



Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage
9th Annual Conference and Awards Banquet

FROM BONDAGE TO LEGACY

Interactive Paths to Reclaiming Our Heritage
in the Age of Erasure



A Message from the Chairperson

A Message from the Chairperson

Dr. Evelyn McDowell

Chair and Founder, Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

Dear Friends, Kin, and Fellow Truth-Seekers,

On behalf of the board of Directors and members of our organization, I thank you for attending our 9th Annual Conference. Whether this is your first time attending or you've been walking with us for years, your presence today affirms the importance of our mission: to remember, to connect, and to speak truth about the lives of our enslaved and freed ancestors.

We are a lineage society for descendants of enslaved Africans brought to what is now the United States. This organization was founded in 2013 and took its first membership application in 2016

At **Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage**, we are committed to honoring the estimated 10 million people of African descent who were enslaved in what became the United States and its colonial territories. Through documented lineage, family research, storytelling, and community, we not only remember them—we reclaim their dignity and preserve their legacy..

This work matters. In a time when the truth of American history is being contested, watered down, or outright erased, our commitment to genealogical research, historical documentation, and collective memory is an act of resistance. It is also an act of love.

I invite you to go deeper. If you are not yet a member, join us. If you've already traced your lineage, help someone else begin. If you've uncovered one story, dig for another. And if you can support our work with your time, skills, or donations, please know that every contribution helps us uncover more truths that might otherwise remain buried.

When we know who we come from, we know more fully who we are. And when we lift up the names and lives of our ancestors, we rise with them.

With gratitude and determination,

Dr. Evelyn McDowell

Chair, Board of Directors

Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Lyrics

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, Our God, where we met Thee;
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our GOD,
True to our native land.

Board of Directors

Dr. Evelyn McDowell, PhD., President & Founding Board Member

Robert Burch, Jr, Vice President

Honorable Judge Anita Laster Mays, Secretary

Jonnie Brown, Treasurer

Abasi Aniton*, Board Member

Gigi Best-Richardson, Board Member

Janice Gilyard, Board Member

Sharon McKinnis, Board Member

Kathryn Puckett*, Board Member

Margo Lee Williams, Registrar General

Renate Yarborough Sanders, Deputy Registrar

*Founding Board Member



Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage
2025 Annual Conference
Conference Schedule

Friday, June 6, 2024

Visit the 2025 Conference website

Visit the Ancestor Poster Room to hear presentations about found ancestors
Learn more about our sponsors in their virtual booths
Get links to the Annual Awards Ceremony and Conference

6:00 P.M.

Processional

All Members of Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

Master of Ceremony

Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing

Welcoming Remarks

Dr. Evelyn McDowell, President and Chair of the Board of Directors

Keynote Address

Jari Honora

SDUSMP Phillis Wheatley Literary Award Presentation

Shelley Viola Murphy

Historical Academic (Non-fiction)

Dominican Crossroads: H. C. C. Astwood and the Moral Politics of Race-Making in the Age of Emancipation by
Christina Cecelia Davidson

**Historical Era (Non-fiction), Historical Family Stories (Non-fiction), Genealogical Research (Non-fiction),
Illustrated History**

"Payne-ful" Business: Charleston's Journey to Truth by Margaret Seidler

Historical-Academic (Non-fiction)

Not Yet Completely Free: Gradual Emancipation and the Family of Moses Williams, Philadelphia 1776-1833 by
Ellen Fernandez Sacco, Ph.D.

Historical Family Stories (Non-fiction)

Wick Garrett's Darkest Day: 6 September 1919 by LaBrenda Garrett Nelson

Historical-Memoirs, Biographies (Non-fiction)

Traveling without Moving: Essays from a Black Woman Trying to Survive in America by Taiyon J. Coleman

Historical-Academic (Non-fiction), Historical Era (Non-fiction), Historical Event (Non-fiction)

American Dark Age: Racial Feudalism and the Rise of Black Liberalism by Keidrick Roy

Genealogical Research (Non-fiction), Children's (Ages 0-17) Non-fiction

The Untold Story of Bridget Mason: A Freedwoman Becomes an Entrepreneur by Dr. Artika Tyner

Historical Memoirs, Biographies (Non-fiction), Children's (Ages 0-17) Non-fiction

The Untold Story of John P. Parker: The Underground Railroad Conductor by Dr. Artika Tyner

Historical Fiction

All We Were Promised by Ashton Lattimore

Historical, Nonfiction

Forgotten Patriots: The American Revolution Northern Theater by Ric Murphy

SDUSMP Service Awards Presentation

Drusilla Jones

Certificate of Special Recognition

Assemblymember Reuben D'Silva

Chairperson's Award

Judge Anita Laster Mays

William Wells Brown Leadership Award

Brian Sheffey, Founder & Host of Genealogy Adventures

Ida B. Wells Leadership Award

Cheryl LaRoche, Archaeologist, Author, & Scholar

Harriet Tubman Leadership Award

Steve Williams, President of National Juneteenth Observance Foundation

Frederick Douglass Leadership Award

Joseph D. Feaster, Jr, Chair of the Task Force on Reparations

Closing Comments

Judge Anita Laster Mays

Virtual After Party (immediately following the awards ceremony)

Please see bios and session descriptions on the conference website: <https://sdusmp.org/conference2025/>

Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

2025 Annual Conference Awards Ceremony Agenda



Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

2025 Annual Conference

Conference Schedule

Saturday, June 7, 2025

8:30 A.M. Doors Open

Remembrance Ceremony

Asha McDowell

Welcome

Dr. Evelyn McDowell, President and Chair of the Board

Plenary Session

Jari Honora

Break

Breakout Session A: 10:30 am to 11:30 am

Breaking Through The Brick Wall of Unknown Ancestors, Delbra Brown, **Pre-recorded w/ live Q&A**

Getting Started with FamilySearch (Tools and Strategies), Carol Parmley, **Live(virtual)**

Lunch: 11:30 am to 1:30 pm

Guy Weston, Strategies for Writing Engaging Stories About Our Ancestors

Chef Keesha O' Galdez, Golden Fields Salad: A Taste of Lowcountry Heritage

Breakout Session B: 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm

Black US Naval Prisoners of the War of 1812/Napoleonic War, Benita Law-Diao, **Live(virtual)**

The Land Remembers: Unearthing Enslaved Ancestors Through Place, Ruth Hunt, **Live (virtual)**

Break: 2:30 pm to 2:45 pm

Breakout Session C: 2:45 pm to 3:45 pm

What if...You Must Formally Prove Your Lineage to Your Enslaved Ancestor?, Jonnie Brown, **Live(virtual)**

Were There "Skeeters" In the Great Dismal Swamp? An Examination of Maroon Communities in the Diaspora, Gigi Best-Richardson, **Live (virtual)**

Drafting Family Stories with AI Using Genealogical Facts, Dr. Evelyn McDowell, **Live (virtual)**

Closing Remarks

3:45-4:30

Name

Business Meeting for Members of SDUSMP

4:30-5:00

Please see bios and session descriptions on the conference website: <https://sdusmp.org/conference2025/>

Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

2025 Annual Conference Awards Ceremony Agenda

Breakout Session A

10:30 am - 11:30 am

BREAKING THROUGH THE BRICK WALL OF UNKNOWN ANCESTORS

DELBRA BROWN

This session will guide participants through the process of leveraging DNA matches to identify unknown ancestors. It will cover key concepts such as understanding shared DNA, analyzing relationship patterns, and utilizing genealogy tools to map family connections. Participants will learn practical strategies for organizing DNA match data, cross-referencing historical records, and forming hypotheses about missing ancestors. By the end of the session, attendees will have a structured approach to using genetic genealogy in their research.

GETTING STARTED WITH FAMILYSEARCH (TOOLS AND STRATEGIES)

CAROL PARMLEY

This live session will be a hands-on FamilySearch experience with guidance in setting up free accounts, navigating through historical context, and platform-specific research strategies/tools. The group will be using the Research Wiki's State-by-State research guides for pre-1870 U.S Census resources, and best practices for adding documentation for enslaved persons and attaching/correcting individuals and sources to FamilySearch Family Tree.

Please arrive with any FamilySearch questions you may have and the birth/death dates for your most recently deceased ancestor(s) if you wish to attach your family into the shared FS Family Tree.

Lunch Panel & Cooking Presentation

11:30 am - 1:30 am

STRATEGIES FOR WRITING ENGAGING STORIES ABOUT OUR ANCESTORS

GUY WESTON

Sometimes our research uncovers notable people and events. On other occasions we might say our ancestors were just everyday people. Nevertheless, there is usually an intriguing journey that takes us from the present to the past, and very often there are findings to share. How do we translate our findings into compelling essays that others will enjoy reading? In this session Guy will share how writers can use both fascinating and mundane details of family history to create interesting stories. He will also discuss how Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been helpful recently without infringing on the authenticity of his work, as well as discussing publication opportunities.

GOLDEN FIELDS SALAD: A TASTE OF LOWCOUNTRY HERITAGE

CHEF KEESHA O'GALDEZ

A vibrant and hearty salad inspired by the Gullah Geechee culinary tradition, featuring heirloom Carolina Gold rice (or brown rice), charred okra, sweet corn, greens, and a citrus-herb vinaigrette. This dish pays tribute to the agricultural expertise of enslaved African ancestors and their contributions to Southern foodways.

Breakout Session B

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

BLACK US NAVAL PRISONERS OF THE WAR OF 1812/NAPOLEONIC WAR

BENITA LAW-DIAO

Black US Naval Prisoners of the War of 1812: HMS Ganges and Dartmoor Prison, England. Black men who fought in the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic War ended up on prison ships like the English HMS Ganges. When the ship became overcrowded, some were imprisoned at Dartmoor Prison. My triple great grandfather John Macklin was imprisoned at Dartmoor Prison, Princetown, England. Prisoners were encouraged to form committees and tribunals in order to operate a system of self-governance in the prison blocks. The Blacks in Number 4 Block at Dartmoor Prison had a self-appointed king named Richard Crafus (aka King Dick), who managed his fellow prisoners. Number 4 war prison became the centre for social and economic life at Dartmoor. "It put on theatre productions such as Romeo and Juliet, had a boxing school and its own preacher. It was also the centre of gambling which included a roulette wheel smuggled in by the French. These activities were not restricted to the Black prisoners but were also enjoyed by the white prisoners. Rather than being the block for the degenerates, Number 4 block gained the reputation for being the best run in the entire prison," as reported by the Dartmoor Museum. After the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent, many Black men sold their places on ships that would repatriate them to the US (which delayed their return home), because they were concerned they would be returned to southern states that would enslave them. More than 38 years after the wars ended, Black and White veterans were acknowledged at a National Convention of Veterans of the War of 1812 in Washington DC.

THE LAND REMEMBERS: UNEARTHING ENSLAVED ANCESTORS THROUGH PLACE

RUTH HUNT

Genealogist Ruth Hunt shares her transformative experience of discovering her enslaved ancestors by physically visiting the land where they once lived. In this powerful session, she recounts how walking the same ground—meeting local residents, historians, and community elders—led her to records, oral histories, and connections that she would never have found online. This presentation highlights the often-overlooked importance of place-based research and how ancestral landscapes can hold the keys to long-buried truths. Whether you're just beginning your search or facing brick walls in your family history, Ruth's story will inspire you to follow the footsteps of your ancestors—right to the soil that shaped their lives.

Breakout Session C

2:45 pm - 3:45 pm

WHAT IF...YOU MUST FORMALLY PROVE YOUR LINEAGE TO YOUR ENSLAVED ANCESTOR?

JONNIE BROWN

The objectives of this session are to explore the importance of lineage organizations and the benefits of joining them, with a particular emphasis on the Sons & Daughters of the U.S. Middle Passage. Participants will engage in hands-on activities focused on documenting the first three generations of their lineage using vital records, with sample data provided. Additionally, the session will offer practical experience in writing clear and concise explanations to address discrepancies found in historical documents, supported by sample scenarios.

WERE THERE "SKEETERS" IN THE GREAT DISMAL SWAMP? AN EXAMINATION OF MAROON COMMUNITIES IN THE DIASPORA.

GIGI BEST-RICHARDSON

We will delve into the life, trials, and tribulations of the African Diaspora Maroon Communities. Understanding that the maroon spirit of resistance and self-determination was the impetus that forced runaway, enslaved, free people of color, and indigenous peoples to escape by entering into isolated communities. However, many of these communities were very dangerous because of their physical environments and the constant pursuit of the occupants. Maroons hid by living in neighborhoods from the Colonial times, like the Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina and Virginia (where my ancestors lived), and Fort Mose in Florida. Maroon communities also existed in Haiti, Brazil, Colombia, Belize, and other places in the Americas, and Maroon settlements in Jamaica have survived to today.

DRAFTING FAMILY STORIES WITH AI USING GENEALOGICAL FACTS

DR. EVELYN MCDOWELL

Discover how to transform historical records into powerful family narratives using artificial intelligence. In this interactive session, Dr. Evelyn McDowell will guide participants through the process of using AI tools like ChatGPT to draft meaningful stories rooted in genealogical facts. Whether you're just beginning your family history journey or have years of research, you'll learn how to craft effective prompts, enrich stories with historical context, and explore ethical storytelling. Attendees will also participate in a hands-on breakout room activity to practice writing their own AI-assisted story drafts.

Conference Speakers



Gigi Best-Richardson is a Co-Owner, Curator, and Docent of Best Richardson African Diaspora Literature and Culture Nonprofit Museum. An Antiquarian bookseller co-owner since 1997, she is a member of the Association of African American Museums, Florida Antiquarian Booksellers Association, Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, and a Presenter on the Rare Book Café. She is a Historian (Phi Alpha Theta), Genealogist, Speaker, Poet, and a Virginia Humanities Scholar. Gigi is an award-winning author of "Thomas the Melungeon: His Locust Family of Free Persons of Color, Vol 1" and a contributor to the Inaugural Edition of the SOFAFEA Journal. She attended Morgan State University's Graduate Literature Program. Gigi is a board member of several national hereditary societies, a Historian General of the Society of First African Families of English America, and a board member of Sons and Daughters United States Middle Passage. She is also a member of the Society of the Order of First Families of North Carolina; Daughters of the American Revolution; Colonial Dames 17th Century; New England Women; National Society Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America; Colonial Dames of America; and Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War.



Delbra Brown has been conducting genealogical research for over 35 years, self-teaching her way through online resources to uncover the history of her family. Her maternal roots trace back to Bullock and Macon Counties in Alabama, while her paternal lineage originates from Jamaica. Professionally, Delbra works as an automation test engineer in the IT industry; however, her true passion lies in genealogy, particularly in uncovering the stories of her ancestors lost due to the legacies of slavery. Through her research, Delbra has successfully validated many of the oral histories shared by her grandmother, and she is now dedicated to tracing the lineage of her enslaved ancestors. During the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, she published several books documenting her family's history, with each chapter focusing on a different ancestor and presented in a narrative style that captures the essence of southern dialect. Additionally, she transformed one of her published works into a documentary. Today, Delbra is committed to sharing the knowledge she has gained throughout her genealogical journey. She is passionate about helping others break through their own research brick walls and discover their ancestral connections.



Jonnie Ramsey Brown, an award-winning writer, has traced her family back to slavery, the American Revolution and beyond. She is the family historian and storyteller and holds membership in the Sons & Daughters of the US Middle Passage, Daughters of the American Revolution, First Families of Alabama and several other lineage organizations. Recently, Jonnie wrote a book to bring awareness of racial disparities in healthcare, in honor of the legacy of her late husband, Thomas James Brown. She currently resides in the Los Angeles area and is pursuing the adaptation of her book to film.

Conference Speakers



Benita Law-Diao As the self-appointed family historian since the age of 10, Benita found researching her family history has given her strength and drive to venture into places and spaces that have made her life richer. Over the years, Benita continued her quest to learn about her family and formerly enslaved people of the Black Diaspora, so that she can share this history in the Black community in order to fortify them. Benita is an Advisor for the Harriet Tubman NYS Underground Railroad Byway, which will eventually be part of a contiguous historic byway from Maryland to St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. As a Board Member for John Brown Lives! (JBL!), a nonprofit freedom education and human rights organization, the John Brown Lives uses arts and education, advocacy and activism to engage the public in excavating useful legacies of the past in order to inspire community and civic action that addresses critical social justice issues today. As the Leader for Outdoor Afro-Albany and Upstate NY, Benita works to connect and re-connect Black people to nature through planned and guided outdoor adventures. She shares her outdoor expertise, knowledge of civics and history, and love for nature with participants in various activities like foraging, fishing, kayaking, gardening, and skiing. Additionally, she hosts monthly events, participates in stewardship and conservation efforts, and promotes Outdoor Afro's mission through various channels. For the past 4 years, as a Trustee of the Adirondack Experience Museum, Benita has been bringing busloads of African Americans to the museum to teach them about the little known history of free African Americans who settled in the Adirondacks in the 1800s to the present. She and others have worked to secure \$2M from the NYS Legislature to create an African American history gallery that will open at the Adirondack Experience Museum July 4, 2027, during the 200th anniversary of the legal abolition of slavery in New York State.



Jari C. Honora, a Certified Genealogist®, is a New Orleans native and proud Louisiana Creole with roots dating back more than two centuries along Bayou Lafourche and the German-Acadian Coast. He is a graduate of St. Augustine High School and Tulane University. He works as Family Historian in the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection. He previously worked for Le Musée de f.p.c. and taught in local charter schools. He also does historical and genealogical research professionally, including the TV programs “Finding Your Roots” “We’ll Meet Again,” and the Georgetown Memory Project. He has presented at numerous historical and genealogical conferences including the International Black Genealogy Summit; American Educational Research Association; Southern Historical Society; Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society (AAHGS); and the Canadian Society for Eighteenth Century Studies. As one of four contributors to the CreoleGen blog, he regularly shares research findings on Louisiana Creole people and institutions.

Conference Speakers



Ruth D. Hunt is a seasoned family historian and genealogist. In 1977 she was inspired by the Godfather Alex Haley and has been researching family history ever since. She has developed research skills that produced miraculous results believed to be gifts from her ancestors. One of her greatest accomplishments was finding her long-lost WWII half-brother in England. She lectures and provides genealogical workshops for numerous organizations, libraries, and civic groups. Ms. Hunt most recently developed a genealogy workshop program for the New York City Veterans, New York City Health + Hospital Corporation Inclusion Group, and the Roanoke Virginia Daughters of the American Revolution. A few of Ms. Hunt's affiliations are she is a Charter Member of The Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage. She has been a member of The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society since the 1980s. Ms. Hunt has been a member of the DAR since 2009, and she holds a certificate in Genealogical Research from the National Society Daughters of American Revolutions and was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the United States Department of Defense for her work with Veterans



Dr. Evelyn A. McDowell, Ph.D., CPA, CGMA is the Accounting Department Chair and Associate Professor of Accounting at Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey and is the co-chair of Rider's taskforce on its history of slavery. She is also the Director of Aspiring Accounting Professional Program, an organization for students of color majoring in accounting. Dr. McDowell is the Chairperson of the Board of Directors, founder, and Charter Member of Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage (SDUSMP), a lineage society for descendants of individuals enslaved in the United States of America. Dr. McDowell has been researching her family for over 20 years and has identified over 35 enslaved ancestors. She is a strong advocate for the memory of the 10 million men, women, and children enslaved in the United States of America, in its tribal nations, and during its colonial period. Dr. McDowell is an author and speaker. In addition, she is a member of the Gavel Society and the Princeton Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



Carol Parmley has over thirty years of experience in family history research as a volunteer, student, FamilySearch Center Consultant/Director, and a genealogist doing business as The Ancestral Guardian. She specializes in U.S. Southern States research and enjoys mentoring and motivational speaking on a variety of genealogical subjects.

Conference Speakers



Guy Weston's current activities encompass research and public history initiatives to raise the profile of Timbuctoo, NJ, where his fourth great grandfather purchased land in 1829. These have included interpretive signage in Timbuctoo, coordination of a curriculum development project in collaboration with local teachers, and preservation efforts for the Timbuctoo cemetery, where the oldest gravestone is dated 1847. He currently serves as Managing Director of the Timbuctoo Historical Society and is a Visiting Scholar at Rutgers University. He has contributed articles to Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) Journal, AAHGS News, National Genealogical Society Magazine, and New Jersey Studies. He maintains a website at www.timbuctoonj.com.

Service Award Winners

Certificate of Special Recognition



Assemblymember Reuben D'Silva represents Nevada's 28th District, covering parts of East and North Las Vegas. Born in Mumbai, India, and raised in North Las Vegas, he is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who earned a Purple Heart after being wounded in Iraq. Following his service, D'Silva pursued education at the College of Southern Nevada, UNLV, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University, earning multiple degrees in history, globalization studies, and religion and politics.

A former history teacher at Rancho High School, D'Silva was elected to the Nevada Assembly in 2022, becoming the first Indian-American to serve in the state legislature. He is Vice Chair of the Education Committee and serves on the Government Affairs and Revenue Committees.

In 2025, D'Silva introduced Assembly Bill 328 to create a commission to study the impacts of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and racial discrimination in Nevada, and to explore reparations for descendants of enslaved people. Emphasizing the importance of public education and social justice, he called the moment right for such a study despite national backlash against diversity efforts. His work reflects a deep commitment to equity, education, and service.

Chairperson's Award



Judge Anita Laster Mays was born to the late Charles Lee Laster and Evelyn Madeline (Brooks) Laster and is the seventh of eight children. As a child she loved listening to her Grandmother Evelyn (Butler) Brooks, born in 1892 talk about her life. She became fascinated with the stories. Upon speaking with her Great-Uncle Peter Vassar, born in February 1873, she was intrigued about her history. She started asking her mom more about the family lineage.

When Roots was televised, Anita was determined to learn more about her family and someday share her story. She began to collect obituaries, news articles, and wedding programs to assist her when she was able to begin the research. She even scheduled a time to record her Uncle Pete as she asked him questions about the family. Sadly, he passed a couple weeks later at the age of 105. Anita was disappointed that her parents did not transport her to his home in time to speak with him. Overtime, Anita has gathered information about both sides of her family.

After becoming an attorney and later being elected as a municipal court judge in Ohio, Anita often wondered what her ancestors would say. Upon being elected to Ohio's 8th District Court of Appeals in November 2014 a citizen in the community asked her if she had the opportunity to have tea with anyone in history, who would it be. To the surprise of many, she stated that she would sit down with her second-great grandmother Raida Vassar, born around 1848. She would thank her for her resilience, determination, steadfastness, and strength because if she did not survive, Anita would not be here.

Service Award Winners

Anita believes that it is important for young African Americans to see her in her judicial capacity because to see it is to achieve it. Anita consistently appears in schools and other community events speaking about ancestry and what her enslaved people would think about her position. She uses this to get others interested in their ancestry and show pride in being decedents of enslaved people

Anita is a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc and currently serves as the President of the Cleveland, Ohio Alumnae Chapter, Alpha Lambda Sigma. Judge Laster Mays is currently the co-chair of the Ohio Black Judges Associate, Secretary of the Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage – Harriet Tubman Chapter, and a member of Providence Baptist Church. She is the wife of Kurt Mays and mother of three children.

William Wells Brown Leadership Award



Brian Sheffey serves as the Director of the Center for Family History at the International African American History Museum in Charleston, South Carolina. He is also the founder and host of *Genealogy Adventures*, a popular television series that explores African American genealogy, culture, and history, which he co-presents with Donya Williams on e360tv.

Brian's research focuses primarily on U.S. regions east of the Mississippi River, with a particular emphasis on the northern British American Colonies. He is widely recognized for his expertise in researching the history of enslaved people and communities during the early British American colonial period.

In 2023, the University of Virginia Foundation hired Brian to trace the descendants of the enslaved individuals who lived at William Garth's Birdwood Plantation in Charlottesville, Virginia. His recent work also includes extensive research on the descendants of enslaved communities owned by the Bull, Butler, Middleton, Brewerton, and Guerard families in South Carolina.

An accomplished author, Brian has written two award-winning, Amazon Top 10 bestselling genealogy books: *Practical Genealogy: 50 Simple Steps to Research Your Diverse Family History* and *Family Tree Workbook: 30+ Step-by-Step Worksheets to Build Your Family History*.

Service Award Winners



Ida B. Wells Leadership Award

Dr. Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, historical archaeologist, began her career as an archaeological conservator, preserving the grave goods from the African Burial Ground archaeological site in New York City. Her historical work focuses on escape from slavery and the Underground Railroad and its connections to various institutions such as the AME Church, which is what brought Bishop William Paul Quinn to her attention.

She has worked as an ethnohistorian for several National Park Service sites either locating descendants of those once enslaved on those sites or collecting family stories from them. She has worked for numerous cultural and historical institutions, including the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, where she was the project historian for the "Cultural Expressions" inaugural exhibition. She is an associate research professor in Historic Preservation in the School of Architecture at the University of Maryland, College Park.

She is grateful for the numerous awards she has received across her career. Dr. LaRoche is the author of *Free Black Communities* and *the Underground Railroad: the Geography of Resistance*. Her latest book, *Apostle of Liberation: AME Bishop Paul Quinn and the Underground Railroad* was published by Rowman & Littlefield earlier this year.

Harriet Tubman Leadership Award



Steve Williams, President of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation, the chief advocate and subject matter expert of the National Juneteenth Independence Day legislation. Board member Project 1619, Chairman of the National Miss Juneteenth Scholarship Program, Past President of Internet Society of Washington DC, Father, Technology Engineer Director of IT Services at NetSecurity Corporation, Principal Consultant at Micro Information Services—and, wait for it, trumpeter leader of the Funkativity the Wave of Freedom Band.

Born in Los Angeles, California, Steve grew up in a Navy family all over the United States. His Grandfather, a WWII veteran first exposed him to Juneteenth with "No work and no slave food". Later he marched with Denver, Colorado legend Daddy Bruce Randolph and performed at his Juneteenth celebrations.

After working around the country Steve moved to Leesburg, Virginia with his family in 2000, where he launched SkyNet Access one of the first Wireless Internet Service Providers in the world. His introduction as a technical advisor for the Congressional Internet Caucus Advisory Committee was fortuitous for understanding Capitol Hill. He then became the Senior Engineer for an IT company supporting DC nonprofits and Capitol Hill. Steve met the late Rev. Ronald V Myers Sr M.D. and joined the mission to make Juneteenth a National Holiday in the words of U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer "...and Steve Williams, who has been so fabulous and relentless, in making sure that this (Juneteenth) happens."

Service Award Winners



Frederick Douglass Leadership Award

Joseph D. Feaster is a distinguished attorney and civic leader based in Boston, Massachusetts, with a legal career spanning 48 years. He is currently at the law firm Dain, Torpy, Le Ray, Wiest & Garner, P.C. Feaster has held numerous public service roles, including Interim Administrator of the Boston Housing Authority, Acting Director of Real Estate for the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, and Assistant Secretary and General Counsel in the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Administration and Finance.

He also served as the court-appointed Receiver for the Roxbury Comprehensive Community Health Center and is currently the Receiver for the Edgar P. Benjamin nursing home.

Beyond his legal practice, Feaster is deeply involved in community and mental health advocacy. He chairs the board of directors of the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts and serves on the executive committee of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health. In 1985, he founded Feaster Enterprises, a consulting firm focused on strategic planning and community outreach. He and his family also established the Feaster Family Foundation, dedicated to promoting mental health awareness and supporting related services throughout Massachusetts.

An alumnus of Northeastern University, Feaster earned his bachelor's degree in political science in 1972 and his Juris Doctor in 1975. His extensive career reflects a lifelong dedication to legal excellence, public service, and community empowerment.

Phillis Wheatley Literary Award Winners



Historical Academic (Non-fiction)

Dominican Crossroads: H. C. C. Astwood and the Moral Politics of Race-Making in the Age of Emancipation by Christina Cecelia Davidson



Historical Era (Non-fiction), Historical Family Stories (Non-fiction), Genealogical Research (Non-fiction), Illustrated History

"Payne-ful" Business: Charleston's Journey to Truth by Margaret Seidler



Historical-Academic (Non-fiction)

Not Yet Completely Free: Gradual Emancipation and the Family of Moses Williams, Philadelphia 1776-1833 by Ellen Fernandez Sacco, Ph.D.



Historical Family Stories (Non-fiction)

Wick Garret's Darkest Day: 6 September 1919 by LaBrenda Garrett-Nelson



Historical-Memoirs, Biographies (Non-fiction)

Traveling without Moving: Essays from a Black Woman Trying to Survive in America by Taiyon J. Coleman

Phillis Wheatley Literary Award Winners



**Historical-Academic (Non-fiction),
Historical Era (Non-fiction),
Historical Event (Non-fiction)**

*American Dark Age: Racial
Feudalism and the Rise of Black
Liberalism* by Keidrick Roy



**Genealogical Research (Non-
fiction), Children's (Ages 0-17)
Non-fiction**

*The Untold Story of Bridget Mason:
A Freedwoman Becomes an
Entrepreneur* by Dr. Artika Tyner



**Historical Memoirs, Biographies
(Non-fiction), Children's (Ages 0-
17) Non-fiction**

*The Untold Story of John P. Parker:
The Underground Railroad
Conductor* by Dr. Artika Tyner



Historical Fiction

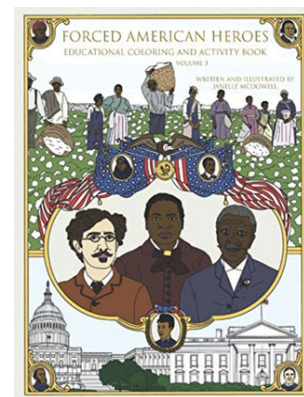
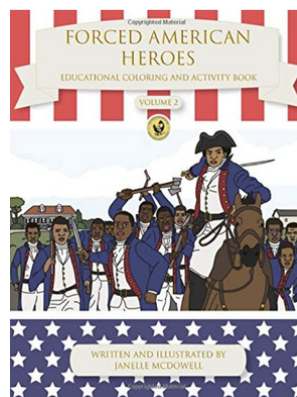
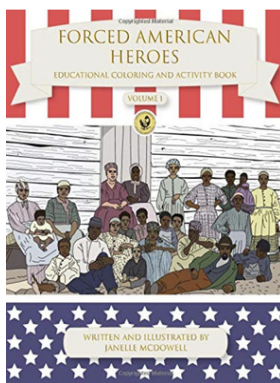
All We Were Promised by Ashton
Lattimore



Historical, Non-fiction

*Forgotten Patriots: The American
Revolution Northern Theater* by Ric
Murphy

Celebrate the Brilliance of Our Ancestors **Forced American Heroes Coloring & Activity Books**



Inspire young minds with powerful stories of resilience, creativity, and achievement. These unique educational activity books honor the *real* lives and contributions of enslaved Americans—heroes who shaped the United States despite unimaginable hardship.

- ✓ Learn about extraordinary but lesser-known individuals
- ✓ Engage with history through portraits, summaries, and fun activities
- ✓ Encourage children to explore their roots and honor their ancestors
- ✓ Teach that slavery never erased humanity, dignity, or greatness

Written and illustrated by Janelle McDowell,
a proud descendant of many Forced American Heroes.

Perfect for classrooms, families, and heritage events.

Available now at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Explore the legacy. Empower the future.



© 2025 Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage. All Rights Reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations used in critical reviews and scholarly work.

For permission requests, please contact:
Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage
P.O. Box 5002, Trenton, NJ 08638