

WILLIAM
& MARY

THE LEMON PROJECT
A JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION

16TH ANNUAL LEMON PROJECT SPRING
SYMPOSIUM

United We Stand:
Fortifying Black Communities
through Courage, Dignity, and Joy

March 20-21, 2026



This symposium will take place both in person at the William & Mary School of Education (301 Monticello Avenue) and virtually over Zoom. The Saturday evening event will be at Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved (115 Jamestown Road).

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Friday, March 20

8:00 AM– 4:00 PM	Registration	School of Education, Concourse
8:00 AM–9:00 AM	Breakfast	Concourse
8:55 AM–9:10 AM	Libation Pouring by Omiyemi (Artisia) Green, Theater & Africana Studies Welcome by Dr. Jajuan Johnson, Interim Robert Francis Engs Director of The Lemon Project Greetings by Dr. Iyabo Osiapem, W&M Sure, Africana Studies, & Linguistics Reading of Land and Labor Acknowledgments Introduction of Keynote Speaker Dr. Daniel Black by Johnette Gordon Weaver	School of Education, Matoaka Woods
9:10 AM–10:40 AM	We are the Way: Move Forward Together by Dr. Daniel Black, Followed by Q&A	Matoaka Woods
10:40 AM–11:00 AM	Book Signing/Break Three Concurrent Panels	Concourse
11:00 AM–12:15 PM	Panel 1: Reclaiming the 19th Century History of the Amblers House in James City County, Virginia Panel 2: From Ancestral Ground to Living Monument: Courage, Dignity, and Hope in the 313+ Ancestors Speak Project Panel 3: Unfinished Business: An Unpanel with Enslaved and Enslaver Descendants	Matoaka Woods School of Education, Dogwood School of Education, Holly
12:15 PM–1:15 PM	Lunch Three Concurrent Panels	Matoaka Woods
1:15 PM–2:30 PM	Panel 4: Curating 400 Years of African American History on Maryland's Eastern Shore Panel 5: The Road to Dawn: Resilience, Repair and the Power of Stories Panel 6: Reckoning and Relationship: Descendant Collaboration in Amherst College's Racial Reckoning Project	Matoaka Woods Dogwood Holly
2:30 PM–2:45 PM	Break	

United We Stand: Fortifying Black Communities through Courage, Dignity, and Joy

Three Concurrent Panels

2:45 PM–4:00 PM	Panel 7: <i>Flesh and Fragility: Recentering the Black Male Gaze</i>	Matoaka Woods
	Panel 8: Rewriting 300 Years of Public History at the Rosewell Ruins	Dogwood
	Panel 9: Resilience of Communities through Art, Culture, and Intellectual Legacies	Holly
4:00 PM–4:15 PM	Break	
	Three Concurrent Panels	
4:15 PM–5:30 PM	Panel 10: Stolen, Trafficked, Enslaved, Erased: Reclaiming and Retelling Their Stories and Ours	Matoaka Woods
	Panel 11: The 2025 Preservation Virginia African American Fellowship: A Summer of Community Research	Dogwood
	Panel 12: Learning from Genealogy and Family Histories	Holly
5:30 PM–6:30 PM	Food, Fun, and Fellowship: A Community Reception	Matoaka Woods & Concourse



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Saturday, March 21

8:00 AM–3:00 PM	Registration	School of Education, Concourse
8:00 AM–9:10 AM	Breakfast	Concourse
9:10 AM–10:25 AM	Descendant Communities Speak Plenary Panel	Matoaka Woods
10:25 AM–10:45 AM	Break	
	Three Concurrent Panels	
10:45 A.M.– 12:00 P.M.	Panel 13: Community Resilience	Matoaka Woods
	Panel 14: Joy, Memory, and Power: How Descendant Communities are Fortifying the Future	Dogwood
	Panel 15: Black Women’s Lives and Histories	Holly
12:00 P.M.– 1:00 P.M.	Lunch	
	Poster Viewing	Concourse
	Three Concurrent Panels	
1:00 PM–2:15 PM	Panel 16: <i>Displaced from the Birthplace of America</i>	Matoaka Woods
	Panel 17: Lemon Project Graduate Student Panel	Dogwood
	Panel 18: Florence Barber’s Norfolk Diary and the Black Women’s Diaries Project	Holly
2:15 PM–2:35 PM	Break	
	Three Concurrent Panels	
2:35 PM–3:50 PM	Panel 19: It Takes a Village: The Evolution of Black Birth in America	Matoaka Woods
	Panel 20: The Labor of Storytelling	Dogwood
	Panel 21: Together, Lynchburg Stands – with Courage, Dignity & Joy	Holly
7:00 PM–9:00 PM	Unity Gathering at Hearth : Join us for encouraging words by Dr. Daniel Black and performances by Ebony Expressions, Lacroy "Atlas" Nixon, and many others! This open mic event celebrates the symposium theme while honoring and remembering the people who came before us.	Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved (Rain location: Lodge 1, Sadler Center)

We are the Way: Move Forward Together Keynote by Dr. Daniel Black

Dr. Daniel Black is an award-winning novelist, professor, activist, mentor and public speaker. His published works include *They Tell Me of Home*, *The Sacred Place*, *Perfect Peace*, *Twelve Gates to the City*, *The Coming*, *Listen to the Lambs*, *Don't Cry for Me*, and *Black on Black*. In 2014, he won the Distinguished Writer's Award from the Mid-Atlantic Writer's Association. The Go On Girl! National Book Club named him "Author of the Year" in 2011 for his best-selling novel *Perfect Peace*. Dr. Black has been nominated (three times) for the Townsend Literary Prize, the Ernest J. Gaines Award, the Ferro-Grumbley Literary Prize, the Lambda Literary Award, the Georgia Author of the Year Prize, and the Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award.

Descendant Communities Speak Plenary Panel

Vanessa Adams-Harris is Muscogee (Creek) American Indian with African American/Scot/Irish ancestry. She is an artist, facilitator/presenter, interpreter of history, human rights community activist/peacebuilder. She currently serves as Director of Outreach & Alliances for the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation-Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Jacqueline Bridgeforth-Williams is the Founder and Executive Director of The Village Initiative for Education Equity, a grassroots organization advancing equity, justice, and truth in education and community spaces across Williamsburg and James City County. Through policy advocacy, school programming, early literacy, and the preservation of local Black histories, her work has created lasting, systems-level impact.

Darius Johnson is a scholar-practitioner focused on public history, historic preservation, community development, and philanthropy. He serves as the Project Director for the Chesapeake Heartland, working closely with Starr Center colleagues and with partners from beyond the Center, including advisory committees and consultants, to steer the project's strategic planning, funding, and impact.

Brian Palmer, Moderator, is a Peabody Award-winning journalist based in Richmond, Virginia. He strives to tell stories in pictures about people and situations that might not otherwise be told, with integrity, professionalism, independence, passion, and compassion. His photos have

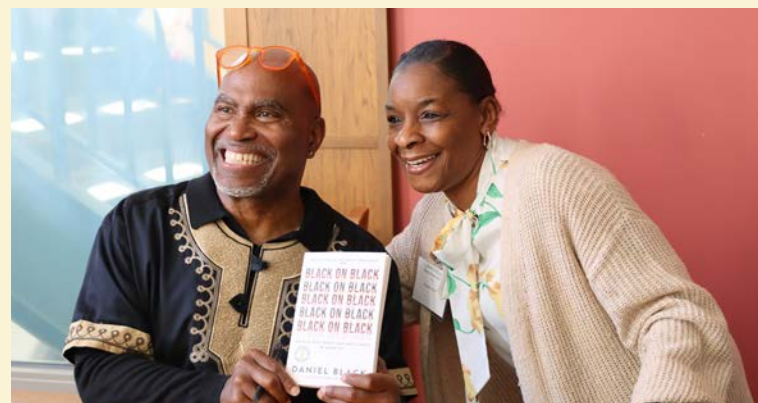
appeared in the *New York Times*, *Buzzfeed*, *Narrative*, and his writing has been published in *Smithsonian Magazine*, the *New York Times*, and the *Nation*.

Descendant Communities Speak centers the voices of descendants of free, freed, and enslaved people in a keynote conversation on Black dignity, resilience, and collective strength. Aligned with the 2026 theme, "United We Stand: Fortifying Black Communities Through Courage, Dignity, and Joy," the panel explores how ancestral knowledge, joy, and dignity sustain Black communities and inform ongoing efforts toward repair and healing.

Panel 1: Reclaiming the 19th Century History of the Amblers House in James City County, Virginia

Virginia Racial Healing Institute
DeVeria Gore, Moderator
Laura Hill
Jaenya Cooper

Reclaiming the 19th century history of the Amblers House in James City County, Virginia will examine a historic property designated as a Virginia Landmark. We will: (1) uncover hidden history about its ties to slavery and the people that lived there; (2) explore initiatives to increase visibility and community awareness; (3) contextualize the property's full 19th century history; (4) identify ways to honor the legacies of the people who lived and labored there; (5) examine how the property can be used today to foster racial healing. This presentation will provide an example of how communities can address and work towards healing from legacies of slavery. It will also address how uncovering Black history can fortify communities. This presentation embodies the Lemon Project's objectives of deepening the understanding of historical and cultural resilience, fostering collaboration, and inspiring practices of repair and empowerment.





Kerri Moseley-Hobbs

MaryLyle Buff

Michael Hudson

This session takes the form of an “unpanel”—a facilitated conversation where most of the time is spent in dialogue between the audience and the panelists. Two descendants bound together by the history of Smithfield plantation—one from the enslaved Fraction family (Kerri Moseley-Hobbs) and one from the enslaver Preston family (MaryLyle Buff)—will open with brief reflections on the feasibility of reconciliation case study from their distinct family lineages. The session will then move quickly into interactive conversation with attendees, who will be invited to bring questions, insights, and challenges to the table. Together, descendants and participants will explore the two tracks of reconciliation—enslaved and enslaver—and what obligations, opportunities, and obstacles remain. By breaking down the traditional panel format, the session emphasizes courage, dignity, and joy as collective practices, making space for a wide range of voices to contribute to shaping the unfinished work of repair.

Panel 2: From Ancestral Ground to Living Monument: Courage, Dignity, and Hope in the 313+Ancestors Speak Project

Stan Neron

Jocelyn Francis-White

Nancy And Rob Benz

Giacomo Sacca

Wanda Lundy, Moderator

This intergenerational, interracial, and inter-institutional panel shares the story of the 313+Ancestors Speak Project, which honors over 313 African ancestors buried at the First Presbyterian Church of Elizabethtown in Elizabeth, NJ. While their circumstances in life varied—from bondage to freedom—their humanity, faith, and enduring presence unite them. The panel includes African and European American descendants, the project lead, the city’s police chief, and a municipal official. Together they explore how communities reclaim erased histories and transform burial grounds into living legacies. Their collaboration—across race, sector, and story—embodies courage, dignity, and joy in action. From research to monument, from healing to hope, they ask: What does repair look like when communities act together with honesty and love?

Panel 3: Unfinished Business: An Unpanel with Enslaved and Enslaver Descendants

Panel 4: Curating 400 Years of African American History on Maryland’s Eastern Shore

Darius Johnson, Moderator

Jaelon Moaney

Carolyn Brooks

Airlee Ringgold Johnson

At Chesapeake Heartland: An African American Humanities Project, we’re helping to write a new narrative of Black life across four centuries of our region—one told by the people who’ve lived it. Rooted in pride of



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place and the belief that our stories deserve to stand in full view, the project unites students, community historians, and families to preserve and interpret the heritage of Maryland's Eastern Shore. Since 2020, we've digitized over 6,000 records, mentored 200+ students, and hosted hundreds of programs that center Black courage, dignity, and joy. This panel asks: what does it mean to connect the personal to the archival, the digital to the ancestral? How do we make memory move across generations to strengthen belonging and self-worth? Our call to action is simple—preserve what is ours, celebrate who we are, and ensure that our communities see themselves reflected in history with pride and purpose.



Panel 5: The Road to Dawn: Resilience, Repair and the Power of Stories

The Rev. Robin Mines
Johnie Tillman
Ann Morris
Kate Tweedy
Dr. Jody Allen, Moderator

Since connecting four years ago, the Meadow Family Linked Descendants group has worked to preserve history and repair the harms caused by slavery and its legacy. The specific focus is on Dawn, Va., a small Black community founded after Emancipation next to the former Meadow plantation, where many descendants still live today. The community is a study in resilience, going back to when freed people raised money to build Dawn's first school and church. More recently, when Caroline County integrated schools but excluded Dawn from bus routes, the community bought its own school bus. Today, the MFLD group honors that resilience through projects that capture

stories, preserve community historic sites, and support Dawn students with a college scholarship fund. Building on the past and mobilizing to address current problems such as heirs property land loss, the group holds events that honor collective memory, build community and look forward. The story of Dawn and its resilient residents hold tremendous power.

Panel 6: Reckoning and Relationship: Descendant Collaboration in Amherst College's Racial Reckoning Project

Nicka Sewell-Smith
Marcus Smith
Allen Hart
Julia Carroll

Like many academic institutions, Amherst College began its racial history project in the summer of 2020. Up to now it has largely been a top-down administrative effort driven by a Steering Committee of faculty and staff, but recently this has changed. Dubbed "Reckoning with the Racial History of Amherst College," there is an effort to decenter the institution and recenter people, including the College's community of descendants, broadly defined. Anyone familiar with the Lemon Project will know renowned researcher and genealogist, Nicka Sewell-Smith, whose investigation into her own family history dovetails with Amherst. Not only are we an institution in conversation with a known descendant, but we are utilizing one another's research in the creation of our own. The intention of this panel is to present our collective research and to create space for dialogue and brainstorming; to think through, as a group, some of the difficult questions that arise in doing this important work.



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Dr. David Brown

Anna Rhodes

Darold Cuba

Markita Brooks

Lori Jackson Black, Moderator

The Remembrance Structure and the Rosewell Archaeology Museum Exhibit at the Rosewell Ruins in Gloucester County, Virginia, reimagines how public history sites can confront the intertwined legacies of enslavement, architecture, and memory. Developed through collaboration between the Fairfield Foundation and descendant community members, these projects honor the lives and labor of the enslaved individuals whose work sustained the eighteenth-century built Rosewell plantation. This presentation explores how archaeological research, community partnership, and descendant perspectives can transform sites of historical trauma into spaces of dialogue, healing, and education. In doing so, it highlights the potential of shared-authority models to rewrite longstanding historical narratives and foster more inclusive futures.

Panel 7: *Flesh and Fragility: Recentering the Black Male Gaze*

Kyle R. Fox, Ph.D., Moderator

William Marshall

Zachary "ZAQ" Jackson, M.Ed.

In the 1980s, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, like many artists before him, turned his lens toward Black men. His black-and-white portraits, characterized by their formal elegance, depicted Black male subjects as embodiments of strength and beauty. While these images appeared to celebrate the Black male form, they simultaneously perpetuated a long-standing objectification and fetishization of Black men's bodies. Four decades later, such racialized eroticization is no longer confined to art galleries and museums; it now proliferates across social media platforms, rendering these platforms as sites of racialized violence. *Flesh and Fragility* is a multidisciplinary visual arts project that centers the perspectives and presence of Black men. It confronts histories of silencing and erasure, repositioning Black male subjectivity. In doing so, *Flesh and Fragility* reclaims the Black male body as a space affirming agency, dignity, and complexity.

Panel 8: *Rewriting 300 Years of Public History at the Rosewell Ruins*

Panel 9: *Resilience of Communities through Art, Culture, and Intellectual Legacies*

Cary Goodman, Moderator

Daraja Carroll, *Dressed and Dripping in Dignity: A Visual Journey Through Black Style and Resistance*



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This powerful photo exhibition explores how Black communities have used fashion and style to express dignity and resilience across generations. This exhibit traces a rich legacy of style as survival and resistance, from the horrific era of enslavement where free people dressed to assert respect and humanity, to the Harlem Renaissance where bold, flamboyant attire challenged social norms, to the present day where we celebrate icons on red carpets during the Met Gala. After viewing the exhibit, participants will have a deeper understanding of how Black communities have used fashion as a bold act of resistance, resilience, and survival.



darlene anita scott, *Feelin' Good: The Pleasure Practices of Black Folk*

The soul food plate asserts “somebodiness”—its composition and communal preparation and consumption announces Blackness. Byproducts of corn and pork announce a history. For ancestral farmers and foragers, leafy greens figure prominently. Yams, rice, okra, the technique of deep frying—all native to Africa—announce identity. Despite being delegitimized and pathologized, soul food is a pleasure practice that rehumanizes people named otherwise for the benefit of the American project. *Feeling Good* explores Black pleasure practices as assertions of “somebodiness,” in, Dr. Cornel West explains, “a society in which one’s body has no public worth, only economic value a laboring metabolism.”

Nyree Dowdy, *Shadows and Light: Picturing Black Hampton Roads through FSA Photography*

In the 1930s, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) was established as a New Deal agency with the mission of alleviating rural poverty. To achieve this, they hired a team of photographers to travel across the United States and “introduce America to Americans.” Between 1935 and 1945, these photographers produced thousands of images.

Hundreds were taken in Hampton Roads by John Vachon, Paul Schermerhorn Carter, Jack Delano, and Arthur Rothstein. Among these photographs are vivid depictions of Black life in Hampton Roads that offer glimpses of daily life including home, family, leisure, and work. Though the stories depicted are numerous, they are connected by a common spirit of unity and resilience. By revisiting these vignettes, we can explore how Black residents of Hampton Roads created community and moments of joy amidst the constraints of the Jim Crow South.

Rashid Faisal, *Dr. Carter G. Woodson and Negro History Week: Fortifying Black Communities through the Black Intellectual Legacy Model*

In 1926, Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded Negro History Week as both a corrective to the miseducation of African Americans and a communal practice of resilience. This initiative, the precursor to Black History Month, fortified Black communities through courage—challenging the erasure of Black contributions, affirming cultural worth and intellectual heritage, and celebrating identity through history, family, and community. My presentation situates Woodson’s vision as the foundation for what I call the Black Intellectual Legacy Model, a framework echoed in culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and historically responsive literacy. I ask: How can Negro History Week (today’s Black History Month) inspire today’s educators and communities to use history as a source of healing, empowerment, and collective strength? I call on participants to reclaim Woodson’s legacy as a blueprint for fortifying Black communities through education, unity, and joy.



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Viola Baskerville, Moderator

Karice Luck-Brimmer

Sheila Wilson-Elliott

Marlo Green

As we approach the end of support from the Mellon Foundation, we are seeking new sources of funding that will enable us to continue preserving and researching African American communities and histories. What direction should we take during a time of dismantling of structures and diversity programs? Hear from the third cohort of PVA fellows: The Jarratt House on Pocahontas Island (Green); The Genealogy of the Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia (Elliott); The History of Black Churches in Pittsylvania County (Luck-Brimmer)

Panel 12: Learning from Genealogy and Family Histories

Renate Yarborough Sanders, Moderator

Alan B. Taylor, Celebrating a Combined History of Maryland's Elite on the Eve of America's 250th Anniversary: A Case Study of Two Stone Families of Poynton Manor

With America's 250th anniversary set for July 4, 2026, individuals across the nation will gear up to commemorate and reflect on the nation's founding ideals and tortured history. Since 2022, presenter Alan B. Taylor has discovered his connection to the less visible histories of Thomas Stone National Historic Site, the plantation home of a Signer of the Declaration of Independence in Charles



Panel 10: Stolen, Trafficked, Enslaved, Erased: Reclaiming and Retelling Their Stories and Ours

Johnette Weaver, Moderator

Liza Rodman

Melanie Roberts

Walter English

Special Guest: Lacroy "Atlas" Nixon

How can Black people and their communities fortify themselves through cultural practices, powerful history, and collective action? We must know the history first. And Black history has been largely hidden and erased. Combining local history, descendant stories, genealogical research and primary documents, the historians on this panel will explore how to reclaim and retell Black history. From a local plantation researcher to the founder of a non-profit that is passionate about connecting American descendants of chattel slavery with their ancestry, this panel will delve into individual stories of survival and resilience never before shared.

Panel 11: The 2025 Preservation Virginia African American Fellowship: A Summer of Community Research

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County, Maryland. Taylor has traced his shadow family from 1680 to present who share DNA with the Stones and other prominent settlers in Maryland and Kentucky. Coming from a genealogist perspective, Taylor will share his research methods in DNA analysis, online tools, and historical research. The session will speculate on the future of interpretation of Thomas Stone NHS and related historic sites.



Terrie Gaskins-Bryant, Family History at the Hanna African American Cemetery of Lake City, South Carolina

The Hanna African American Cemetery, long abandoned and overgrown, is being restored through collaboration among Saint Teresa Community Outreach and Empowerment (descendants), Francis Marion University History Department, and Lynches Lake Historical Society. Through genealogical research, family and local histories, and careful site preservation, this project illuminates African American resilience, honors interred ancestors, and fosters community empowerment. Participants will explore how descendant-led initiatives, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and reparative practices can recover neglected heritage, strengthen identity, and inspire community engagement.

Tonia Meredith, The Black Burwells - Scholars, Trailblazers and History Makers

How can Black people and their communities fortify themselves through cultural practices, powerful history, and collective action? My presentation will demonstrate the powerful history of the Black Burwell family, descendants of the Burwell Family, one of the First Families of Virginia. The African American community can be fortified by learning the history of the Black Burwell family that traces its lineage back to the First Africans, were members of the first Scholars in the British North Atlantic (Bray) and held positions of high esteem in the White House. In recent times, their descendants have affected change in legislation to restore the dignity stripped from African Americans.

Debbie-Ann Paige, The Recovered Lives of Indentured Children in Post-Revolutionary New York

This presentation explores the lives of children indentured under New York's 1799 Gradual Abolition Act, using newly found documents, including indenture contracts and ledgers from the Richmond County overseers of the poor. The Act was a step toward emancipation, but created a harsh reality, binding children as young as four years old into indentures until their early twenties. This presentation examines the indentures as a continuation of control and exploitation of enslavement, prolonged by a system that labeled children "abandoned" before putting them to work for new "owners." By bringing their stories to light, the research honors their lives and contributes to a deeper understanding of the resilience of Black communities in their quest for freedom and dignity.



Panel 13: Community Resilience

Dr. Daniel Sunshine, Moderator

Donovan Branche (accompanied by Dr. Karen Ford), Mentorship as Resilience: Lessons from Leaders of Color in Building Collaboration and Repair

This presentation explores mentorship as a practice of resilience, collaboration, and repair in communities of color. Drawing on interviews with 21 leaders across nonprofit, government, and entrepreneurial sectors, the study highlights mentorship as transformational, reciprocal, and culturally grounded. Participants described mentorship as a safe space to process bias and trauma, a bridge to networks, and a source of empowerment that affirmed identity while fostering

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leadership. Attendees will gain strategies to reimagine mentorship as both career development and a systemic lever for equity, cultivating leaders who not only succeed individually but pour back into their communities to create change.



LaToya Gray-Sparks, Preserving Dignity Through Documentation: Using State Resources to Fortify Black Communities

This presentation will explore how the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) supports the preservation and empowerment of Black communities through its archival collections, research tools, and community engagement initiatives. Using case studies, the session will demonstrate how state-level resources can be mobilized to document, honor, and fortify Black communities through acts of historical reclamation and cultural preservation. It will also offer practical guidance for researchers, educators, and community members seeking to engage with DHR's resources to tell fuller, richer stories of Black life in Virginia.

Darren Wayne Jackson II, MD, MPH, Improving Trauma-Informed Care Amidst Growing Gun Violence in Marginalized U.S. Communities

Gun violence has emerged as the leading cause of death among American youth, disproportionately affecting non-Hispanic Black males aged 10–44. This presentation explores how trauma-informed care and community-based interventions can mitigate the psychological and structural toll of firearm violence on marginalized populations. Drawing on evidence from Community and Hospital Violence Intervention Programs (CVIP & HVIP), the session examines how integrating trauma-informed frameworks within community, psychiatric, and

emergency settings promotes safety, trust, and cultural humility. Through case examples and public-health data, participants will explore how clinicians, educators, and community leaders can collaborate to address the social determinants of violence, reduce re-traumatization, and strengthen resilience across affected communities.

Marvin Tupper Jones, USCT Families and Neighbors of the Winton Triangle

This presentation is about interconnected families of color from the Hertford County, NC area who served in the United States Colored Troops. The central soldier - my great-grandfather Jack Robbins had a brother, cousins, father-in-law and brothers-in-law who enlisted. They supported each other and their neighbors during and after the war, and their descendants remained connected into the 21st century. Four days after the Nat Turner Rebellion, Jack's father was forced to get a certificate proving that he was a free person of color and a resident of his county. Jack's brother was 3 years old during the Rebellion and enlisted with Jack. Both took part in the destruction of Charleston. Their cousins besieged and conquered Richmond and served in Texas at the time of Juneteenth. After the war, the Robbins network included USCTs who were in-laws, comrades, and neighbors. They supported each others' pension claims and those of their widows.

Panel 14:

Joy, Memory, and Power: How Descendant Communities are Fortifying the Future

Devon Williams

Star Reams, Moderator

Lorenzo Dickerson

Bertha French



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This session explores how descendants use genealogy, oral history, and collective memory work to transform historical trauma into pathways of healing, advocacy, and empowerment. By sharing the ongoing work of DEC-UVA, and partnerships with other descendant-led organizations, we will highlight how grassroots initiatives fortify communities through connection and joy. The panel will address three questions: What role does joy play in memory work and activism in descendant communities? How can partnerships among descendant communities foster greater community and unity? What opportunities do we have for continued fortification in a collaborative way? Panelists will draw from lived experiences, collaborative projects, and models of shared stewardship at various sites to demonstrate how descendant-led work offers a roadmap for strengthening Black communities.



Panel 15: Black Women's Lives and Histories

Dr. Adrienne Petty, Moderator

Gaila Sims, *A Space of Our Own: Black Women in Community*

In January 2025, the Fredericksburg Area Museum launched a new program series entitled *A Space of Our Own: Black Women in Community*. Dozens of women showed up to the first meeting, sharing stories, cracking jokes, and surrounding one another with affection and friendship. The intention of the program series is to provide space for Black women in our community to come together, relax, and care for one another. At each of our meetings, we aim to foster intergenerational conversations, networking, and communal comfort. We've received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Dr. Sims will speak on the success of the program, the lessons learned, and her personal experience of finding joy in the company of other Black women.

Audrey Landell Perry Williams, *In Spite of It, God Still Moves: The Untold Story of Virginia Mae Burnette/Perry/Perry*

This presentation relates to the question: How Black People and their Community fortify themselves through Powerful History. The presentation will focus on the strength of a Black Woman, Virginia Mae Burnette Perry/Perry, who lost her husband suddenly, on June 6, 1964, the day her youngest daughter was to graduate from high school, had a pregnant daughter, whose son was born June 28th, 22 days after the death of his grandfather, and would be returning to college for her sophomore year, had no guaranteed income, but never missed a beat. Thus, not only was she the backbone of our family, but of her community.

Cydney A. Neville, *Champion for Education Equity: Yvonne Bond Miller's Legislative Legacy and the Path to Post-Massive Resistance and Reconciliation*

Remembered as "the conscience of the Democratic Caucus," by Senator A. Donald McEachin, Yvonne Bond Miller was a fierce and passionate advocate for Virginia's marginalized communities, minorities, voter rights, and education. Yvonne Miller broke racial and gender barriers as the first Black woman to win a seat in the House of Delegates in 1983. Four years later, Senator Miller was the first Black woman elected to a seat in the State Senate and served on the budget-writing Finance Committee. She became the first Black woman to chair a Senate Committee; the Senate Transportation Committee. This presentation will guide participants through an amazing story of an incredible life lived, an overview of Massive Resistance in Virginia, and the legislative legacy of Honorable Senator Yvonne Bond Miller and will provide takeaways for participants to continue to tell her story of racial and educational reconciliation in their communities so that her legacy continues to live on and inspire generations to come.



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Chelsea D. McNutt, *Reparative Memory: Black Women, Archival Silences, and the Work of Remembering*

This presentation interrogates how recovering the lives of overlooked Black women civil rights activists in Arkansas and western Tennessee redefines the archive as a living space of repair, remembrance, and communal fortification. Drawing on correspondence, NAACP branch records, and local newspapers from 1935–1970, it argues that the historian’s task is not merely recovery but restoration, the ethical return of dignity, visibility, and voice to those systematically erased from public memory. Engaging Black feminist historiography and an ethics of care, this project models how rigorous scholarship can also enact tenderness and repair. In conversation with the symposium’s theme, it asks: how might historical research itself fortify Black communities through courage, dignity, and joy? It calls scholars and descendants alike to view remembrance as a shared practice of repair and renewal.



Panel 16: *Displaced from the Birthplace of America*

Jacqueline Bridgeforth Williams, Moderator

Andrea Claiborne

Johnella Carter

William S. Crump Jr.

Displaced from the Birthplace of America is a feature-length documentary film exploring the history of displacement of Black communities in Williamsburg, Virginia. The film is produced by The Village Initiative and displaced families, as part of The Local Black Histories Project, The Village Initiative’s community-university partnership with William & Mary. In this

session, we will screen a 25-minute preview of the film that explores the history of the Historic Triangle Block, a Black business district and surrounding community in Williamsburg, VA. This short film reveals the strength and importance of this community as a refuge during segregation and follows the community’s activism during its displacement by the City of Williamsburg in the 1970s under the auspices of urban renewal. A panel discussion will follow, featuring descendants of displaced families who will speak powerfully on their history and their call to action for the future to fortify Black communities.

Panel 17: *Lemon Project Graduate Student Panel*

Kelly Conway, The Lemon Project Society and Student Archiving

Conway’s discussion will reflect on the Lemon Project Society’s efforts to build a comprehensive archive documenting the organization’s roster and activities for donation to Swem Library’s Special Collections Research Center. This initiative—aligned with new administrative oversight by the William & Mary Libraries and rooted in the group’s prior hands-on archival exhibition work—positions the collection as both an institutional record and a proactive safeguard against the ongoing threat of Black historical erasure through archival loss.

Jonas Darko, *Preserving Memory and Heritage: Preliminary Research on the Jones/Lewis Cemetery Project*

The Jones/Lewis Cemetery Project is an ongoing heritage preservation initiative focused on documenting and safeguarding a historic African American family cemetery located at Strawberry Plains in Williamsburg, Virginia. The project originated from a request by descendants of the Lewis family seeking assistance in preserving the burial site, which has experienced uncertain boundaries, and loss of visible grave markers over time. This research integrates archival investigation, community engagement, and oral history documentation to reconstruct the cemetery’s historical context and support future preservation planning.

Nia-Patrice Lewis, *Heart to Hearth: Articulating the Uses of a Living, Breathing Space*

A major effort of the Lemon Project has been the journey to and construction of the Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved. As part of the journey of reconciliation, acknowledgement of William & Mary’s past and participation in the practice of slavery, the monument stands to recognize this history, reflect the communal efforts behind its construction, and embody goals beyond its mere existence on the university’s campus. Beyond a physical place, it is a space intended to be used, appreciated, and lived with. In an effort to articulate these many uses and its further potential, I have been working to develop an

United We Stand: Fortifying Black Communities through Courage, Dignity, and Joy

interpretive manual as part of my work with the Lemon Project, and working on the question: how does one grapple with the afterlives of slavery in a constructed memorializing space?

Tyler Lewis, The Bray School, William & Mary, and the American Revolution

This presentation aims to highlight connections between William & Mary and the Williamsburg Bray School during the American Revolution. It highlights Bray School enslavers' various links to the College as alumni, Board of Visitor members, and numerous other positions that position the Bray School in the broader Williamsburg community. It also discusses Bray School Scholars, Adam and Fanny, as a glimpse into W&M's enslaved communities during the Revolution, as financial difficulties prompted the College's slave sales in 1779 and 1782.

Panel 18: Florence Barber's Norfolk Diary and the Black Women's Diaries Project



Sapphire George
Ziz Kilmer
Kirsten Lee
Rev. Christian Savage
Jennifer Putzi, Moderator

The Black Women's Diaries Project brings together digital tools and the study of African America women's life writing to transcribe, encode, and annotate diaries written between 1854 and 1910. The first diary featured on the BWDP website will be that of Florence Barber (1857-1941), a Norfolk teacher and clubwoman whose deep commitment to her community would be largely invisible to researchers

without the existence of this manuscript. Guided by the project's faculty directors, students involved in the BWDP have worked with community partners to recover Barber's life, as well as that of the community in which she lived, worked, and worshipped. In this panel, we will introduce the Black Women's Diaries Project and our work on the Barber diary, explaining how we've researched and identified the people and places named therein. We will go on to discuss two of the organizations to which Barber was most committed: St. John's A.M.E. Church and the Y.M.C.A.

Panel 19: It Takes a Village: The Evolution of Black Birth in America

Moira Offord, M.S.

Ashley Nelson, M.S.

Helana Thomas, Moderator

Our panel traces the continuum of Black birthing experiences from enslavement to the present day, revealing how cultural resilience and systemic inequities have shaped maternal outcomes. The panel will explore the displacement of Black midwives, the medical exploitation of enslaved women, and the rise of obstetrics that sidelined traditional care practices, while also highlighting the resurgence of community-centered birthing models. By examining intersecting social and clinical drivers, structural racism, implicit bias, and hypertensive-related gestational comorbidities, we reveal how historic legacies persist in today's maternal health crisis. In dialogue with the symposium's theme, this panel emphasizes how cultural practices, collective action, and community "villages" remain central to survival and joy. We issue a call to action: reclaiming culturally grounded practices, challenging systemic barriers, and advancing reproductive justice to improve outcomes for Black birthing people.



Panel 20: The Labor of Storytelling

Moderator/Chair: Courtney Young

Evelyne Del

Kwadjo Campbell

Preserving African American heritage is both cultural and communicative labor; an act of courage and dignity expressed through storytelling, media, and placemaking. This panel examines how digital storytelling, film, branding, and social media can serve as modern tools for safeguarding Black cultural sites, shaping narratives, and driving economic empowerment through heritage tourism. Our panel of experts in communications, history, and strategic storytelling will demonstrate how intentional media framing influences public perception, combats erasure, and builds sustainable visibility for descendant communities. Attendees will gain practical insight into how messaging, narrative strategy, and community-based media can fortify cultural institutions, provide a framework for funding opportunities, and inspire intergenerational engagement.

Panel 21: Together, Lynchburg Stands – with Courage, Dignity & Joy

Deborah Smith (Deb), Moderator

Ramona Battle

David Neumeyer

Gloria Simon

Lynchburg was the largest per capita slave market in Virginia. Three organizations share how Lynchburg is confronting difficult history, inspiring empowerment and repair, and ensuring that African American experiences are integral to understanding our past and present. Silent Witnesses, Inc. documents the experience of enslaved people of African descent and educates citizens of all ages; since 2021 they have designed and installed historical markers across Lynchburg. Started by the descendants of enslaved residents, The Legacy Museum of African American History displays exhibits on African American heritage and is dedicated to collecting, preserving and storing historical artifacts, documents and memorabilia. Jones Memorial Library is a genealogy and history archive recording the names of enslaved residents; since 2023, JML has transcribed datasets for Enslaved.org naming more than 2,000 people. Four panelists share a call for connected action, and show how courage, dignity, and joy influence their work.



CHECK OUT THESE POSTERS AND EXHIBITIONS IN THE CONCOURSE

- Sophia Futrell and Eliana Rougle, Reparative Food & Agricultural Justice through Collaborative Youth Programming At Highland
 - Daraja Carroll, Take the Shackles Off My Feet So I Can Dance
- Ashley Nelson, Intersecting Social and Clinical Drivers of Black Maternal Mortality and Morbidity

JOIN US AS WE CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE SYMPOSIUM THEME THROUGH TWO VIRTUAL LEMON'S LEGACIES PORCH TALKS:

- Reparative Public History: The Colored Rosemont Community History Initiative, April 16, 2026, at 12pm. Register at <https://go.wm.edu/tn3tVS>
- Advancing Black Women's Knowledge of Nontraditional Wellness Practices, April 23, 2026, at 6pm. Register at <https://go.wm.edu/Q9PPZW>





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