

# BUILDING CAPACITY TO PRESENT, INTERPRET, & DISCUSS DIFFICULT ISSUES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY



THE SANKOFA  
COLLABORATIVE  
AASLH 2019 MEETING

**WELCOME! As you come in, please...**

- Complete the questionnaire
- Introduce yourself to your table
- Be ready to share what you most want to get from this workshop





# WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE'VE DONE

# Oh Freedom

Oh freedom

No more crying

Oh freedom

No more crying

Of freedom over me!

No more crying over me!

And before I'd be a slave

And before...

I'll be buried in my grave

And go home to my Lord and be

There'll be singing...

free.

There'll be shouting...

There'll be praying...

# **Elaine Buck & Beverly Mills**

Trustees, Stoutsbury Cemetery Association

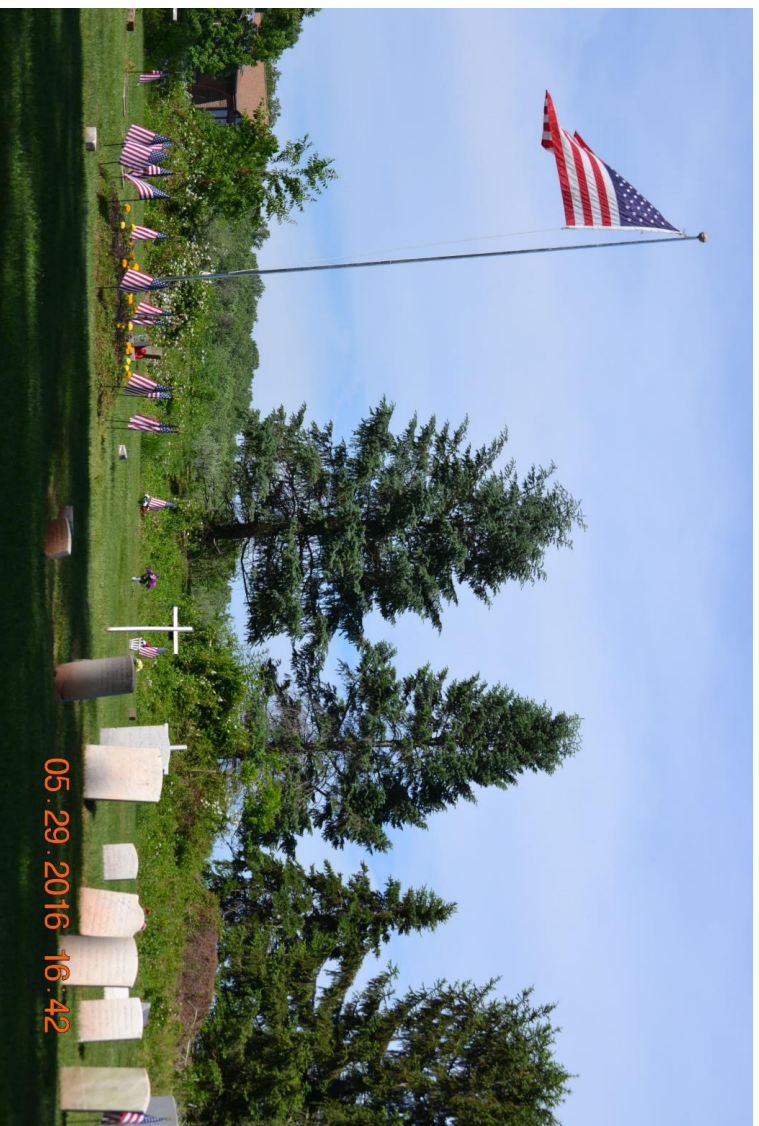
Advisors, Stoutsbury Sourland African American Museum

Authors:

**IF THESE STONES COULD TALK**

African American Presence in Hopewell Valley, Sourland Mountain  
and Surrounding Regions of NJ

# Stoutsburg Cemetery, Hopewell, NJ



**Mt. Zion AME, Skillman, NJ**  
**Built 1866 - Home of the Stoutsbury Sourland**  
**African American Museum (SSAAM)**



# Sam Stephens

The 1719 William Trent House Museum  
Trustee, Trent House Association

Trenton, NJ



# 1719 William Trent House Museum, Trenton, NJ



# Slaves Listed in 1726 Inventory After Trent's Death

Acco't of Negroes viz:

A man Nam'd Yaft.....	40 " "
a Woman nam'd Joan .....	35 " "
a boy nam'd Bob.....	30 " "
1 ditto Dick.....	20 " "
a Girle Nanny.....	32_10_ "
a Child Tom.....	10_ " "

# Slaves Listed in 1726 Inventory After Trent's Death

3 Negro Men as follows viz:

Julius.....30 " \_ "  
Bossin.....30 " \_ "  
Harry.....45 " \_ "

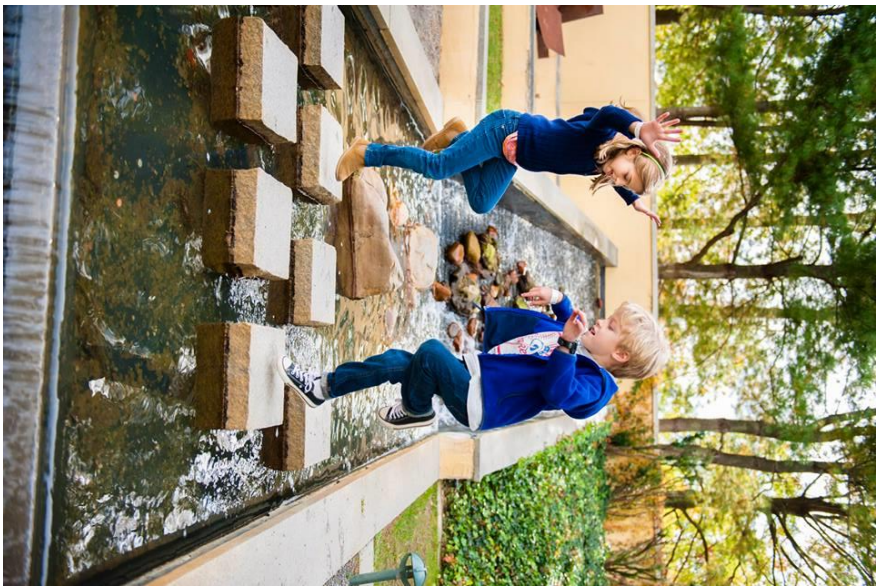
Two (*West?*) Indieno Men, viz:

Cupid.....45 " \_ "  
Pedro.....35 " \_ "

# Bruce Daniels

The Grounds For Sculpture  
Hamilton, NJ





# Joyce J. Scott: Harriet Tubman & Other Truths



# Linda Caldwell Epps

President/CEO, 1804 Consultants

New Jersey Historical Society

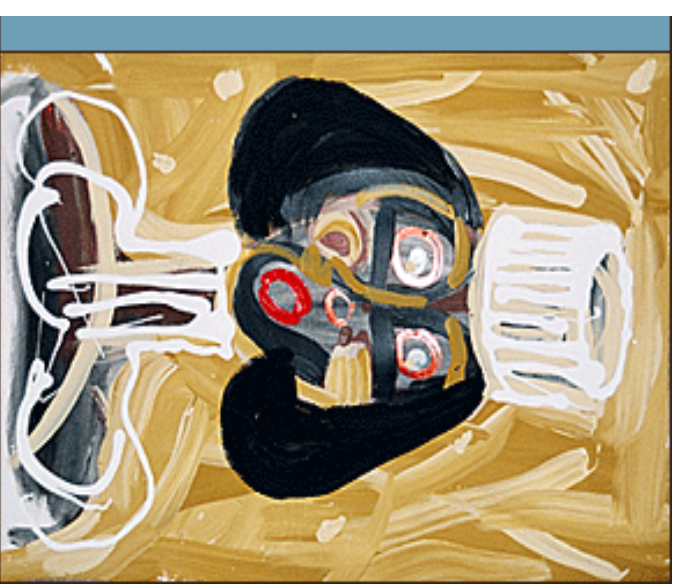






# The 1967 Newark Rebellion

I was between the second and third grades when it happened. It was summer vacation, it was hot, we were at in the Hayes Homes projects. There was trouble, there was gunfire, Mom was worried, I was terrified. Mom said to stay down on the floor so we wouldn't get hit, so we crawled along the floor from room to room. We were on the second floor, close to the street. I would forget and stand up and Mom would scream at me to get back down. This went on all day and all that night.



# History, Memory, and Acknowledgement



# OUR COLLECTIVE IDENTITY



**Sankofa Collaborative**  
looking back • moving forward







# Why “Sankofa”?

- What does “Sankofa” mean?
- How does this symbolize the meaning of “Sankofa”?
- How does it represent the focus of our work?





# Our Work Together

- **January 2017 Invitational Symposium** “Interpreting African American History At Historic Sites And Museums”
- **2017 Workshops**
  - May “Exploring African American History In New Jersey”
  - November “Presenting & Discussing Difficult Topics in African American History”
- **2018 Workshop** “Telling African American History as New Jersey History”
- **2019 Workshops**
  - January “Engage Your Audiences With Difficult Topics in African American History”
  - June “What Do You See? Using The Arts To Enrich Understanding Of The African American Experience”
  - October “Teaching African American History: A Workshop For K-12 Educators”

# Our Goals for Our Work

- **Build our own organization's capacity...**
  - ...to present, interpret, and engage others in self-reflection and civil discourse on the impact and legacy of African American history on our society today
- **Offer opportunities for others involved in similar work...**
  - ...to hear from experts with diverse perspectives, share resources and experiences, participate in in-depth discussions, and build networks

# Share Who You Are & Why You're Here

Briefly, in just a few minutes, please say:

- Your name
- Your organization
- A recent experience related to why you are here
- What you most want to get from this workshop





# CASE STUDIES FOR REFLECTION

## The “Peculiar Institution”

- Are your visitors generally expecting to hear or learn about African American history when they come to your site?
- What do you think your visitors’ responses are to what you present about African American history?
- How prepared is your site/organization to identify and respond to visitor discomfort about what is presented?

# Quotes from Visitors to Plantations

- From white visitors:
  - “We felt we were being lectured and bashed.”
  - “Subjected to a lecture aimed to instill guilt”
  - “Very racist. If you’re white, don’t go.”
- From African American visitors:
  - The tour guide said, “enslaved men and women were treated and fed well on the plantation. In fact, they ‘were like family’ to the owners” ... My friend and I exchanged “This is bulls—t” glances throughout the tour.
  - The docent told a story about an enslaved woman and her family who stayed on the plantation after the owners fled during the Civil War. The docent was clear that they likely stayed there only because they had nowhere else to go. I appreciated her honesty.

## Rethinking the Honors Bestowed

- Who in the past is your site/organization most associated with and for what reason?
- What is presented about the connection this person had with African American history?
- How does your site/organization help visitors deal with this connection?



**Dr. J. Marion Sims**  
**“Father of Gynecology”**  
**1813-1883**



## A Simple Lawn Ornament

- How does your site/organization make sure that information presented to visitors is accurate and complete?
- What “myths” about your site might visitors have about people or events associated with African American history?
- How does your site/organization respond to visitors’ misinformation or preconceptions?

# JOCKO GRAVES – LAWN JOCKEY



BY EARL KOGEE SR.



THE BLACK BOY  
WHO INSPIRED  
GEORGE WASHINGTON

A Landmark in American History, With The  
World's Greatest Music - Told In a Dramatic,  
Easy To Read, Easy To Sing and Lovely Style.  
Good Reading For Every Boy and Girl

# the LEGEND of JOCKO

AMERICA'S REVOLUTIONARY BICENTENNIAL - 1776-1976

















# BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

## How Our Collaborative Developed

- Started with “ah-ha” moment
- Followed by conversations with each other and internally
- Reinforced by each organization’s link with consultant
- Expanded during search for workshop venue
- Strengthened through joint projects (workshops) and internal work
- Continued because of demonstrated need/interest from audiences and positive impact for individual organizations

# Who Are You Currently Engaging?

- Stakeholders
  - Board/Governing body
  - Donors/Supporters
  - Staff
  - Volunteers/Members
- Audiences
- Partners
  - Peer organizations
  - Community groups
  - Experts

# What's Missing

- Who is your organization/site not attracting as volunteers or members? As donors/supporters? As audiences?
- How committed are your staff and board/governing body to the work?
- What is missing in terms of your organization's/site's own knowledge, skills, experiences, resources, visibility?
- Who could be valuable partners that your organization/site is not engaging?

## Table Work

- Describe Current Stakeholders, Audiences, Partners
- List Potential Stakeholders, Audiences, Partners
- Identify Opportunities To Engage Those Potential Groups
- Identify Challenges In Engaging Those Potential Groups

## Reporting Out from Tables

- Who are the frequently missing stakeholder or audience groups?
- Who are frequently mentioned as potential partners?
- What are the most promising opportunities and most difficult challenges in developing relationships with stakeholders, audiences, and partners?

## Our Lessons Learned

- There is no “quick fix” within our own organizations or in our work together
- Trust among individuals as important as organizational alignment
- Opportunities for partnerships can emerge through serendipity, but require awareness and action
- Be willing to acknowledge what you don’t know & seek out those who do
- Recognize the potential risks in forming partnerships & tackling difficult issues, but be bold

## QUESTIONS BEFORE LUNCH

- Are we on the right track in terms of what you are hoping to get from this workshop?
- Is there anything more you'd like to know about our work together? About how our individual organizations have contributed to, benefited from our work?
- What other questions do you have so far?
- What are you hoping we'll cover in the rest of the workshop?





# Target Audiences & Agendas

We began not to inform others but  
to learn how to improve what we  
were doing.

We were surprised to find out that  
we were viewed as a resource.

# Our Audiences

- Initial symposium - experts and people with experience with goal of exploring interests and issues
- First two workshops – broad reach
  - Museum/historic site staff and volunteers
  - Educators
  - Community and faith group members
  - University students
- Next three workshops – more targeted in focus
  - Museum/historic site/library professionals
  - Artists and those interested in using the arts in their work
  - K-12 educators

# Our Workshop Agendas

- Shaped by feedback
- Facilitated by support from funders and partners
- Consistently includes 4 components:
  - Keynote speaker – information & inspiration
  - Small group breakout sessions – examples of what's being done
  - Informal networking
  - Feedback

# Feedback from Our Initial Symposium

- Difficult conversations/topics; Multi-narrative interpretive planning
- Resource bank is a great idea and very needed - an internet resource site would be great!
- A follow-up to this Symposium ASAP
- Methods to present information in a non-confrontational way – how to begin the dialog & continue the conversation
- More strategies for engagement with community & various audiences
- The mechanics of accessing historical resources in New Jersey

# From Our First Workshop

- Strategies for raising awareness about African American history and eradicating racism today
- Teaching, curriculum, and story telling
- Sharing articles and information on current research
- How to use communicate about African American history through other disciplines, especially the arts.
- Research tools
- Organizing for social justice in context of schools, communities, and other contexts (especially through the arts)
- Cross-curricular activities – how to support incorporating art/artistic perspectives into other spaces
- How to deal with contemporary issues about race, not focus primarily on slavery

## From Our Second and Third Workshops

- Have workshops more frequently
- More time in workshops — consider two days
- We need a conversation on White Fragility
- Workshop on moving racial justice through political power
- Sessions for attendee questions & dialogue on own concerns
- Recruiting diverse volunteers, board members, stakeholders
- Working with consultants - how to find and use them
- The legacy - how history informs today's culture

# What Do You Hope to Get from Creating a Capacity-Building Experience?

- Learn?
- Build?
- Teach/Share?
- Change?
- Grow?
- Reap and Sow?
- Fulfill your mission?



## Creating a Capacity-Building Experience

- Who would be your target audience and what do you know about their current knowledge and skills and their interests?
- What specific goals would you have for creating a capacity-building experience with this audience?
- What would your agenda for this experience be and what resources would you need?



# FINDING COMMON THREADS IN CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

# Wade in the Water

Wade in the water

Wade in the water

Children, wade in the water

God's gonna trouble the water.

Who's that host all dressed in red

Wade in the water

Must be the children that Moses led

God's gonna trouble the water.

Wade in the water...

Who's that host all dressed in white

Wade in the water

Must be the children of the Israelite

Oh, God's gonna trouble the water.

Wade in the water...

Who's that host all dressed in blue

Wade in the water

Must be the children that's coming  
through

God's gonna trouble the water, yeah

Wade in the water...

## Why We Start with a Song

- What difference do you think this can make?
- What other “openings” might be used in other settings?

## Table Work

- Share examples of situations from your experience when presentation or discussion about African American history was comfortable for those involved
- Share examples when this was uncomfortable for some or all of those involved – Who was uncomfortable? How was that discomfort displayed? What was the response of others? What was the effect on the presentation or discussion?
- What made the difference? Was it the topic? The setting? The mix of people involved? What people already knew, believed, or expected?

# Dynamics of Race

- What resistance or “push back” do whites presenting information or leading discussions on difficult topics face...From white audiences? From African American audiences? From mixed audiences?
- What about when African Americans are presenting information or leading discussions?

# Being Prepared to Engage and Respond

- Anticipate, but don't assume
- Know the facts
- Be open to questions and discussion
- Acknowledge discomfort, don't ignore
- Have strategies to defuse or deflect conflict

# Beyond Individual Preparedness

- Institutional commitment to presenting and discussing difficult topics – what does this look like?
  - Leadership
  - Mission & strategic plan
  - Allocation of resources
  - Benchmarks and accountability
  - Engagement and training at all levels
  - Continuity and sustainability



# More Questions & Further Discussion

## Contact Us

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