Engagement at University of North Carolina Asheville; and Dr. Elwood Watson, author and Professor of History and African American Studies at East Tennessee State University.

[Emancipation Saturday: An Appalachian Tradition, 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, August 8, 2020](#)

You’ve heard of Juneteenth, but what about Emancipation Saturday? This Freedom Stories discussion explores this lesser-known Appalachian emancipation celebration. The distinguished panel features Black in Appalachia founder, William Isom; author and scholar, Dr. Cicero Fain of the University of Southern Maryland; and Jasmine Henderson, a spoken word artist residing in Johnson City, Tennessee. The panel is moderated by Freedom Stories Project Director Dr. Alicestyne Turley. Together, we learn the history behind the celebration, including the role that President Andrew Johnson played in Emancipation Saturday and the celebration’s spread throughout Central Appalachia.

[What You Don't Know \(But Should\) About Appalachian Slavery](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, September 5, 2020

Antebellum slavery is most often associated with the Deep South: sprawling Mississippi cotton fields, Alabama sugar plantations, and Georgia estates straight from *Gone with the Wind*. But Central Appalachia had a thriving slave trade, as well. You probably don't know (but should) that nearly every Appalachian county had a slave auction block at their local courthouse or within its market district. You probably don't know (but should) that slavery was primarily industrial in nature, creating what are now described as "Iron Plantations." And you probably don't know (but should) that some of Appalachia's first slave owners were actually Cherokee.

These topics, and others, are the subject of our fourth discussion, "What You Don't Know (But Should) About Appalachian Slavery." The distinguished panel includes "Affrilachian" poet and author, Frank X. Walker; author and historian, Anne G'Fellers Mason, Executive Director of the Heritage Alliance of Northeast Tennessee & Southwest Virginia; West Virginia storyteller and humanities scholar, Ilene Evans of Voices of the Earth; and Dr. Dinah Mayo-Bobee from the East Tennessee State University Department of History.

[Stories of the Underground Railroad](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Thursday, October 1, 2020, live streamed to National Storytelling Festival registered audience as well as ISC Facebook

Inspirational instrumentalist and storyteller, Reverend Robert Jones, Sr., brings to life true tales from the Underground Railroad.

[Melungeon: The Criminalization of Race](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, November 7, 2020

Our sixth Freedom Stories event explores the history of a tri-racial ethnic group prevalent in Central Appalachia and the rural Southeastern United States known as Melungeons. Through performance and discussion with storyteller Lyn Ford, author and community scholar Wayne Winkler, and Anthony Mayle, Assistant Director, Marietta College Office of Diversity and Inclusion, we examine the unique development of multiple racial identities and challenge the story of Appalachian monoculturalism.

[Jim Crow Appalachia: Slavery by Another Name](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, January 9, 2021

At the end of the Civil War, the South emerged with destroyed transportation and shipping lines, a devastated economy, and no labor force. The North and South agreed slavery was an unacceptable form of American labor, but Black Americans were still viewed as an undesirable, inferior race in need of control. Over the next 100 years, the Appalachian South successfully re-established their system of racial caste under a new name, "Jim Crow," a popular antebellum term. This discussion features storyteller and spoken word artist, Mitch Capel, along with Dr. Steven Nash, Associate Professor of history at East Tennessee State University, and Freedom Stories Project Director Dr. Alicestyne Turley as we explore the roots of Appalachian Jim Crow and its impact on how the region is viewed today.

[Profit & Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, February 13, 2021

The end of the Civil War granted ascendancy of industry over agriculture. This economic shift in the American ideal gave birth to a new generation of American capitalist focused on exploiting rich Appalachian resources exposed during the Civil War. The need for profits and power over-shadowed ideas of American individualism, concepts of self-sufficiency, and concern for human conservation. A new America was on the rise. Storytellers and musicians, Rhonda and Sparky Rucker; adjunct history professor, Andrew Baskin of Simmons College of Kentucky (Kentucky's only private HBCU;) and Dr. William Turner, Director of Education at the Appalachian African-American Cultural Center present a discussion exploring "profit and power" in Appalachia.

[Separate but Equal? Race-based Bias in Education](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, March 13, 2021

Through performance and conversation with Emmy Award-winning storyteller, Bobby Norfolk; Langston Centre Supervisor, Adam Dickson; and Green McAdoo Cultural Center Director, Adam Velk, we examine the

effects of segregation and integration—both positive and negative—on public education in Appalachia and how these still impact society today.

[Out-Migration: Spreading Appalachia Abroad](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, April 10, 2021

This discussion is a look at how Appalachian culture, specifically Black Appalachian culture, has spread to other areas of the country. We hear from wordsmith and storyteller, Omopé Carter-Daboiku; Professor of Appalachian Studies, Dr. Ted Olson from East Tennessee State University; and Dr. Freida H. Outlaw, a Minority Fellowship Program member of the American Nurses Association.

[The Civil Rights Movement: It Still Remains](#), 1-2:30 p.m., Saturday, May 8, 2021

In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her bus seat to a white patron, an act which sparked the Montgomery bus boycott. In 1963, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and delivered his now-famous “I Have A Dream” speech. During this same time, folk music legend Pete Seeger helped popularize the Civil Rights anthem, “We Shall Overcome.”

While these people and their historic acts might be well known, what is often overlooked is the role Appalachia played in this liminal period. Parks, King, and Seeger all attended training sessions at the Highlander Center in East Tennessee, and twelve Black students from Clinton, Tennessee, became the first in the South to integrate a public high school. The Birmingham Campaign in Alabama is part of Appalachian history, and marches took place across the region.

In this public discussion in our Freedom Stories series, we hear from musician, storyteller, and educator Reggie Harris; civil rights activists Ann Beard Grundy and Charles Nebett; and Dr. Daryl Carter, Associate Dean for Equity and Inclusion for the College of Arts and Sciences and director of Black American Studies at East Tennessee State University as we explore the events of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly as they pertain to Appalachia, and ask ourselves, “Are we there yet?”

[How Do We Talk to Each Other? Storytelling for Racial Justice](#), 1-3 p.m., Saturday, June 12, 2021

In 1776, America’s forebears declared that “all men are created equal.” Twelve years later, they developed their plan for “a more perfect Union.” While not unprecedented, these acts were unique enough to be dubbed the “American Experiment.” Such ideals are still venerated, but as America moves toward its 250th anniversary, we must face the difficult truths which underpin these concepts. Those who declared “all men are created equal” did not include enslaved persons. Those who formed “a more perfect Union” counted Black people as three-fifths human.

Fortunately, the shortcomings of the past need not dictate the future, and the American Experiment is not complete. In the twelfth and final event in our Freedom Stories series, we explore ways to engage in constructive dialogue and present tips on how to use storytelling to advance racial justice. This special two-hour presentation will include performance and discussion from Mzuri Moyo Aimbaye, Founder, President, and CEO of Healing Through the Sound of Music and creator of the one-woman show, “The Fannie Lou Hamer Story;” Lecia Brooks, Chief of Staff at the Southern Poverty Law Center; Trina Jackson, Education Team Coordinator at the Highlander Center; and Kiran Singh Sirah, President of the International Storytelling Center. Together, we can continue unearthing the stories which surround us, more fully realizing our forebears’ ideals.

(See [Appendix A](#) for a full list of panelist biographies)

Participants and Other Collaborating Organizations

Freedom Stories Key Personnel

- **Kiran Singh Sirah**, President, International Storytelling Center: Responsible for initiating and setting goals for the program, providing guidance, assistance, and participation as needed.

- **Alicestyne Turley**, Freedom Stories Project Director, International Storytelling Center: Responsible for planning events from start to finish, including procedures, milestones and deadlines. Budgeting for event operations and monitoring each event to make sure it stayed within budget.
- **Lynnea Salinas**, Assistant to the President, International Storytelling Center: Kiran's right and sometimes left hand. Lynnea stepped up to become a major coordinator in the production, online broadcast, and webpage and social media management for the Freedom Stories Project.
- **Krystal Hawkins**, Program Administrator, International Storytelling Center: Krystal helped oversee each of the eleven live streams on Facebook, including monitoring participant comments and troubleshooting technical issues.
- **Other ISC Staff as needed**

Other Partner Organizations

Organization Name: [Appalachian African-American Cultural Center](#)

Location of Organization: Pennington Gap, VA

Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.

Organization Name: [Black in Appalachia](#)

Location of Organization: Knoxville, TN

Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration, information and resource sharing.

Organization Name: [Black/White Dialogue](#)

Location of Organization: Johnson City, TN

Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.

Organization Name: [Green McAdoo Cultural Center](#)

Location of Organization: Clinton, TN

Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.

Organization Name: [Heritage Alliance of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia](#)

Location of Organization: Jonesborough, TN

Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.

Organization Name: [Highlander Research and Education Center](#)

Location of Organization: New Market, TN

Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.

- Organization Name:** [Historic Jonesborough Tennessee](#)
Location of Organization: Jonesborough, TN
Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.
- Organization Name:** [Langston Centre](#) and [Langston Education and Arts Development, Inc.](#)
Location of Organization: Johnson City, TN
Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.
- Organization Name:** [Leadership and Civic Engagement](#) at East Tennessee State University
Location of Organization: Johnson City, TN
Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.
- Organization Name:** [McKinney Center](#) (Jonesborough's Mary B. Martin Program for the Arts)
Location of Organization: Jonesborough, TN
Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.
- Organization Name:** [National Association of Black Storytellers](#) (NABS)
Location of Organization: Baltimore, MD
Contribution to the project: In-kind support, event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.
- Organization Name:** [Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association](#) (NETTA)
Location of Organization: Johnson City, TN
Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.
- Organization Name:** [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) (SPLC)
Location of Organization: Montgomery, AL
Contribution to the project: In-kind support event publication and audience promotion, Storyteller support and identification, serving as a member of the Freedom Stories Advisory Committee, project collaboration.

Social and Cultural Impact

While originally conceived as a regional program of in-person discussions based in Central Appalachia, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the program to go to an entirely online format. As such, we were able to reach far more participants than we ever thought possible, and make more resources available more quickly. The creation of online and digital resources, the embedding of academic and community resources from highly credible colleges, universities and community partners, and the collaborative nature of the project means the twelve public discussions and performances will maintain a life well into the future, far beyond the current NEH grant funding.

Initially, we identified three major themes that would allow different points of entry into discussions and produce insights that could advance storytelling and humanities scholarship in an integrated fashion well beyond the duration of the project. We rendered those themes in the following statements to illustrate the educational direction of the project:

- 1) Storytelling is integral to historical inquiry and discovery.
- 2) Storytelling has been a crucial means for cultural survival, shaping identities, facilitating dialogues and achieving equity for marginalized communities.
- 3) African-American Appalachian communities and individuals have played key roles in improving conditions for Appalachians of all backgrounds and African Americans across the US.

These themes are important to audiences in our region, because audience members recognize storytelling to be an important and valuable dimension of African-American and Appalachian cultural heritages and identities, and are interested in listening to, discussing, and learning more about storytelling. In addition, audience members are aware that people outside of Appalachia often perceive the region as backward, all-white, and disconnected from the larger US, and they are eager to explore and highlight the diversity of Appalachian communities, the complexities of Appalachian histories, and the role the region has played in United States history.

It is important to note, also, that the Appalachian region is much larger than one might assume, and far more diverse than presented in the monoculture myth of the stereotyped “moonshine hillbilly.” According to the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#), Appalachia is comprised of 420 counties spread across 13 states, spans 205,000 square miles from northern Mississippi to southern New York, and houses 25 million residents.

In Central Appalachia, consisting mainly of northeast Tennessee, southeast Kentucky, southern West Virginia, southwest Virginia, and western North Carolina, pop culture holds that the population is comprised mostly of the descendants of Scots-Irish settlers. While those descendants are indeed here, far more people in this area identify as African American than Scots-Irish.

To these ends, the Freedom Stories initiative laid out specific goals for the project. These accomplished goals include:

- *Strengthen teaching and learning in schools and colleges:* Teachers from various grades and subjects have begun using Freedom Stories content in their classrooms, and curriculum guides are currently being written by teachers for publication in the toolkit.
- *Facilitate research and original scholarship:* New research interests and projects for graduate students from two of involved Freedom Stories academic partners have already begun seeking use of resources contained at the Heritage Alliance.
- *Provide opportunities for lifelong learning:* Responses to survey questions indicate an on-going interest by the viewing public to learn more about the history of under-represented groups in Appalachia and the US.
- *Preserve and provide access to cultural and educational resources:* Each public discussion created a listening and learning opportunity for the general public of men, women, children, teaching professionals and all members of the listening and viewing public.

The importance of these goals was readily showcased in the response to our first online public discussion, “Do Black Lives Matter in Appalachia?” The discussion was held on July 3, 2020, barely six weeks after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, but also at a time when many Americans were celebrating independence and freedom. In the midst of international outcries for racial justice, protests calling for widespread police reform, and a pandemic which highlighted glaring systemic inequalities, the Freedom Stories initiative opened its public discussion portion by questioning what “freedom” truly means and

exploring the historic and modern contexts of freedom for Black Appalachians. Much to our surprise, the online event reached over 300,000 people, with several hundred tuning in live. Clearly, we had struck a chord.

To date, over 252,000 people from at least 29 states and 12 countries have benefited from the twelve Freedom Stories discussions, either via the live streams as participants, from viewing recordings of the discussions, or having been panelists and being able to bring important narratives to light. Over one million people have been exposed to the Freedom Stories project, largely through social media, and while not all of these have viewed a discussion or performance, they are now aware that such information exists and is free for them to access. Project staff have also received inquiries both via email and comments on social media regarding future subject matter, resources, and possible plans for program continuation.

Beyond academia and the world of humanities, the Freedom Stories project has served to greatly improve public knowledge around previously unknown topics of Black heritage in Appalachia. Participants on social media were quick to share their views, largely positive, and even offer their own suggestions for continued education. Participants spoke of family ties to discussion subject matter, provided links to books and websites, and spoke of the value of the program. Such comments and suggestions demonstrate how storytelling events of this kind can be used to help facilitate difficult dialogues and create safe spaces for individuals and communities to gather and share their stories.

A few comments from Facebook viewers include:

- “When there is storytelling, there is story-listening, and we create the environment for unity across backgrounds, and embracing distinctive backgrounds.”
- “I’ve heard bits and pieces of [my grandmother’s] possible Melungeon heritage, but would like to know more.”
- “I just recently learned some of my West Virginia ancestors were slave owners. Did not expect that.”
- “I took several Appalachian studies classes in college and this content was not included. So interesting.”
- “If this subject interests you, pick up a copy of ‘The Hemingses of Monticello’ by Annette Gordon-Reed. The book won her the Pulitzer Prize for History and the National Book Award for Nonfiction. It is very revealing.”
- “Awesome discussion - helping me begin [to] understand as a white person the changes needed. Wonderful panel and amazing story telling by Mama Linda. Can’t wait for more discussions.”
- “This is fantastic. So many truths we have never heard.”
- “This has been a beautiful conversation and understanding of an important story! Thank you!”
- “Tim Reid has an amazing film ‘When We Were Colored’ that speaks to this [topic.]”
- “Thank you. This is such a valuable resource and an enjoyable learning experience.”
- “Love [that] you are researching these significant cultural pieces of American history.”
- “What you are describing now is Truth! So good to hear it verbalized so clearly.”
- “Thoroughly enjoying this discussion. Thank you, panelists. Grateful. Thank you ISC, National Endowment for the Humanities and all sponsors. Ase.”

(Please see [Appendix B](#) for collated data.)

Findings from the National Humanities Alliance

Of greatest note, is the social impact survey conducted in partnership with the National Humanities Alliance. Overall, responses strongly demonstrate that Freedom Stories has given participants the opportunity to learn about the history and diverse, rich cultures of the Appalachian region in a forum that felt approachable, personal, and supportive of learning. More specifically, survey results demonstrate that the programs: (1) fostered community pride for those from the region; (2) brought underrepresented histories to the forefront

and made space for participants to engage with them; (3) made historical connections to contemporary social issues; (4) encouraged reflection on identity; (5) created space for and confidence in having difficult conversations through storytelling; (6) offered a place for participants to connect with one another and the International Storytelling Center in light of physical distancing; and (7) encouraged continued learning about the region and cultural heritage. Findings of all survey respondents are as follows:

- *Respondents' Relationship to Appalachia:*
 - 34% of respondents reported familial ties to Appalachia
 - 25% live in Appalachia
 - 19% grew up in Appalachia
 - 54% of respondents were not from but had visited Appalachia
 - 8 respondents had never visited the area
- *Fostering Community Pride:*
 - 81% agreed they “take pride in the fact that this program is being held in [their] community.”
 - 80% agreed that “participating in this event enhanced [their] sense of connection to [their] community.”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - It provided some background and history on my region and the people in it.
 - Hearing from the panelists opened my understanding of a region I've called "home" my entire life. Their stories (especially Mama Goss!) were entertaining and relatable.
 - I liked hearing what resources are available for learning the true history of individuals like York and those who are not famous. It made me think that we can uncover the stories of our family members, our community's ancestors, our state's founding mothers and fathers.
 - I loved the stories, and the discussions were powerful and well presented. I felt increased pride in my home region just knowing that orgs like ISC were putting these topics on the table.
 - This furthered my knowledge of the role of Blacks in Appalachia; provokes more thought about the importance of Appalachia in my life. I currently live far away but would like to move "back home."
- *Bringing Underrepresented Histories to the Forefront:*
 - 87% agreed they “have a better sense of the stories that are missing from our popular depictions of Appalachia after participating in this program.”
 - 88% agreed they have a “better understand[ing of] Appalachia’s place in the American story.”
 - 87% agreed the program “helped [them] better understand the diversity of the Appalachian region.”
 - 74% said the program motivated them to “learn more about underrepresented histories in [their] own community.”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - I grew up in Appalachia, but both of these talks so far have presented information that was very new to me—much of it from within just a few miles of where I grew up and now live. For example, I was completely unaware of the tradition of Emancipation Saturday or the role that Greeneville, TN, played in this celebration until the August 8 discussion.
 - Black history has been excluded from history & Appalachian identity & those voices need to be amplified if we want to truly honor our Appalachian heritage.
 - [I learned about the] diverse nature of Appalachian culture: racial, cultural, economic, etc. [The] strongest message for me was the importance of recognizing that no group is monolithic.

- The fact that a man who was so important to the Lewis & Clark expedition has been excluded from American history made me think of the millions of other black people & voices who have been hidden away under the white supremacy that blankets the landscape of American history. It made me understand that it is my job to educate myself.
 - This program resurrected an important history many of us were never taught. Programs like this paint the fuller, truer picture of who we are and how we got here. These programs open the eyes of white people to the truths our black and brown kin have been living all along.
 - I have heard and enjoyed many storytellers, but this academic perspective really brought home that stories are so much more than entertainment. Really saw the value of oral history as storytelling, which I hadn't much thought about before. Left me wanting much more!
 - I'm a data scientist who has come to appreciate that the availability and legibility of information isn't neutral: we tend to have much more complete records about privileged folk (primarily white and male) compared to other groups. Storytelling is an important source of information and context, especially for people who weren't as closely (or accurately) represented in records and other histories, and I think this session really helped underscore that.
- *Making Historical Connections:*
 - 95% agreed they were “able to see connections between themes explored in this program and contemporary issues in our society.”
 - 71% were motivated to “learn more about racial justice in Appalachia.”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - Our current social climate is indicative of past history...descendants of enslaved people, Native Americans/indigenous people of color continue to be oppressed and suffer from [the lack of] access to the great American dream.
 - The continuation of the misrepresentation and exclusion of black historical figures from our understanding of history and the inequities that still exist in acknowledging the contributions and importance of people of color. Specifically the ongoing racism, but yet denial of it, by those who want to excuse their behavior and justify their inaction.
 - I think that there are huge racial divides in our country right now because many people have not been properly educated on the brutalities of slavery & racism in America & Appalachia. We are still dealing with the repercussions of that time in history within our culture today due to that lack of education & willingness to learn about a topic that is so painful & complex. This helps to bridge that divide because it provides a resource for people to be able to learn more about slavery & the stories of enslaved people. It gives us a chance to see how the lost & hidden stories of those people affect the world we live in today.
- *Reflecting on Identity:*
 - 72% agreed “this program helped [them] think more deeply about what it means to be Appalachian.”
 - 96% agreed “it is important that we collectively explore the stories of Black Appalachia.”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - I feel that it addressed the importance of listening to Black voices. It also highlighted how Black stories have been excluded from our history, which contributes to the idea of white supremacy & other misunderstandings about the founding and shaping of both our nation and the Appalachian region.

- [This program] expand[ed] my awareness of experience so different from that of my white privileged upbringing.
- *Creating Space for and Confidence in Difficult Conversations Through Storytelling:*
 - 95% agreed that they “have a greater appreciation for the role of storytelling in our society.”
 - 91% agreed they “have a greater sense of the value of listening to stories.”
 - 93% felt motivated to “listen to the stories of people whose backgrounds are different from [their] own.”
 - 82% agreed they “feel more confident taking part in thoughtful discussions about race.”
 - 72% agreed they “feel more confident taking part in thoughtful discussions about Appalachia.”
 - 70% felt motivated to “be a part of dialogues around racial justice.”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - Storytelling is an important part of my culture as an Appalachian. My grandfather never learned to read or write, but he told fantastic stories that I will some day tell my own child. These programs link us to the past, hold information, and allow for exploring narratives on a larger scale.
 - One can list statistics and give lectures, but Storytelling brings us listeners right into the time and experience of those living the stories. Definitely a more powerful and effective experience. We are no longer one step removed from the experience or the ramifications of our societal policies, laws or events. Instead we are LIVING that experience and those ramifications. Only by hearing these stories can we truly understand each other's experiences and lives. Only then can we truly understand and FEEL strongly enough to affect change.
 - It opens up dialogue. Storytelling is an excellent tool for gaining someone's attention and getting them to listen. The ability to listen is the first key step in communication.
 - We need to take time to see from one another's eyes, to imagine other experiences and perspectives. Storytelling is one of the most powerful ways to give us this experience.
 - I think the idea for this program is fascinating, and marked important work which needed to be done. Given the current cultural climate and the increasing importance of movements like Black Lives Matter, conversations such as these are paramount. It is vital that we learn to speak openly and honestly with one another, engage in difficult discussions around complex topics, and value one another's experiences even when (especially when) those experiences are far different from our own.
 - Programs such as these allow us to grapple with difficult truths in relatable ways, and help break down barriers of ignorance and fear, especially when it comes to discussing topics such as race and ethnicity in America.
- *Connection with Others and Appreciation for the International Storytelling Center:*
 - 91% agreed they “appreciated the time to connect with others during this time of physical distancing.”
 - 49% said they were motivated to “visit the International Storytelling Center”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - Because my attention span can be short, I greatly appreciated that this was a collection of speakers. We were able to cover a significant amount of material containing info on resources available today, history of individuals whose lives intersected with Appalachia, teaching practices, and much more.
 - Even though the program was virtual, I felt as if I was right there. It was an intimate and powerful experience. I felt very much immersed in the stories.
 - This was my first experience with the Center and I am now greatly motivated to participate in future programs. It was an enlightening experience and greatly appreciated during this time of great crises. Thank you.

- I already strongly believed in the value of listening to stories and have attended festivals and programs for many years. [...] I am very impressed with the broadening of program content to embrace more diversity.
- *Encouraging Continued Learning and Sharing:*
 - 73% said they would “participate in other storytelling events in the future.”
 - 55% said they were motivated to “visit other cultural institutions.”
 - 77% said they would “share programs like this one with friends/family.”
 - 44% were motivated to “learn more about [their] own cultural heritage.”
 - 32% were motivated to “share their own stories.”
 - 98% agreed that “humanities programs like this one enrich our society.”
 - In open-ended questions, respondents wrote:
 - I continue to think about what I learned during this program and ordered one of the mentioned books.
 - It was valuable in helping me realize that as I learn, I also need to teach my children & the people around me, because knowledge like this is useless if it isn’t being shared. I don’t want my children to grow up learning the whitewashed version of history like I did & resources like these are truly invaluable places in helping to learn more.
 - They allow us to share in the human story and build community together. Humanities programs are essential for developing a better understanding of the human experience and to engage in conversation with one another meaningfully.
 - [These programs] break down barriers, educationally teaches the truth in engaging ways that people can relate to, understand and accept. Through the understanding there is potential for real change in negative attitudes. It is a great educational tool for everyone! It can encourage young people to know their history and take positive actions to end discrimination. It gives people of the region pride.
 - If we are to live up to the motto, "E Pluribus Unum", we have to hold space for every voice, especially those voices that have gone unheard or don't fit the typical American narrative. Programs like this amplify the voices we need to hear most if we are to fully realize unity with diversity.

Such data and comments demonstrate the increased public knowledge surrounding this project’s work, which will hopefully lead to changing practices around racial equality and improving social, economic, and civic conditions for all People of Color.

Appendices

Appendix A: Panelist Biographies

“Do Black Lives Matter in Appalachia?”

Freedom Stories Online Public Discussion July 3, 2020 1-2:30 p.m. EST

Panelists



Mama Linda Goss

National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellow;
Co-Founder and Former President, National Association of
Black Storytellers (NABS)

[NEA Heritage Fellow](#)

[National Association of Black Storytellers](#)

Born in Alcoa, TN, currently, Mama Linda Goss is the storyteller ambassador for the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore, MD and the storyteller-in-residence at the Peale Center. Named the 2019 National Heritage Fellow, Goss is known nationally. In 2019, Goss was honored by the American Folklore Society which hosted a forum entitled, “Black Storytelling and Cultural Preservation: The Legacy of Mama Linda Goss.” “Well, Oh Well, Oh Well. It’s Storytelling Time!” is her recognized legendary call. As a forerunner of the Black Storytelling Movement in America during the 1970s, she rang her bells and told her stories on the streets of Washington, DC and Philadelphia. As a community folklorist and activist, she believes “Black Storytelling is a combination of the oral, the written, and the rhythms of our people. It bends, it curves, not separating spirit from the art.”

In 1982, Mother Mary Carter Smith (1919-2007) and Goss founded the “In the Tradition...” Annual National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference in Baltimore. The co-founders understood the need to institute an organizational structure to perpetuate African diasporic storytelling and began the Association for Black Storytellers in 1984 in Philadelphia, which developed into the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS). The annual festival continues today and has taken place in communities across the United States.

Goss is the author of seven books, including co-editing *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African-American Storytelling* with Marian E. Barnes and with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Significant works appear in other anthologies, and she has two albums of storytelling with Smithsonian Folkways.

Next generation storytellers across the country continue to benefit from Goss’s mentorship and oral history projects. She has been awarded master/apprenticeship fellowships with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and twice received the Maryland Traditions Apprenticeship Award. She also developed *How We Got Over*, a project of the Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture funded by Maryland Traditions to conduct interviews with Baltimore storytellers about their school experiences.



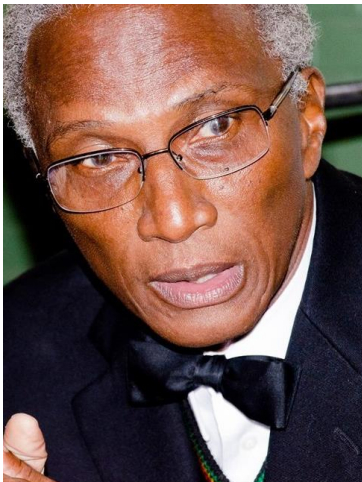
Darin J. Waters, PhD

University of North Carolina – Asheville

www.DarinWaters.com

Dr. Darin J. Waters is an Associate Professor of History and Director of Community Engagement at the University of North Carolina at Asheville where he teaches courses in American history, North Carolina History, Appalachian History, African American and Brazilian History. He also specializes in the history of race relations in both the United States and Latin America.

Dr. Waters received his doctorate from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2012. Dr. Waters' research focuses on the history of African Americans in Asheville and Western North Carolina. More recently, Dr. Waters has written about issues surrounding the construction of the nation's collective historical memory, exploring the impact that that memory has on the present. In his role as Special Assistant to the Chancellor of UNC Asheville, Dr. Waters works closely with community leaders and organizations to strengthen old and build new partnerships for and with the university. For the past three years, he has successfully organized three major conferences on the history of African Americans in Western North Carolina and Southern Appalachia. The conference has grown to become a major annual event for the university. Dr. Waters is also the co-host of The Waters and Harvey Show, a weekly radio program that airs on WCQS the local NPR/Public radio station in Asheville.



William H. Turner, PhD

Retired Distinguished Professor of Black and Appalachian Studies, Berea College

[Appalachian African American Cultural Center](http://AppalachianAfricanAmericanCulturalCenter)

www.WHTurnerPhd.com

Harlan County, KY Native, consultant to non-profits serving marginalized communities, and Director of Education for the Appalachian African American Cultural Center, Bill is the fifth of ten children, born in 1946 in the coal town of Lynch, Kentucky. His grandfathers, father, four uncles and older brother were coal miners.

Bill has spent his professional career studying and working on behalf of marginalized communities, helping them create opportunities in the larger world while not abandoning their important cultural ties. He is best-known for his ground-breaking research on African-American communities in Appalachia, but Bill's work is universal. As an academic and a consultant, he has studied economic systems and social structures in the urban South and burgeoning Latino communities in the Southwest. What he strives for on behalf of his clients and their communities is what we all want: prosperity, understanding and respect.

- Co-edited the path-breaking textbook *Blacks in Appalachia* and thematic essays on Black Appalachians in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, and the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*.
- Research associate (1979-1991) to *Roots* author Alex Haley, who said, "*Bill knows more about black people in the mountains of the South than anyone in the world.*"
- Chair, Department of Social Sciences, Winston-Salem State University.
- Center for the Study of Civil Rights & Race Relations, Duke University. Ford Foundation-sponsored post-doctoral fellow. John Hope Franklin, Adviser.

- Formerly Dean of Arts and Sciences and Interim President, Kentucky State University, Vice President for Multicultural Affairs, University of Kentucky; and, Distinguished Professor of Appalachian Studies and Regional Ambassador at Berea College.
- At the time of his retirement in late 2017, Turner was Research Scientist Leader at the Prairie View A&M University College of Agriculture and Human Sciences, where he led the collection and analysis of data on underserved Texans, the economically insecure, and long-term impoverished.



Sandra Weissinger, PhD

Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville

[Faculty Bio](#)

[Book List](#)

Dr. Weissinger is Associate Professor of Sociology at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. She also currently serves as Director for the Department of Sociology Graduate Program at Southern Illinois University where she was awarded the 2018 Emerson Teaching Award, Saint Louis, Missouri; and the 2018 recipient of the Teaching Excellence Award, Faculty Development Council, Southern Illinois University. Dr. Weissinger is an author, editor, and sought-after lecturer on issues of Race, Class and Gender in American society.

Dr. Sandra E. Weissinger is an internationally recognized scholar in the areas of inequality and violence. Specifically, her work seeks to uncover the various ways racism and inequality have usurped every aspect of society and important societal institutions. Though she uncovers the grim realities of our times, her work is not without hope. People make institutions. Therefore, people can change the marginalizing practices which shackle us all and leave us limited, wanting, and unable to reach our highest potentials.



Alona Norwood

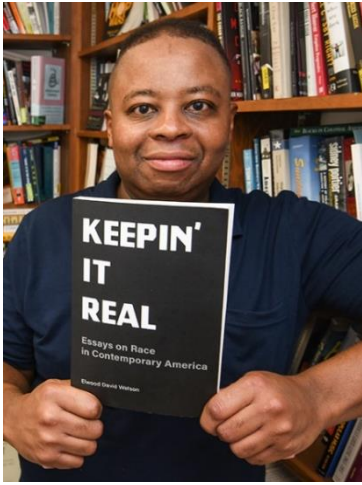
2020 Berea College Peace and Social Justice Major,
Community Activist

[New Generation Freedom Fighters](#)

Alona Norwood, 21, was born in Elizabethton, TN. Alona currently resides in Johnson City, TN where she is active in community protests and continues her work with several grassroots organizations as a member of *The New Generation Freedom Fighters*. Alona grew up as the epitome of blackness, often as the only black student in classes or as a member of sports teams. She used her many hours of free time reading fiction to escape her feelings of isolation in the mountains. Upon attending Berea College, the first integrated, co-educational college in the South, Alona found her identity as an Afrolachian woman. Her

classes challenged her and allowed her to break free of preconceived mental chains.

Graduating from Berea College with her undergraduate degree in Peace and Social Justice, Alona's work as a community activist seeks racial and economic justice which require police and community reforms in the Tennessee Tri-City area. *New Generation Freedom Fighters* work directly with local leaders, which include Johnson City Mayor Jenny Brock and Johnson City Chief of Police Karl Turner, to make communities in the Tennessee Tri-City region safer and more inclusive for all Tennessee residents.



Elwood Watson, PhD

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City

[Keepin' It Real](#)

Dr. Elwood Watson is Professor of History, Gender Studies and African American Studies. He has published numerous articles about race, gender, higher education, popular culture and American culture in national newspapers and magazines and is a blogger for *Diverse Education*, *Huffington Post*, *The Good Men Project*, *X/Y Online*, *The Black Past.org*, *Medium.com*, *New York Times*, *The North Star*, *Seattle Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *US News and World Report* and others. He has served as guest editor for a special issue of *Masculinity in the 21st Century*, and *Interactions: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* (Spring 2016).

He is the author of several books, including: *Outsiders Within: Black Women in the Legal Academy After Brown v. Board* (Rowman and Littlefield) and *Understanding the Humanities* (Kendall Hunt, 2014). *Race in America: Critical Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 2019) and *Today's Man: essays on 21st Century Masculinity* (Connection Victory Publishers, 2019). His edited collections include *Performing American Masculinities: The 21st Century Man in Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2011) *Pimps, Wimps, Studs: Thugs and Gentlemen: Essays on Media Images of Masculinity* (McFarland, 2009), *The Oprah Phenomenon* (University Press of Kentucky, 2007), *Searching the Soul of Ally McBeal: Critical Essays* (McFarland, 2006), and *There She Is, Miss America: The Politics of Sex, Beauty and Race in America's Most Famous Pageant* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), *Mentoring Faculty of Color: Essays on Professional Development and Advancement in Colleges and Universities* (McFarland, 2012) *Generation X Professors Speak: Voices From Academia* (Scarecrow Press, 2013), *Overcoming Adversity in Academia: Stories From Generation X Professors*, (University Press of America, 2014 and *Beginning a Career in Academia: A Guide For Graduate Students of Color* (Routledge Press, 2015). *HBO Girls: The Awkward Politics of Gender, Race and Privilege* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2015) and *Violence Against Black Bodies: An Intersectional Analysis of How Black Lives Continue to Matter* (Routledge Press, 2017).

“Emancipation Saturday: An Appalachian Tradition”

Freedom Stories Online Public Discussion August 8, 2020 1-2:30 p.m. EST

Panelists



Cicero M. Fain, PhD

Assistant Professor of History, Southern Maryland University

[Black Huntington: An Appalachian Story](#)

Dr. Fain is a third-generation black Huntingtonian. He is the recipient of the Carter G. Woodson Fellowship from Marshall University and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in History from The Ohio State University. His teaching career includes positions at Marshall, Niagara University, and his current position as professor at the College of Southern Maryland as a faculty member and member of the Male Student of Color Mentee Program. He has authored several articles in peer-reviewed journals, including “Buffalo Soldier, Deserter, Criminal: The Remarkably Complicated Life of Charles Ringo,” in the *Ohio Valley Journal*, which is his current book project. His first book, *Black Huntington: An Appalachian Story*, was published in May 2019 by the University of Illinois Press. Fain has also been a contributing historian to: “It’s Time to Talk about West Virginia’s Slaves,” by Nicholas Brumfield, *Expatalachians*, January 29, 2019, <http://expatalachians.com/its-time-to-talk-about-west-virginias-slaves>. Reviewer, “The African Blood Brotherhood in the West Virginia Coalfields,” *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies*, April 2018. Reviewer, “Reading ‘The Storer Record:’ Education, Race, and John Brown in the Storer College Newspaper,” *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies*, January 2017.



Jasmine Henderson

Spoken Word Artist

[Umoja](#)

Jasmine Henderson serves as a board member and recording secretary for Umoja Unity Committee, a nonprofit organization focused on bridging diverse cultures through education and artistic presentations in East Tennessee. As a board member, Henderson has produced events and campaigns dedicated to celebrating diversity through education and artistic performance. A prolific community organizer and spoken word artist, Henderson has produced events and campaigns dedicated to celebrating diversity in Appalachia and beyond, helping to raise funds for the “Water for Flint” crisis and work with the NAACP. Most recently, she has partnered with the 400 Years of African American History Commission to develop a series entitled “An Evening with Our Elders,” a dinner conversation featuring local notable elders and their stories. Jasmine states, “I am hopeful that this project will encourage a much deeper appreciation of the diversity of Appalachia and the important role African Americans have played in American history. Henderson acknowledges the International Storytelling Center Freedom Stories Project is capable of helping connect African Americans in Appalachia realize with a larger American legacy.”

Henderson is supported in her community work by the Langston Education and Arts Development Centre (LEAD) where she has also performed as a spoken-word artist and community activist. As a spoken-word artist, Henderson has also performed at LEAD, the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville, North Carolina, the Yarn Exchange Radio Show in Jonesborough and several events at Eastern Tennessee State University. Jasmine is the daughter of Elizabethton, TN native, Bonnie Henderson and the twin of Jessica Henderson. While she was born and raised in Hampton, VA, she accredits Johnson City and former Washington County NAACP President, Ralph Davis for birthing her dedication to community action. She is still blooming and hopes to help others bloom as well.



William Isom, II

Director of Community Outreach, East Tennessee PBS

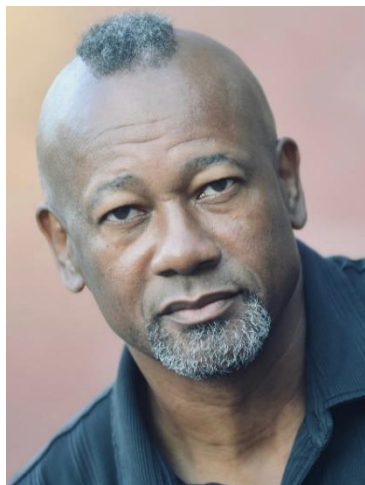
[Black in Appalachia](#)

William Isom II is a 6th generation East Tennessean and Director of Community Outreach at East Tennessee PBS in Knoxville. As the director of Black in Appalachia Project for PBS, he coordinates the project's research, community database development, documentary film & photography production, oral history collection and educational events in conjunction with local residents. He is also the proud father of two boys, Devin & Isa. In his role of Director of Community Outreach, he teaches an after-school media training program with Knoxville high school students (PBS Newshour's Smoky Mountain Youth Media), hosts free community screenings of Independent Lens documentaries, produces and directs short historical films under "Blacks in Appalachia Films." That documentary series is aimed at preserving and raising up the narratives of Black history and culture in Central Appalachia.

“What You Don’t Know (But Should) About Appalachian Slavery”

Freedom Stories Online Public Discussion September 5, 2020 1-2:30 p.m. EST

Panelists



Frank X Walker

Poet/Professor, University of Kentucky – Lexington

www.FrankXWalker.com

A native of Danville, Kentucky, Frank X Walker is the first African American writer to be named Kentucky Poet Laureate. Walker has published ten collections of poetry, including *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*, which was awarded an NAACP Image Award for Poetry and the Black Caucus American Library Association Honor Award for Poetry. His honors also include a Lannan Literary Fellowship for Poetry, the Denny C. Plattner Award for Outstanding Poetry in Appalachian Heritage, and the West Virginia Humanities Council’s Appalachian Heritage Award. He is also the author of *Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York*, winner of the Lillian Smith Book Award, and *Isaac Murphy: I Dedicate This Ride*, which he adapted for stage. His poetry was also dramatized for the Contemporary American Theater Festival in Shepherdstown, WV. Walker coined the term Affrilachia and co-founded the Affrilachian Poets, whose story is documented in the film *Coal Black Voices*. The founding editor of *pluck! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*, Walker serves as Professor of English and African American and Africana Studies at the University of Kentucky in Lexington.



Ilene Evans, MA

Voices from the Earth

Voices from the Earth

www.Ilene-Evans.com

Ilene Evans, M.A., is an inspired storyteller, performer and scholar who weaves music, poetry, dance and drama, to bring history alive. Ms. Evans creates and presents storytelling/theater programs and workshops/seminars that inform, educate and entertain audiences young and old. She has toured extensively across the US and internationally with her historical and original works. In 2009, Ms. Evans worked with staff from the US State Department to tour to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Columbia to share African American history and culture through arts, education, literature, and music. In 2015 she travelled to Ghana, and in 2018 to Marwa, Tanzania. She has received the Foundation of Freedom Award from Wheeling Jesuit University for her outstanding work. She is a Chautauqua scholar, developing presentations of historical women who have contributed significantly to African American culture; selected by the United States Embassy to share her work in the history and culture of African Americans, Ms. Evans’ historical storytelling presentations include Harriet Tubman, Memphis Tennessee Garrison, Carrie Williams, Coralie Franklin Cook, Ethel Waters, Bessie Coleman, and Eslanda Robeson, and Elizabeth Catlett.



Dinah Mayo-Bobee, PhD

Associate Professor, East Tennessee State University

Dinah Mayo-Bobee is an Associate Professor of history at East Tennessee State University. She began developing and teaching college-level courses in 2002 and earned a Ph.D. in History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2007. Dr. Mayo-Bobee's research focus is the early republic producing the book *New England Federalists: Widening the Sectional Divide in Jeffersonian America* (2017), as well as articles in *The New England Quarterly* and *Slavery and Abolition*. She has been teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at East Tennessee State University since 2011.



Anne G'Fellers-Mason, MA, MFA

Executive Director, Heritage Alliance of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia

[Heritage Alliance](#)

www.AnneGFellersMasonAuthor.com

Anne G'Fellers-Mason is the Executive Director of the Heritage Alliance of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. She has worked for the nonprofit for over ten years. Anne has a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and History from Mars Hill University, a Master of Arts in History from East Tennessee State University, and a Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting from Hollins University. She puts her research and writing skills to use to craft original, history-based plays for the Heritage Alliance that are presented in schools, museums, and even in the Old

Jonesborough Cemetery. Her cemetery play "A Spot on the Hill" has been held in the historic cemetery every year since 2014.

When she's not researching or writing history, she publishes short stories and novels that are set in the Appalachian region. Her first novel *The Summer Between* was published in 2018 by Mountain Gap Books. She also has two, short stories included in *Haints and Hollers: New Ghost Tales from Appalachia*. Two of her ten-minute plays have been published in anthologies by YouthPLAYS. Anne lives in Jonesborough, TN with her spouse and their three energetic cats.

“Stories of the Underground Railroad”

Freedom Stories Online Public Discussion October 1, 2020 1-2:30 p.m.

Livestreamed to National Storytelling Festival registrants and Facebook viewers.

Panelist



Reverend Robert B. Jones, Sr.

Singer, Songwriter, Educator

Reverend Robert Jones, Sr. is a native Detroiter and an inspirational storyteller and musician celebrating the history, humor and power of American Roots music. His deep love for traditional African American and American traditional music is shared in live performances that interweave timeless stories with original and traditional songs. Reverend Jones has been performing for more than thirty years, entertaining and educating audiences of all ages in schools, colleges, libraries, union halls, prisons, churches and civil rights organizations across the nation. At the heart of his message is the belief that our cultural diversity tells a story that should celebrate, not just tolerate.

“Melungeon: The Criminalization of Race”

Freedom Stories Online Public Discussion November 7, 2020 1-2:30 p.m.

Panelists



Lynette Ford

Storyteller & Spoken Word Artist

[Lyn Ford, Storyteller](#)

[Live from the 2017 National Storytelling Festival](#)

Lynette (Lyn) Ford is a fourth-generation storyteller, author and teaching artist. Her work is rooted in the gifts of her Affrilachian family's heritage of folktales and personal stories. Lyn's first two collections of those stories, *Affrilachian Tales* and *Beyond the Briar Patch*, are both winners of Anne Izard Storytellers' Choice Awards. Lyn's work has taken her to schools and conferences, correctional facilities and women's retreats, from her home in Ohio across the United States, to Australia and Ireland, and around the Zoomiverse to Germany, Singapore and South Korea.

For almost 30 years, Lyn has provided stories for libraries and schools, keynote and closing presentations, workshops at universities, education and literacy conferences, and featured programs at some of the most prestigious storytelling conferences and festivals in the United States, Australia and Ireland. Thanks to Zoom, Lyn has also spoken for an environmental gathering in Berlin, Germany, and the "Ain't I a Woman" retreat for survivors of domestic violence in Maryland.



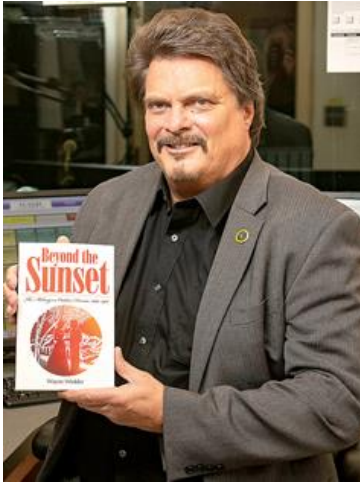
Anthony Mayle, M.Ed., CRC, ABD

Assistant Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Marietta College

[Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#)

Tony Mayle was born and raised as part of a Morgan County, Ohio Melungeon community which has existed in the Morgan County area over several generations. He is a first-generation high school graduate, and is currently finishing his doctorate in counselor education, from Ohio University. Involved in genealogy as a means of aiding people in finding themselves, using the teachings of the elders. He is the proud father of two beautiful teenage girls, who love discussing family history.

Over the years Tony has remained active in the Morgan County community as a member of the Multicultural Genealogical Center which operates a history center and has actively worked to preserve Morgan County's history of involvement in the Underground Railroad. Mayle continues to support the work of Marietta, Ohio public historian Henry Burke by inspiring and celebrating diversity and multicultural history throughout Southeast Ohio. Mayle spreads knowledge he has gained from the elders and his own personal experiences by assisting as a guide, holding community lectures and discussions, mentoring and writing to educate the masses on African American culture and heritage. He does all this with the goal of working to create an environment of equality and significance of life, aimed at liberating minds.



Wayne Winkler

Author, Director, WETS-FM East Tennessee State University
[WETS-FM](#)

In addition to serving as director of ETSU's public radio station, Wayne Winkler is the author of two books, his first, *Walking Toward the Sunset: The Melungeons of Appalachia* and *Beyond the Sunset: The Melungeon Outdoor Drama, 1969-1976*. Both books are published by Mercer University Press. Fifty years ago, residents of an impoverished county in East Tennessee staged an outdoor drama. They had no experience in any aspect of show business, their county was in a remote mountainous area far from major highways, and many of their fellow citizens objected to the subject of the play. But the show went on anyway. "This is the story of a community that wouldn't give up," says Winkler.

"It seemed like they had nothing going for them; everyone they turned to for help thought they were a lost cause. But they pulled together, used what they had available to them, and tried to make things better."

The play about Melungeons written about by Winkler in *Walking Toward the Sunset*, was controversial in Hancock County. Some county residents didn't want to call attention to the presence of this mixed-race community. A bomb threat kept volunteers up all night guarding the newly built amphitheater before the play opened. And only a few residents believed that paying customers would make the journey over narrow, twisting mountain roads to the amphitheater in Sneedville, the county seat. In *Beyond the Sunset*, Winkler uses contemporary press reports, long-forgotten documents, and interviews with participants to chronicle the struggles of an impoverished rural Appalachian county to maintain its viability in the modern world – and the unexpected consequences of that effort.

“Jim Crow Appalachia: Slavery by Another Name”

Freedom Stories Online Public Discussion January 9, 2021 1-2:30 p.m. EST

Panelists



Mitchell Capel

Storyteller and Spoken Word Artist

www.gjbug.com

Under the stage name of “Gran’daddy Junebug”, a character created for young folks, Mitchell calls his style of storytelling “sto’etry” because the majority of his stories are in rhyme. For the past 36 years this award-winning artist has traveled both nationally and internationally performing his different one man shows, from historical to inspirational, at schools, libraries, festivals and thousands of other venues. He has been featured at The Smithsonian’s Folklife Festival, The National Association of Black Storytellers Festival (NABS), The Kennedy Center, The National Storytelling Festival (NSF), Timpanogas Storytelling Festival and the first Inauguration of President Barack Obama. At

his first attempt of “Stand-Up Comedy”, Mitchell won “Showtime At The Apollo” hosted by Steve Harvey who said, “That man right there was funny! Y’all’s ass was hollering! He made me laugh!”

Mitchell attended North Carolina A&T State and Howard Universities studying Speech and Theater. His stage credits include, but are not limited to: “And Then Came Tomorrow”, “To Kill A Mockingbird” and “Driving Miss Daisy”. He has several one man shows, “W’en Dey ‘Listed”, “Our Story”, “Dunbar Lives”, just to name a few. His two-man, multi-media play, (which he wrote and directed), “The Color of Courage” has garnered critical acclaim for the honor it brings to the unsung heroes of African descent who participated in the Union Army.

Mitchell is the recipient of numerous recognitions and awards including The Zora Neale Hurston Award, (the highest honor given by NABS) as well as awards for his work with his community and the youth. He is the co-founder of The African American Storytellers Retreat, past board member of NABS and currently serves on the board of directors for The Boys & Girls Club and St. Joseph’s of The Pines Hospital.



Steven Nash, PhD

Associate Professor, East Tennessee State University

[Reconstruction's Ragged Edge](#)

Steven Nash is an associate professor of history at East Tennessee State University. He earned his master's degree in history from Western Carolina University in 2001 and his PhD from the University of Georgia in 2009. He is the author of *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge: The Politics of Postwar Life in the Mountain South* (2016), which received the Weatherford Award for Nonfiction from Berea College and the Appalachian Studies Association. He also serves as president of the Mountain History and Culture Group, a non-profit support group for the Zebulon B. Vance Birthplace State Historic Site in Weaverville, North Carolina.

“Profit and Power: Company Towns and the Exploitation of Appalachia”

Freedom Stories Public Discussion Saturday, February 13, 2021 1-2:30 p.m. EST

Panelists



Rhonda and Sparky Rucker

Storytellers, Musicians, and Recording Artists

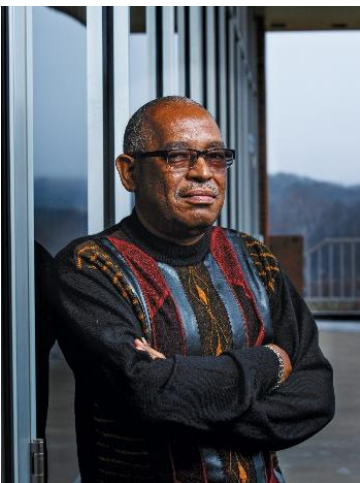
www.SparkyAndRhonda.com

[Live at the Mystic Sea Music Festival 2017](#)

Sparky and Rhonda Rucker deliver uplifting presentations of toe-tapping songs spiced with humor, history, and tall tales. Their music includes a variety of old-time blues, Appalachian music, slave songs, and spirituals as well as originals, and they accompany themselves with fingerstyle picking and bottleneck blues guitar, old-time banjo, blues harmonica, piano, spoons, and bones.

Sparky's research on the African-American ballad tradition culminated in the highly acclaimed recording, *Heroes and Hard Times*. Rhonda is an author, and her third book, *Welcome to Bombingham*, is a historical novel set against the backdrop of the Birmingham Children's March during the civil rights movement.

Over several decades of performing, Sparky and Rhonda have performed at the Kennedy Center and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival as well as NPR's *On Point*, *Prairie Home Companion*, *Mountain Stage*, and *Morning Edition*. Their recording, *Treasures & Tears*, was nominated for a W.C. Handy Award, and their music is also included on the Grammy-nominated anthology, *Singing Through the Hard Times*. The duo's most recent recording is *Down by the Riverside*.



Andrew Baskin, MA

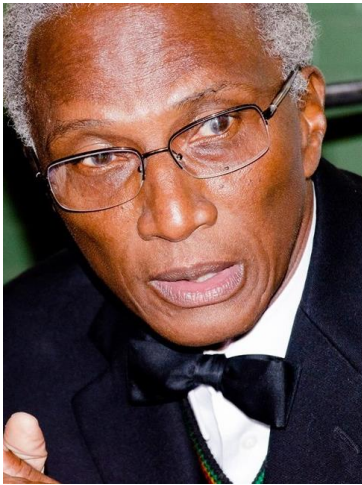
Adjunct Professor, Simmons College of Kentucky

[Simmons College of Kentucky](#)

Andrew Baskin is an Adjunct Professor at Kentucky's only HBCU, Simmons College of Kentucky in Louisville, teaching Western Civilization and African American History courses.

Baskin has taught General Studies core courses required of first-year students and African American Studies courses throughout most of his career, in addition to directing African and African American Studies programs. He received his M.A. in American History from Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia and a B.A. in History from Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.

He served as editor of *The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies*, official organ of the Southern Conference of African American Studies, 1986 to 2018 and is a former member of the Lincoln Foundation Board of Trustees for two different terms and former member and Chairperson of the Kentucky Humanities Council. He currently serves as Chairperson of the Publishing Board of the General Association of Baptist in Kentucky, since 2015.



William H. Turner, PhD

Retired Distinguished Professor of Black and Appalachian Studies, Berea College

[Appalachian African American Cultural Center](#)

www.WHTurnerPhd.com

Harlan County, KY Native, consultant to non-profits serving marginalized communities, and Director of Education for the Appalachian African American Cultural Center, Bill is the fifth of ten children, born in 1946 in the coal town of Lynch, Kentucky. His grandfathers, father, four uncles and older brother were coal miners.

Bill has spent his professional career studying and working on behalf of marginalized communities, helping them create opportunities in the larger world while not abandoning their important cultural ties. He is best-known for his ground-breaking research on African-American communities in Appalachia, but Bill's work is universal. As an academic and a consultant, he has studied economic systems and social structures in the urban South and burgeoning Latino communities in the Southwest. What he strives for on behalf of his clients and their communities is what we all want: prosperity, understanding and respect.

- Co-edited the path-breaking textbook *Blacks in Appalachia* and thematic essays on Black Appalachians in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, and the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*.
- Research associate (1979-1991) to *Roots* author Alex Haley, who said, "*Bill knows more about black people in the mountains of the South than anyone in the world.*"
- Chair, Department of Social Sciences, Winston-Salem State University.
- Center for the Study of Civil Rights & Race Relations, Duke University. Ford Foundation-sponsored post-doctoral fellow. John Hope Franklin, Adviser.
- Formerly Dean of Arts and Sciences and Interim President, Kentucky State University, Vice President for Multicultural Affairs, University of Kentucky; and, Distinguished Professor of Appalachian Studies and Regional Ambassador at Berea College.
- At the time of his retirement in late 2017, Turner was Research Scientist Leader at the Prairie View A&M University College of Agriculture and Human Sciences, where he led the collection and analysis of data on underserved Texans, the economically insecure, and long-term impoverished.

“Separate but Equal? Race-based Bias in Education”

Freedom Stories Public Discussion Saturday, March 13, 2021 1-2:30 p.m. EST

Panelists



Bobby Norfolk

Award Winning Storyteller, Author

www.BobbyNorfolk.com

Bobby grew up a shy child in North St. Louis with a debilitating stutter. Son of an elevator operator and confectionery clerk, Norfolk's future was hazy as a poor black kid surrounded by violence and gangs in the inner city. As a youth, Bobby wondered “What could a discouraged kid from the low-rent blocks of St. Louis do with the rest of his life?” Norfolk's path toward storytelling and success began in 1961 when he suddenly overcame his stutter when performing in a fourth-grade poetry recital. From that moment, his teachers helped him grow both as an individual and a performer. “They saw things in me I didn't see in myself, which is the mark of a master teacher, to see inside the

student with low self-esteem (who) hasn't found his or her gifts,” Norfolk said in a recent interview. His teachers put him in drama class, glee club, poetry recitals and talent shows. “Whenever I performed, I wouldn't stutter,” he said.

His career began as a stand-up comedian in 1975 at local St. Louis comedy clubs and as an actor with *The St. Louis Black Repertory Company*. Concurrently, he worked ten years at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis as a National Park Service Ranger. In 1979, Bobby made his first appearance as a storyteller at the St. Louis Storytelling Festival, and discovered that through storytelling he was able to combine his theatre and stand-up comedy background to become a “story-performer.” Along the way, he discovered the human brain is just naturally hardwired for storytelling.” In television, Bobby won three Emmy awards as the host of the CBS TV show “Gator Tales” and also hosted the Emmy nominated series “Children's Theater at Bobby's House.” Both shows were based out of St. Louis and promoted themes of character education, literacy, and storytelling.

Many people describe Bobby as an adventure story come to life! His high energy performances combine lively animation, unique sound effects, amazing facial expressions and laugh out loud humor to engage, entertain and educate audiences of all ages. His performances promote literacy, cultural diversity, living history, music and character education. Truly, Bobby is a gift for your imagination!



Adam Dickson, MPA

Supervisor, Langston Centre

Langston Centre

Adam Dickson was raised in Washington County, Tennessee, graduating from David Crockett High School. He went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Carson-Newman University and then his Masters of Public Administration from East Tennessee State University. Adam Dickson is a relationship manager and servant-leader with professional experiences in local government, community development, higher education and the nonprofit sector.

Adam currently works for Johnson City, TN as Supervisor of the Langston Centre (Langston), a facility promoting multicultural awareness through community arts, education, and leadership. Langston sits on the site of the former Langston High School, Johnson City, TN's segregated black high school from 1893-1965. Langston seeks to accomplish three objectives. First, the preservation of memories of the alumni of Langston High School that celebrates Johnson City's African-American experience. Second, Langston creates artistic and educational programs to enable students to learn, have fun, and develop necessary life skills. Third, Langston serves as a "community hub" for innovative ideas that address serious social problems and promote community engagement.

Adam has previously served as Chair of the Washington County Democratic Party. He was instrumental in organizing the community when the NAACP and other members of the black community asked the leaders of Johnson City to rename a street, or designate a memorial highway, in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When city's Planning Commission voted on a decision against the NAACP and the community's wishes, Adam made sure a coalition of support was present at the city planning meeting and the city commission meeting. His leadership was pivotal in getting University Parkway in Johnson City designated as a memorial highway in honor of Dr. King.



Adam Velk, MA

Director, Green McAdoo Cultural Center

[Green McAdoo Cultural Center](#)

Adam Velk is the Director for the Green McAdoo Cultural Center, a nonprofit organization devoted to honoring and telling the history of the Clinton 12; the first students to desegregate a state-run school in Tennessee. He is currently creating projects at the GMCC that offer high school students opportunities to get first-hand experiences and mentorships in museum work, educate patrons on food inequality and culinary injustices, and focus on bringing community together.

A transplant from the Chicago, Velk received his bachelor's degree in History from the University of Hartford and his master's degree in Public History at the University of Illinois, Springfield. He has worked for organizations such as the Adler Planetarium, the Central Illinois African American Museum, the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, the White House's National Christmas Tree, and Padre Island National Seashore. He has presented his work, "Into the Trenches: The Effectiveness of African American Lead Violence in the Civil Rights Movement Pre-1966." He was awarded the Donley's Wild West Town 2011, "Cowboy of the Year."

“Out-Migration: Spreading Appalachia Abroad”

Freedom Stories Public Discussion Saturday, April 10, 2021 1-2:30 p.m. EDT

Panelists



Omopé Carter-Daboiku

Wordsmith and Storyteller

An Appalachian of mixed ancestry, Omope Carter Daboiku hails from the Ohio River town of Ironton. She migrated to Cincinnati in 1972 and to Dayton in 2012. A cultural geographer and award-winning teller of tales, Omope became affiliated with the Ohio Arts Council in 1990 and the Cincinnati Arts Association at its inception in 1997 and has performed and led story circles across the U.S. and abroad. In 1993, she spoke at the *Art of Survival* (Nuremberg, Germany), addressing quilting as a cottage industry used by African American women to support families. In 2008, the U.S. Department of State chose her for a seven-city tour of Turkey as part of the Adana Consulate’s English Proficiency Program. Her company, Homeside, specializes in arts-based, culturally relevant

academic curriculum.

She is also a seasoned stage and voice actor with multiple production credits and accolades in theatre and television. Omope’s writing appears in the Southern Appalachian Writers Collective’s *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, and in Frank X Walker and Nikki Giovanni editions of Shepherd University’s *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, where her first published short story, “The Power of Water Baptism,” was nominated in 2014 for the prestigious Pushcart Prize. Grassroots work in health, nutrition, and foodways is documented in several small press cookbooks and “History Keeper” —a memoir about place and identity produced in 2018 at a Story Center/NPS Network to Freedom digital storytelling workshop— is on YouTube.

Working to share generational wisdom and encourage cross-cultural conversations about social justice, Omopé serves the Urban Appalachian Community Coalition as a cast member of “Express Appalachia,” an initiative about cultural identity. She supports the National Park Service and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar’s historic home, is a cultural advisor at Sinclair College and vice president of the Ohio Storytelling Network, and leads the Dunbar Branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.



Ted Olson, PhD

Professor, East Tennessee State University

[Titles by Ted Olsen](#)

[Smoky Mountain Air podcast, episode seven](#)

Ted Olson holds the Ph.D. in English (1997) from the University of Mississippi, the M.A. in English (1991) from the University of Kentucky, and the B.A. in English (1982) from the University of Minnesota. Presently Professor of Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University, he served in 2008 as Fulbright Senior Scholar in American Studies at the University of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain. Olson was President of the Tennessee Folklore Society in 2003-2005, and in 2003 he co-chaired the

curatorial committee for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival's "Appalachia: Heritage and Harmony" exhibition, attended by an estimated one million people in Washington, D.C. In 2019 Olson was the committee chair of "Tell It To Me: The Johnson City Sessions 90th Anniversary Celebration," which won Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association's Pinnacle Award for Event of the Year.

The author or editor of a number of books as well as poems, creative nonfiction pieces, articles, essays, encyclopedia entries, reviews, and oral histories published in a range of books and periodicals, Olson has researched and written many scholarly works exploring the history and culture of Blacks in Appalachia and the South. He has also produced and curated documentary albums of traditional Appalachian music, including three box sets from Bear Family Records focused on telling the full stories of influential pre-Depression Era music recording sessions in East Tennessee (the 1927-1928 Bristol Sessions, the 1928-1929 Johnson City Sessions, and the 1929-1930 Knoxville Sessions) and also four CDs for Great Smoky Mountains Association featuring music from Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For his work as a music historian, Olson has received a number of awards, including seven Grammy Award nominations. He recently began co-producing and co-hosting (with Dr. William Turner) a podcast series for Great Smoky Mountains Association entitled *Sepia Tones: Exploring Black Appalachian Music*.



Freida H. Outlaw, PhD, RN, APRN, FAAN

Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) American Nurses Association

Dr. Freida Hopkins Outlaw was named the Academic Program Consultant to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) at the American Nurses Association on September 1, 2015, after having served on the MFP National Advisory Committee for more than a decade. Previously she was an Adjunct Professor, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee and an Associate Professor at Meharry Medical College where she served as Director of the Meharry Youth Health and Wellness Center, a health care delivery system for adolescents with

a special focus on LGBTQ youth. Prior to this appointment, for eight years she was the Assistant Commissioner, Division of Special Populations, Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. In this role she focused on developing policies and initiatives that improved treatment for children with mental health and substance abuse issues. In addition, she provided leadership in securing thirty-two million dollars of federal funding to support transforming the state's mental health system for children and their families. And was part of the leadership that was instrumental in passing legislation to create the Children's Mental Health Council that was required to develop a plan for a statewide system of care implementation, which continues today.

Dr. Outlaw is a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing and is an active member of the Psychiatric Mental Health and Substance Abuse Expert Panel.

She has published in the areas of depression; the impact of racism and stress on the health of African Americans; management of aggression, seclusion and restraint; religion, spirituality, the meaning of prayer for people with cancer; children's mental health and substance use in the elderly. She is an editor of the newly published *Policy and Politics in Nursing and Health Care*, 7th Edition. Dr. Outlaw has received recognition for her excellence in clinical practice and for her work to improve the mental health of children and their families.

“The Civil Rights Movement: It Still Remains”

Freedom Stories Public Discussion Saturday, May 8, 2021 1-2:30 p.m. EDT

Panelists



Reggie Harris

Musician, Storyteller, Educator

www.ReggieHarrisMusic.com

www.LoydArtists.com

Internationally acclaimed performer Reggie Harris is a deeply rooted singer, songwriter, storyteller and cultural ambassador known worldwide for his ability to inspire hope and create opportunities for building community and positive change.

A powerful interpreter of song and history, Reggie’s 40 plus years as a musician and educator has kept him on the road presenting over 300 concerts and lectures per year at arts centers, universities, schools and music and story festivals throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe. His travels also connect him to a variety of faith and worship communities and centers of ecumenical intersection in work that brings people together in song and dialogue.

As a teaching artist in the Kennedy Center’s CETA program (Changing Education Through the Arts) Reggie has focused thousands on the role of music in the history of the Underground Railroad and as the source for inspiration and motivation in the ongoing struggles of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. He is presently a Woodrow Wilson Scholar in the Independent College Lecture Program and serves as Co-President and Director of Music for the Living Legacy Project, an organization that leads civil rights pilgrimages through the south and hosts seminars on voting and human rights to educate and inspire participation and reform.

His recordings “Ready To Go” (the #5 CD on the US Folk DJ charts in 2018) and “Deeper Than the Skin” (a 2020 collaboration with friend and fellow musician Greg Greenway) were received with critical acclaim. Both recordings address the issues of human rights and our need to heal racial and national divisions that threaten our relationships in the healing of our people and our planet. Reggie’s song “It’s Who We Are” from his newest CD “On Solid Ground” (release date April 2) was the 3rd most played song by Folks DJ’s across America in February.

Reggie is the most recent recipient of the W.E.B. Dubois legacy award for his contribution to the principles promoted by W.E.B. Dubois - civil rights, racial equality, etc. And he is also the most recent recipient of the 'Spirit of Folk' award by Folk Alliance International.

Reggie embodies the spirit of mentors and friends Pete Seeger and Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon as he blends themes of life and hope in his songs and in his every day.



Daryl Carter, PhD

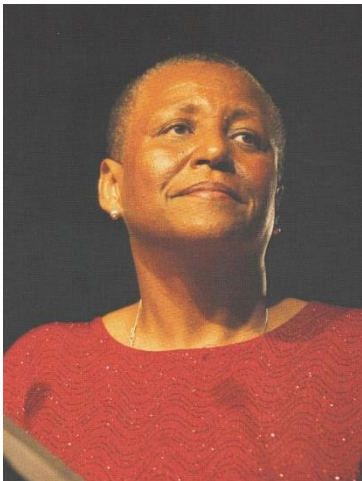
Associate Dean, East Tennessee State University

[Black American Studies Program at ETSU](#)

Dr. Daryl A. Carter is Associate Dean for Equity & Inclusion for the College of Arts & Sciences at East Tennessee State University. Dr. Carter also serves as director of Black American Studies and a professor of history. He has been at ETSU since 2008. During that time Dr. Carter has served as graduate student coordinator, interim director in the Office of eLearning, on the Tennessee Board of Regents Maxine Smith Fellow, ETSU Presidential Fellow, and an emerging leader for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

Dr. Carter is an expert in American political history. *Brother Bill: President Clinton And The Politics of Race and Class*, published by the University of Arkansas Press, is his well-regarded first book. Currently, he is working on a book length examination of Senator Edward M. Kennedy and American liberalism.

Dr. Carter holds a B.S. in Political Science and M.A. in History from East Tennessee State University. He earned his Ph.D. in American history at The University of Memphis.



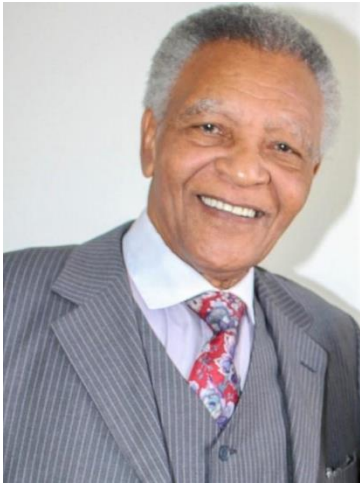
Ann (Beard) Grundy

Community Activist, Civil Rights Advocate

The daughter of Reverend Beard, born while her father was pastor of the 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, Ann is still considered the “Baby” of 16th Street Baptist Church. Her father served as pastor of the church for sixteen years. During that time, the church served as the center of civil rights organizing activity prior to its bombing Sunday, September 15, 1963, an event that claimed the lives of Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Denise McNair.

As a student of Berea College, Grundy became one of 58 Berea College students to join Martin Luther King, Jr. during the last leg of the March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. Ann is a retiree from the Fayette County Public Health Department where she served as director of the Bluegrass-Aspendale Teen Center, an after-school developmental program for Lexington youth. She is the founder of the NIA Study/Travel Program designed to expose African American students to the depth, complexity and beauty of African American history and culture. This program has involved several hundred students over the 30 years of its existence in a rich cultural/educational experience that many of its participants have described as “life-changing.” Ms. Grundy is an advocate for the value of the “shared cultural experience” and continues to develop programs which promote cultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding. With her husband Chester, she is a co-founder of Lexington’s Roots & Heritage Festival. During her sixteen-year tenure, the festival was recognized by the Office of the Governor as one of the Top Ten Festivals in the state and also won the Downtown Beautification Award from the Lexington Visitors Bureau for the festival’s contribution to tourism and the cultural life of Central Kentucky.

Ann is the proud mother of two daughters, Tulani Grundy Meadows, Esq. and Dr. Saida Grundy. She is the even prouder grandmother of two grandsons, eight-year-old Gibran, and seven-year-old Garvey.



Charles Neblett

Activist, Organizer, Charter Member S.N.C.C. Freedom Singers

[Kentucky Oral History Project](#)

Impacted at the age of fifteen by the death of Emmitt Till and how openly the murderers discussed the murder, Charles Neblett has been in the Civil Rights/Freedom struggle the majority of his life. First as a university student organizer, then as a community organizer and charter member of the S.N.C.C. (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) *Freedom Singers*. During his time at Southern Illinois University, Dr. Neblett was influential in building a bridge between students, the campus and community of Carbondale, Illinois.

Influenced by S.N.C.C. leadership, he began organizing direct action initiatives in Cairo, Illinois and Charleston, Missouri where he met Jim Forman and other members of S.N.C.C. At this time, he was recruited as a S.N.C.C. Field Secretary. In 1961, Neblett joined S.N.C.C. in organizing black voter registration in Mississippi, and as a member of the S.N.C.C. *Freedom Singers* along with Bernice Reagon and others. The group sang at protests, marches, on picket lines and during sit-ins in over 40 states during the Civil Rights Movement. He has been jailed for his organizing efforts over 20 times. Neblett was among those who joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the 1963 March on Washington and led participants in song after Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. He also participated in the 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery and the 2001 Million Man March.

During his career, Neblett performed with such luminaries as Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Miles Davis, Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez, Odetta, Mahalia Jackson and Nina Simone. Neblett was elected Logan County, Kentucky's first African American Magistrate in 1989. In 2010, Neblett accepted an invitation from President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama to join the S.N.C.C. *Freedom Singers* in a White House performance of the "Celebration of Music for the Civil Rights Movement," followed by a workshop with First Lady Michelle Obama and 200 youth. In 2010, Dr. Neblett's activism earned him the *Freedom Flame Award* in Selma, Alabama and a place in the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame. As a performer and educator, Dr. Neblett's travels have taken him to Ireland, Turkey, Denmark, and Spain.

Currently, Neblett serves as founder and president of Community Projects, Inc. in Russellville, Kentucky. Neblett and his wife of over 47 years, Marvinia Benton Neblett, have six children, six grandchildren and one great grandchild.

“How Do We Talk to Each Other? Storytelling for Racial Justice”

Freedom Stories Public Discussion Saturday, June 12, 2021 1-3 p.m. EDT

Panelists



Mzuri Moyo Aimbaye

Creator and Performer, “The Fannie Lou Hamer Story”

[The Fannie Lou Hamer Story](#)

Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Mzuri Moyo Aimbaye is an internationally acclaimed singer actress, and playwright of the multi-award-winning one-woman play, "The Fannie Lou Hamer Story." Her Swahili name means Mzuri (beautiful) Moyo (heart) Aimbaye (who sings). Her talents combine the presence of a movie star with a booming vocal range and versatility of an opera singer. Ms. Aimbaye has been enthusiastically received on cabaret and concert stages both nationally and internationally. She has lived and performed in

Paris, France and Rome, Italy.

Upon her return from Europe, Aimbaye trained as an actress at HB Studio in New York City where she performed in small productions in the NY/NJ area. Ever mindful of the importance and power of culturally sensitive stories, she was later cast as Lucy in the first film depicting an African American slave revolt, *Sankofa*.

Mzuri continued to search for material and projects in which she could invest and share her multi-talented artistic gifts. In 1998, she happened upon a television interview of Fannie Lou Hamer, the mother of voting rights for African Americans, which aired on the program "Like It Is." Ms. Aimbaye was struck by the realization she had never heard of Mrs. Hamer. Her incredible story was mesmerizing as well as the display of her kindness and forgiveness. Mrs. Hamer described voter registration inequities and brutal jailhouse beatings without showing any signs of anger or bitterness. Mrs. Hamer's uncanny display of courage and compassion inspired Ms. Aimbaye to conceive the powerful one-woman play, "The Fannie Lou Hamer Story." When she dons her wig and ankle-length dress...Ms. Aimbaye channels Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and takes the audience on a riveting 90-minute journey. The storytelling is integrated with twelve power songs coupled with a video montage. The play is an attempt to raise awareness about Mrs. Hamer's activism whose efforts led to the passage of the Voter's Rights Act of 1965.

In January 2020, Ms. Aimbaye celebrated her 19th year anniversary resurrecting the indomitable spirit of Fannie Lou Hamer. She endeavors to close out the year and each performance with the official announcement of THE FANNIE LOU HAMER VOTER REGISTRATION DAY. The play is speckled with uplifting music from the 1960's movement. She speaks with the power of a warrior and the voice of an angel when she sings. Audiences become transfixed in the 1960s-civil rights struggle, experiencing the emotional highs, lows, twists and turns of the courageous spirit and determination of Mrs. Hamer. Ms. Aimbaye travels the country with her signature performance in theaters, churches, high schools, colleges, universities, and civic organizations.



Lecia Brooks

Chief of Staff, Southern Poverty Law Center

[Southern Poverty Law Center](#)

Lecia Brooks is the chief of staff for the SPLC, where she provides counsel to senior leadership, assists with strategic planning and works with people from across the organization to ensure the SPLC's success, whether it is achieving long-term goals or maintaining effective daily operations.

Before her current role, Brooks served as the SPLC's chief workplace transformation officer, where she supported leadership and staff efforts to build a culture of inclusiveness and ensure a continued focus on diversity and equity.

Brooks also previously served as the SPLC's outreach director, where she traveled across the U.S. and abroad to speak about hate and extremism. Earlier, she was director of the SPLC's Civil Rights Memorial Center, an interpretive experience designed to provide visitors to the Civil Rights Memorial with a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement.

Brooks, who joined the SPLC in 2004, has a wealth of experience in diversity advocacy training for corporations and nonprofit organizations, including Walmart, Lyft, Pixar, the Salzburg Seminar, and the Newark Public Library.



Trina P. Jackson

Education Team Coordinator, Highlander Research and Education Center

[Highlander Center](#)

Trina (she/her/cuz), a Georgia native, works at the Highlander Research and Education Center as the Education Team Coordinator. There, she leads Highlander's Education Team with grassroots organizing and movement building across Appalachia and the US South. She manages four program teams in their accompaniment work of Economics and Governance, Cultural Organizing, Library and Archives, and Intergenerational and Youth Organizing. Together they support and catalyze transformative justice via social solidarity

economies, movement accompaniment and support, and further incubate and innovate radical work across the South, Appalachia, the U.S., and the globe.

In addition, Trina is a doctoral student at Georgia State University where she studies the Social Foundations of Educational Policy and its implications at the intersections of Critical Race Theory, Black Radical Traditions and Womanist Theologies. She is a former archaeologist and public high school science teacher.

She serves as an Imam/ah for her local mosque, the Atlanta Unity Mosque and is a founding member of the Atlanta Protest Chaplains Collective and a co-host of the I'm Sorry Ms. Jackson Podcast: A Lyrical Analysis of Faith, Love, Apology Culture and the Movement.

Trina's local activating/agitating work includes resisting, disrupting, and removing the structures of oppressive systems within the ecologies of educational, religious, and community-centered institutions. Her

spiritual/philosophical roots are sown deep into both mysticism and naturalism that foments her passion for building multi-religious political coalitions, local food security, and mutual liberation.

Trina lives with her spouse, Kim, at the Herb'n Soul Sanctuary, an Afrofuturistic urban farm near Atlanta, where they raise food, goats, chickens, ducks and bees.



Kiran Singh Sirah

President, International Storytelling Center

[International Storytelling Center](#)

www.KiranSinghSirah.net

Kiran Singh Sirah is President of the International Storytelling Center (ISC), producer of the Freedom Stories project, and an educational and cultural institution dedicated to enriching the lives of people around the world through storytelling. ISC organizes the world's premiere storytelling event, the National Storytelling Festival, and supports applied storytelling initiatives across a wide variety of industries.

Prior to his appointment at ISC, Kiran developed a number of award-winning peace-building programs in cultural centers across the United Kingdom. As an artist, folklorist, teacher, and advocate for social justice, he uses the power of human creativity to establish dialogue. An advisory member to UNESCO and a Rotary Peace Fellow, he has developed educational programs and publications, articles, talks and conference papers on interdisciplinary approaches to relationship building in communities around the globe. In 2017, Kiran was awarded the "Champion of Peace" recognition at the Rotary International ceremony at the United Nations Peace Week in Geneva, in recognition of his work to advance the art of storytelling within the arenas of global development and peacebuilding. Kiran firmly believes storytelling not only has the power to enrich lives, but also holds the key to building a better world.

FREEDOM STORIES

Unearthing the Black Heritage of Appalachia

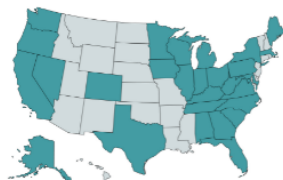
THE INITIATIVE BY THE NUMBERS

This data is from the 12 public Freedom Stories discussions.

1,000,000+

Viewers Reached

Includes the number of Facebook users who had information about Freedom Stories live streams appear in their newsfeed.



Live viewers represented

29 states

and the District of Columbia.



Live viewers represented

12 countries

including Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Ireland, Japan, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

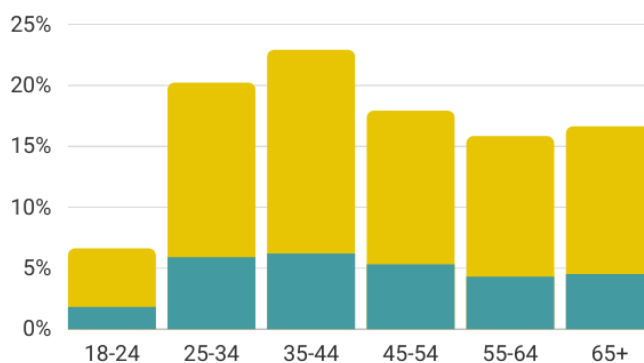
Viewership by Age & Gender



73.6% identify as female



26.4% identify as male



21,000

Average Views per Recording
(Facebook and YouTube combined)

14

Community Experts

13

Storytellers

12

Live Streams

8

Staff & Volunteers

Freedom Stories is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.



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INTERNATIONAL
STORYTELLING CENTER



National Humanities Alliance

FREEDOM STORIES

Unearthing the Black Heritage of Appalachia

From 2019-2021, the International Storytelling Center (ISC) hosted *Freedom Stories*, an initiative combining performance and scholarship in public discussions to illuminate the underappreciated and neglected narratives of African Americans in Appalachian history and culture. As part of its *NEH for All* initiative, the National Humanities Alliance partnered with ISC to assess these public discussions. Surveys were administered after each of the public events, and the following data shows a culmination of all responses.

34% of respondents reported familial ties to Appalachia.

25% of respondents live in Appalachia.

19% of respondents grew up in Appalachia.

54% of respondents had visited Appalachia but were not from the region.



80% agreed that "participating in this event enhanced [their] sense of connection to [their] community."

81% agreed they "take pride in the fact that this program is being held in [their] community."

87% agreed they "have a better sense of the stories that are missing from our popular depictions of Appalachia."

87% agreed the program "helped [them] better understand the diversity of the Appalachian region."

74% said the program motivated them to "learn more about underrepresented histories in [their] own community."

72% agreed "this program helped [them] think more deeply about what it means to be Appalachian."



95% agreed they were "able to see connections between themes explored in this program and contemporary issues in our society."

71% were motivated to "learn more about racial justice in Appalachia"

96% agreed "it is important that we collectively explore the stories of Black Appalachia."

93% felt motivated to "listen to the stories of people whose backgrounds are different from [their] own."

82% agreed they "feel more confident taking part in thoughtful discussions about race."

70% felt motivated to "be a part of dialogues around racial justice."



95% agreed they "have a greater appreciation for the role of storytelling in our society."

91% agreed they "have a greater sense of the value of listening to stories,"

98% agreed that "humanities programs like this one enrich our society."

Contact Us for More Information



www.StorytellingCenter.net/FreedomStories



facebook.com/StorytellingCenter



[@StoryConnect](https://twitter.com/StoryConnect)



[Storytelling Center](https://www.youtube.com/StorytellingCenter)

FREEDOM STORIES

Unearthing the Black Heritage of Appalachia

From 2019-2021, the International Storytelling Center (ISC) hosted *Freedom Stories*, an initiative combining performance and scholarship in public discussions to illuminate the underappreciated and neglected narratives of African Americans in Appalachian history and culture. As part of its *NEH for All* initiative, the National Humanities Alliance partnered with ISC to assess these public discussions. Surveys were administered after each of the public events, and the following quotes are representative of qualitative feedback.

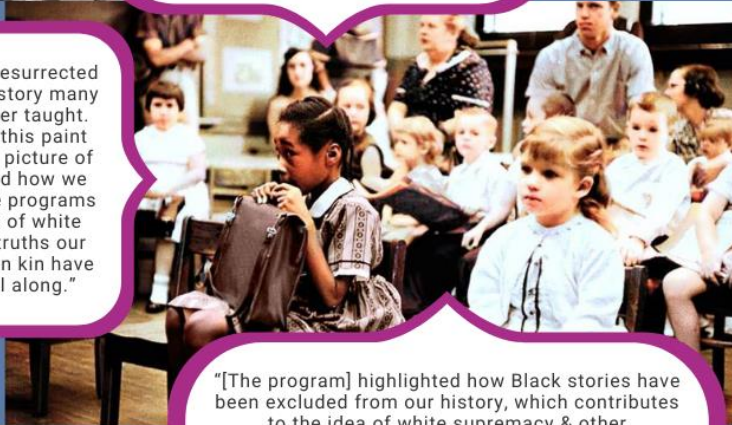
Freedom Stories is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.



"[I learned about the] diverse nature of Appalachian culture: racial, cultural, economic, etc. [The] strongest message for me was the importance of recognizing that no group is monolithic."

"We need to take time to see from one another's eyes, to imagine other experiences and perspectives. Storytelling is one of the most powerful ways to give us this experience."

"This program resurrected an important history many of us were never taught. Programs like this paint the fuller, truer picture of who we are and how we got here. These programs open the eyes of white people to the truths our black and brown kin have been living all along."



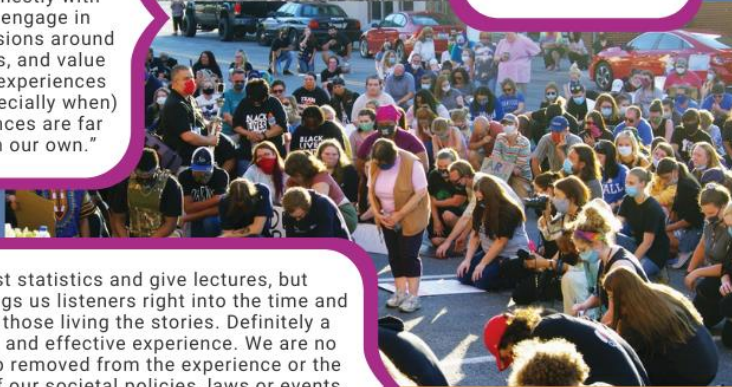
"[The program] highlighted how Black stories have been excluded from our history, which contributes to the idea of white supremacy & other misunderstandings about the founding and shaping of both our nation and the Appalachian region."



"The idea for this program is fascinating, and marked important work which needed to be done...It is vital that we learn to speak openly and honestly with one another, engage in difficult discussions around complex topics, and value one another's experiences even when (especially when) those experiences are far different from our own."

"If we are to live up to the motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, we have to hold space for every voice, especially those voices that have gone unheard or don't fit the typical American narrative."

"One can list statistics and give lectures, but Storytelling brings us listeners right into the time and experience of those living the stories. Definitely a more powerful and effective experience. We are no longer one step removed from the experience or the ramifications of our societal policies, laws or events. Instead we are LIVING that experience and those ramifications. Only by hearing these stories can we truly understand each other's experiences and lives. Only then can we truly understand and FEEL strongly enough to affect change."



INTERNATIONAL
STORYTELLING CENTER

www.StorytellingCenter.net/FreedomStories



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