

# LET THE TRUTH BE TOLD™



June 2023

Speaking Truth to Power

Vol. 2 | Issue 3







## Congratulations Kayla Spruill!



And Thank You for your contributions to **Let The Truth Be Told**.

Kayla Spruill is an amazing young woman. She attended high school at Early College School at Delaware State University where she graduated on May 20, 2023.

In high school, she was a member of the National Honor Society and in her senior year served on the executive board. She was also a member of Business Professionals of America (BPA), an organization that provides students with the opportunity to advance their science and technology skills through state-wide and national competitions. Kayla participated in the Digital Media Production Competition. She won 1st place at the state level and competed in the national competition in Dallas, Texas. During her senior year, Kayla authored several articles for “**Let The Truth Be Told**” in which she offered readers a student perspective.

In the fall, **Kayla will be attending Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia**. She plans to pursue a career in communication and journalism and hopes to one day work as a broadcast journalist. Her dream job is to host her own talk show on television and provide a platform for ordinary people to share extraordinary stories that will inspire others

Kayla, we wish you the best as you begin the next chapter of your life.



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## In This Edition

**Page 2** Congratulations Kayla!

**Page 4** The Importance of Teaching African-American History in the Schools

**Page 8** DE HB198 Update

**Page 9** This is Us...

**Page 13** Vote Like Your Life Depends On It!

**Page 16** Nothing About Us Without Us - What it Means to the Environmental Justice Movement

**Page 18** There's More to the Story

**Let The Truth Be Told (TM)** is a quarterly newsletter.

**Let the Truth Be Told** is intended to give African Americans the opportunity to speak "truth to power" through media such as commentary, poems, history, and art, among others, which will be provided by parents, teachers, children, ministers, historians, and other citizens. This platform aims to transform our words into empowered activism.

We are seeking contributors to **Let the Truth Be Told**. If you feel you have something to say but don't believe you write well enough, don't let that stop you. Please submit what you want to say, and you will be given support which will lead to your voice being heard. **Let the Truth Be Told!**

Submissions are reviewed by the editorial board and may be edited for brevity and clarification. We regret we cannot return any unsolicited articles, photos or other materials.

## Contact information

Contact us: [LetTheTruthBeTold2026@gmail.com](mailto:LetTheTruthBeTold2026@gmail.com)

Website: <https://www.letthetruthbetold.net/>

# The Importance of Teaching African American History in the Schools

By Joyce Stell

In a truly comprehensive education, it is crucial to include the rich history and significant contributions of African Americans. By integrating African American history in school curricula, students of all ethnic backgrounds gain a broader understanding of American history and develop empathy, appreciation, and respect for diverse cultures and experiences.



Educators have the responsibility to provide students with a well-rounded education that reflects the diversity and richness of American history. By embracing African American history as an integral part of the curriculum, we foster a sense of belonging, understanding, and respect among students of all ethnic backgrounds. Ultimately, an education that includes African American history empowers all students to become more informed, empathetic, and active participants in building a more inclusive and equitable future.

## Promotes Cultural Understanding and Empathy

The learning of African American history fosters cultural understanding and empathy among students. By studying the Civil Rights Movement, students grasp the struggles faced by African Americans in their fight for equality and justice. They gain insights into the systemic racism, segregation, and discrimination that African Americans have endured (History.com, 2021). This knowledge encourages empathy and challenges prejudices which can pave the way to a more inclusive and harmonious society. Through the study of African American history, students gain a deeper understanding of the resilience, courage, and determination displayed by individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and countless others who fought for civil rights and social justice. Their stories and experiences provide valuable lessons on the importance of standing up against injustice and the power of peaceful activism. Students develop empathy for those who have faced oppression and discrimination, inspiring them to become advocates for equality and fairness in their own lives.

## Inspires Role Models, Breaks Stereotypes

The inclusion of African American history in the classroom helps break down stereotypes and challenges preconceived notions in general, but, specifically, stereotypes about African Americans. Some who disagree with teaching African American history have prejudices and misconceptions that are distorted by the lack of accurate and unbiased information about African Americans. Also, there are individuals or groups who prefer to maintain a singular and unchallenged version of history, especially if it means acknowledging the injustices and inequalities faced by African Americans throughout history.

Classroom instruction would help remove misconceptions and provide a nuanced and accurate understanding of the diversity within the African American community. In the classroom, students will learn that African Americans have excelled in every field including, the arts, literature, medicine, science, business, mathematics, politics, and space travel, thereby

shattering stereotypes that have continued to survive including the suggestion of intellectual inferiority of African Americans. Education through a classroom setting would foster a more inclusive and informed society.

In addition, students would be inspired by African Americans who have made significant contributions to society. Learning about figures such as George Washington Carver, who revolutionized farming practices through innovative research on crop rotation and the uses of peanuts and sweet potatoes, could inspire a student to pursue his or her passion and thereby make a difference (PBS, n.d.). Students might be propelled forward by people, who do not appear in textbooks, such as African American Civil War heroes, and people like Onesimus, an enslaved man who introduced a White physician to a method for treating smallpox, which led to the discovery of a vaccination for the disease in the 1800s. Learning about those inventive, trailblazing and patriotic African Americans empowers students to challenge societal limitations and work toward their goals, regardless of their background, circumstances, or ethnicity.

### **The Overall Narrative of American History is Enriched.**

Teaching African American history in public schools recognizes the contributions and experiences of African Americans as an integral part of the nation's development. African American history is interwoven with significant events such as the abolitionist movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and the struggle for civil rights, which have shaped the fabric of American society. With the inclusion of diverse perspectives, students gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and interconnectedness of historical events.

### **Provides a Platform for Accurate Recognition of African American Achievements**

Incorporating African American history in the classroom allows students to become aware of the significant accomplishments of African Americans in various fields. In addition to learning a history that includes innumerable unrecognized achievements of African Americans, students will gain a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the American story. A story that highlights the impact of African American contributions in medicine and men such as Dr. Charles Drew, whose pioneering work in blood plasma and transfusion saves lives to this day.

The American story should include men like Robert Smalls, an enslaved man who became a Civil War hero. He was the pilot of the Planter, a Confederate ammunition ship. During the War, with his family and other enslaved people on board, he commandeered the ship, sailed it past Confederate forces, and surrendered the vessel to the Union Navy. His heroic act provided the Union with valuable information about Confederate fortifications and helped bolster the Union blockade. Smalls became a Navy Captain and later served in the South Carolina state legislature. He left a legacy in both maritime and political spheres.

Through these and numerous other documented accounts of little known African American history, students will gain insight into contributions and struggles of African Americans. They will also learn that those contributions and struggles are essential components of the nation's narrative, not just isolated chapters. Students will recognize that the progress and success of America is rooted in the collective efforts and contributions of diverse communities.

## Conclusion

The inclusion of African American history in the classroom gives students a well-rounded education that reflects the diversity and richness of American history. African American history is vital for providing a comprehensive understanding of American history and promoting inclusivity. Through classroom instruction of African American history, students develop a broader perspective, empathy, and cultural understanding, which leads to a more inclusive and accurate narrative. Stories and voices that heretofore were not heard will be acknowledged and celebrated in the classroom, leading to a more informed society.

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*Joyce Stell is an avid reader and researcher of African American history, and she is a children's book author.*



**Celebrating Juneteenth**  
**June 19, 2023**



## DE HB198 Update: Encouraging Progress

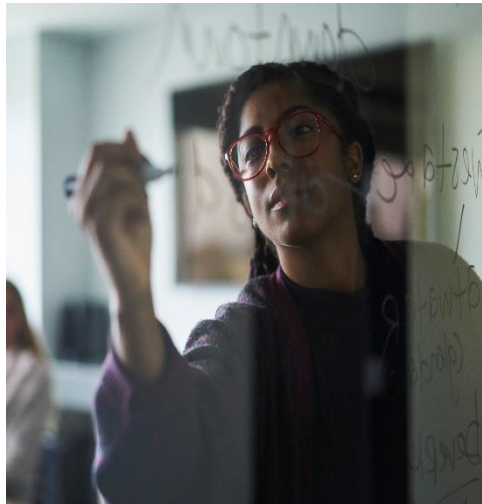
By Dr. Marlene A. Saunders

As DE HB198 moved through the legislative process, first as a draft bill and on to eventual passage in June 2021, both positive and negative positions about a law requiring Delaware public and charter schools to teach Black history to children in grades K-12 were expressed in no uncertain terms. Citizens, upper class to low-income, young and old, legislators and clergy, were among those who either supported or opposed DE HB198. Delawareans who were, and still remain, against the bill described it as critical race theory in disguise. Other opponents based their stance on the belief that teaching Black history creates hostile school environments for white students because teaching Black history conveys the message that every white student is consciously racist. Efforts to teach Black history in schools has never been motivated by the desire to inflame racial division between white and African American students.

Another point of view expressed doubts about the commitment of “the system” (e.g., the Department of Education) to earnestly work to implement DE HB198. The concerns centered on the extent to which teachers would develop and teach all-inclusive lessons mirroring the core content the law says must be taught.

There are at least two justifiable reasons for this position. The first is the decades long resistance on the part of school systems to teach Black history, and on the part of non-school settings, such as libraries, to make the full history

of the African American Experience available to students and the public through books, journals, newspapers, and other media. Consider Mildred Lewis Rutherford’s widely used pamphlet “A Measuring Rod to Test Textbooks, and Reference Books in Schools, Colleges and Libraries.” Published in 1919 at the request of the United Confederate Veterans, this book identified books which educators and libraries should not adopt. For example, among its guidelines were, “Do not reject a book because it does not contain all that the South claims. A textbook cannot be a complete encyclopedia.” “But - reject a book that says the South fought to protect her slaves. Reject a book that speaks of the slaveholder of the South as cruel and unjust to his slaves.”



The second reason is linked to the recent wave of states, 23 as a matter of fact, that have passed legislation limiting instruction around topics such as race, racism, and slavery. Most of us are familiar with recent events in Florida where Governor DeSantis, in 2022, signed the Stop WOKE law which prohibits instruction on race relations or diversity that

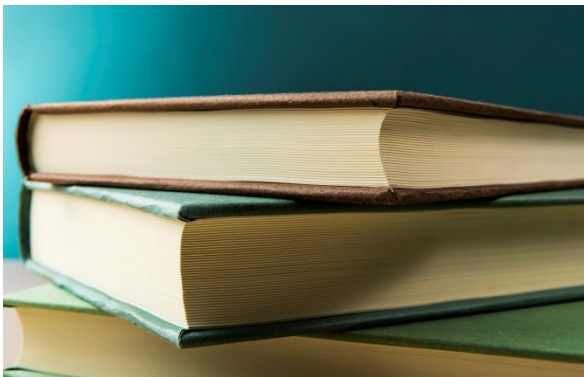
imply a person’s status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily determined by his or her race, color, national origin, or sex.” In 2023, he announced that his administration banned high school students from enrolling in a college-level course on African American history.

So, one-hundred years following works like “A Measuring Rod” and movements like the Lost Cause that emerged in 1866 after the South lost the Civil War, many Americans are engaged in the serious battle to hold back “the dangerous assault on truth and expression in the form of laws” that prohibit teaching children to think critically about such topics as race relations as



well as certain people and events that occurred during the Civil War, Reconstruction and the period following Reconstruction when Jim Crow segregation was legalized to stop the upward advancement of African Americans in American society. This is censorship.

While talking about DE HB198 with Dr. Akwasi Osei, Interim Dean, College of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences at Delaware State University, he used the word “encouraging” to describe the current situation regarding the implementation of DE HB198. While considering his assessment, I thought about the DE HB198 Update Essay for this edition of the newsletter. More specifically, I wondered if the update would support an opinion that implementing DE HB198 “right, all the way”, is moving forward in a manner that not only corresponds to the law’s requirements but is responding to the problem that was the catalyst for the law. That is, Black history is not sufficiently taught in Delaware schools. Dr. Osei’s estimate of the movement toward implementing DE HB198 “right, all the way”, was neither exaggerated nor was it understated. Rather, it reflected the current situation in terms of what the public should expect, given the law’s requirements as well as realities that recognize all individuals responsible for teaching Black history do not yet have the knowledge or the know-how to teach Black history. Nevertheless, an encouraging update on DE HB198 follows:



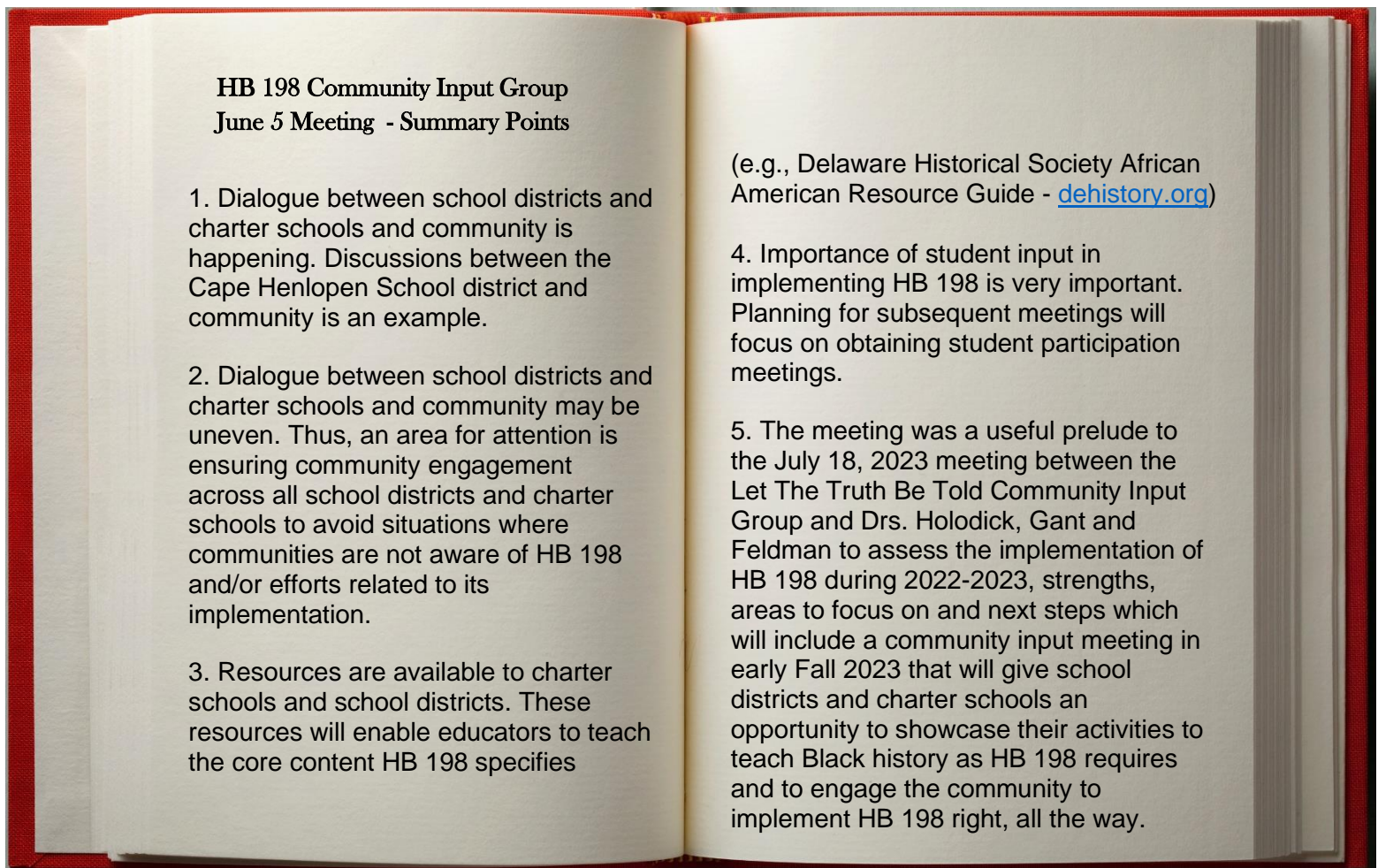
1. By September 15, 2022, each Delaware public school district and charter school provided the names and contact information for persons (Leads) responsible for overseeing implementation of the core educational content prescribed by the law (this report is due every year at the same time).
2. By November 15, 2022, all Leads provided the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) reports describing how the Black history curriculum was being implemented by the respective school district and charter school (this report is due every year at the same time).
3. By January 15, 2023, DDOE submitted a report to the Governor, members of the General Assembly and the Director of the Division of Research.
4. The entire report (“Black History Education Annual Report, 2022-2023”- [Black History Education – Delaware Department of Education](#)) includes appendices that provide the DE HB198 law, list of Leads, and several additional appendices with information reported to DDOE by each charter and public school detailing required content taught at each grade level. The full report is available to the public.
5. Since the February 2023 edition, **the Let The Truth Be Told** Community Input Group has met on two occasions with DDOE’s two top administrators responsible for overseeing the implementation DE HB198. These productive meetings with Dr. Michael Feldman and Dr. Monica Gant have focused on hurdles to overcome related to teaching Black history; ways to use DDOE’s report to promote and facilitate focused and useful discussions between the community, school districts and public schools regarding a variety of

questions and concerns about content, teaching methodology and accountability to ensure required content is, in fact, taught, etc.

6. On March 1, 2023, a community meeting that included a number of Leads was held. Feedback from community members, Leads, and DDOE administrators was positive and indicated their openness to future meetings.

On July 18, 2023, the **Let The Truth Be Told** Community Input Group will meet with Education Secretary Mark Holodick and Drs. Gant and Feldman to discuss next steps for

implementation of DE HB198 “right all the way.” The meeting will include initial planning for a community meeting involving Leads that will give school districts and public schools the opportunity to showcase how they are teaching Black history to Delaware’s students. Aims of this program are to: (1) provide the community, teachers and Leads with examples of content and teaching methods that correspond to the law’s core content areas to be taught; (2) share content and teaching methods about which educators may not be aware but will want to use and (3) demonstrate the extent to which schools in Delaware are embracing teaching Black history like it is American history.



**HB 198 Community Input Group  
June 5 Meeting - Summary Points**

1. Dialogue between school districts and charter schools and community is happening. Discussions between the Cape Henlopen School district and community is an example.
2. Dialogue between school districts and charter schools and community may be uneven. Thus, an area for attention is ensuring community engagement across all school districts and charter schools to avoid situations where communities are not aware of HB 198 and/or efforts related to its implementation.
3. Resources are available to charter schools and school districts. These resources will enable educators to teach the core content HB 198 specifies

(e.g., Delaware Historical Society African American Resource Guide - [dehistory.org](https://dehistory.org))

4. Importance of student input in implementing HB 198 is very important. Planning for subsequent meetings will focus on obtaining student participation meetings.
5. The meeting was a useful prelude to the July 18, 2023 meeting between the Let The Truth Be Told Community Input Group and Drs. Holodick, Gant and Feldman to assess the implementation of HB 198 during 2022-2023, strengths, areas to focus on and next steps which will include a community input meeting in early Fall 2023 that will give school districts and charter schools an opportunity to showcase their activities to teach Black history as HB 198 requires and to engage the community to implement HB 198 right, all the way.



## This is Us...

### Authors of Our Future

by Tya M. Pope

I hated my hair, my lips, my curves, my skin. I was ashamed. Black people were poor, uneducated, criminals who needed to be saved from themselves. We were cowards and traitors to our own people which resulted in American chattel slavery. We were weak and feeble minded, so we remained in bondage for hundreds of years. We did not fight because no one had the capacity to truly understand freedom. This legacy led to Black people living in squalid communities and dilapidated homes, working dead end jobs, and doing nothing to pull themselves out of this darkness.

We could have the “American Dream” if we just worked harder, if we tried harder, if we cared more, if we loved ourselves. I graduated high school believing this, never questioning this deep hatred of myself, my people, my legacy. I knew early on if I aspired to be white or more white adjacent, I would eventually succeed. Being called an Oreo was a compliment. It meant I was getting closer. Being told I sounded like a white girl meant I was getting closer. Being told I was smart for a Black girl meant I was getting closer.

In graduate school I took a women’s studies course in hopes of getting an easy A. I am a woman so this should be easy. The first day, my mind was blown. I never considered why I bought into all the stereotypes about being a woman. I never questioned why I believed behaving a particular way or participating in certain activities were more acceptable because of my outward appearance. I never considered the information provided to me or the things I was seeing throughout my

life were not based on anything other than the desire to oppress. Like a bolt of lightning, it then occurred to me, perhaps this is the case with other pieces of my identity. What if all the things I knew about being Black were much the same?

The things I believed about being Black were not just internalized racism, they were part and parcel of the lies we are fed from an early age. I did not just happen to grow up in a home with no running water and no indoor plumbing. This was by design. My dad did not graduate from high school because he could not hack it, it was by design. I did not see family members and friends cycle in and out of prison because they did not know better, it was by design. My ancestors did not just have comfortable lives with kind caretakers for hundreds of years. They were systematically tortured, raped, and murdered to build the very country we enjoy today. My ancestors were not feeble minded and weak. They were fighting and rebelling the moment their feet touched this land.

Black families do not have a median household wealth of \$14,100 compared to white families who have a median household wealth of \$187,300 because we did not work hard enough. Our wealth was stolen from us time and time again throughout history through forced labor, broken and racist laws, discriminatory policies and practices, bombings, fires, and outright theft. We are living in the shadow of chattel slavery, redlining, deed restrictions, Jim Crow, GI Bill implementation, National Guard occupations, strategic attacks by the FBI and CIA, the War on Drugs, mass incarceration, separate but equal, and the list goes on. We need only look at the history of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Oscarville, Georgia, Kowaliga, Alabama, Seneca Village, New York, Susannah, Alabama, or



# June is Pride Month

## **A Proclamation on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Pride Month, 2023**

### **The White House**

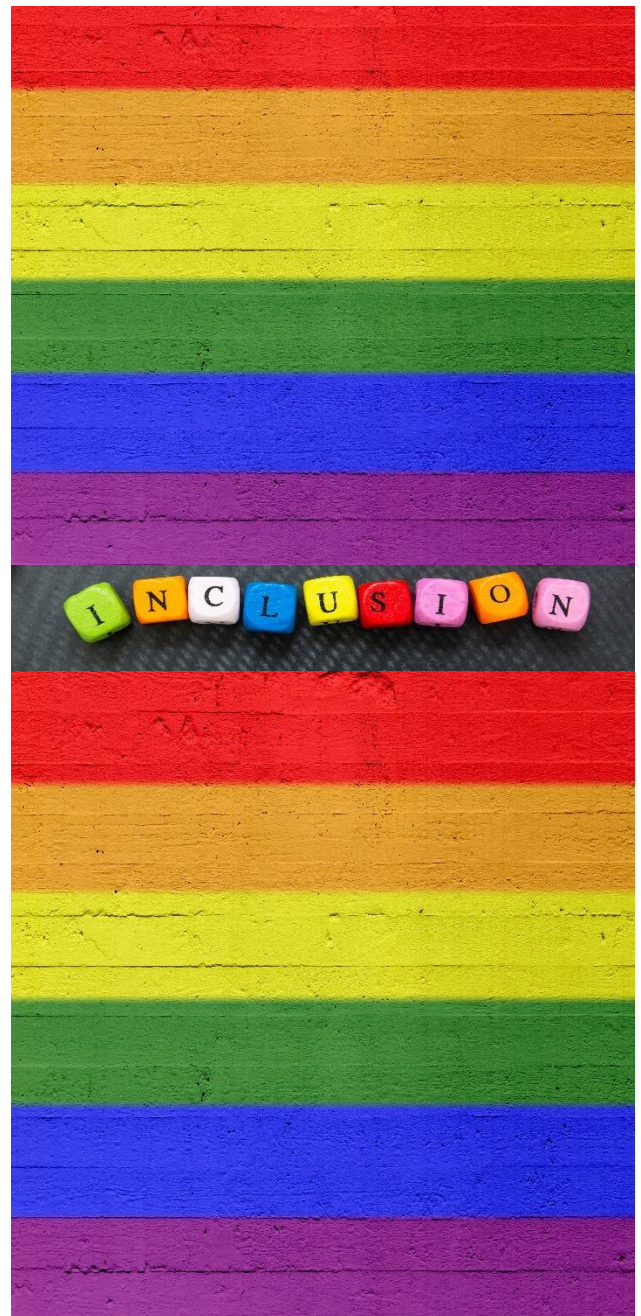
Vanport, Oregon. Black people were never meant to pull ourselves up by their bootstraps because we were never able to keep our boots.

Delaware was the first state to ratify the constitution, thus the first to buy into the lie of America. The constitution is full of word play and hypocrisy. The words freedom, justice, and all never actually meant freedom, justice, or all. Black Delawareans are now presented with an opportunity to tell a different story. This story is not new, it's rather old. We are descendants of deep thinkers, skeptics, intellectuals, musicians, artists, writers, storytellers, and so much more. We have such a beautiful rich history created by beautiful proud people from all walks of life.



There is power in our collective mission, our collective presence, our collective voice. A Black People's Conference in Delaware means we tell the true, unfiltered, full story of us. This is our chance to share our journey as a people, discuss our challenges, and chart the path we intend to blaze. We are the writers of our destiny, the authors of our future. We will create and hold space for dialogue and community, allowing us to carry on the traditions passed on generation after generation by supporting and learning from each other. This is us. This is our agenda.

***Tya M. Pope*** (she/her) is a native Delawarean driven by the desire to see the first state lead by example. She believes in a just and virtuous world free of bars and barriers, filled with peace and an abundance of opportunities.







## “Vote Like Your Life Depends on It”

By Kathy Trusty

On May 9, 2023, school board elections were held in 11 Delaware public school districts. Except for Delmar, the voter turnout was less than 10% in each district, and Delmar’s turnout was an abysmal 10.03%.

Allowing 10% of the population to select those who will be making decisions that affect 100% of the population is appalling.

Unfortunately, that is the case in most local elections. Why is there such voter apathy, generally but particularly, at the local level when decisions made at that level have a direct impact on our lives and the greatest impact on our lives?

Most Americans rarely interact with the federal government, yet the turnout for those elections, though lower than it should be, is much higher than the turnout when elections are held for governor, mayor, state legislators, sheriff, district attorney, school board members and other local officials. Those officials make decisions which affect us daily.

I am perplexed that so many eligible voters do not participate in the process, especially Black Americans. History has shown that those in power can and will enact policies and programs that are not in the best interest of the Black community. The questions remain, why don’t more Black Americans vote and vote more consistently at the local level?

“My vote does not count.” I have heard this so many times and if this is true, how do you reconcile this statement with the outrageously restrictive voting laws being implemented today? Your vote **does** count and can effect change, which is why some state legislatures are making it exceedingly difficult for certain communities to participate in the electoral process. After Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock were elected to the United States senate, primarily on the strength of Black voters, the Georgia legislature, controlled by the opposing political party, began taking measures to disenfranchise Black voters. One of their targets is Souls-to-the-Polls, a get-out-the-vote initiative popular with Black churches.

When Americans cast their vote, they often do not vote down ballot. The bottom of the ticket is just as important, if not more, as the top of the ticket. Shortly after President Joe Biden announced his decision to run for re-election, the New York Times published an article highlighting Black voters’ frustration with the President for his failure to deliver on some of his campaign promises, including federal protections against restrictive voting laws; student loan debt relief; and criminal justice and police accountability measures.

I understand their frustration and yes, the president does share some responsibility for not following through on campaign promises.

I am frustrated as well, however, I am more frustrated because too many of us vote as if the presidency is an autocracy. "He/She alone can fix it" does not apply in a democracy.

Any bill the president wants passed must be voted on and approved by Congress. As voters and participants in the process, we need to keep that in mind.

When we vote for a person to serve as president, we must vote for a "supporting cast" as well, meaning those running to serve in the House of Representatives and the US Senate.

"Not voting is not a protest. It is a surrender."

Keith Ellison, Attorney General of Minnesota

We must vote down-ballot and select representatives and senators who share the president's vision, so they can pass laws we want enacted. Senators must approve a president's nominee for the United States Supreme Court and for cabinet positions including Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of Health and Human Services and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. The decisions made by the people in those positions have a significant impact on our lives and well-being.

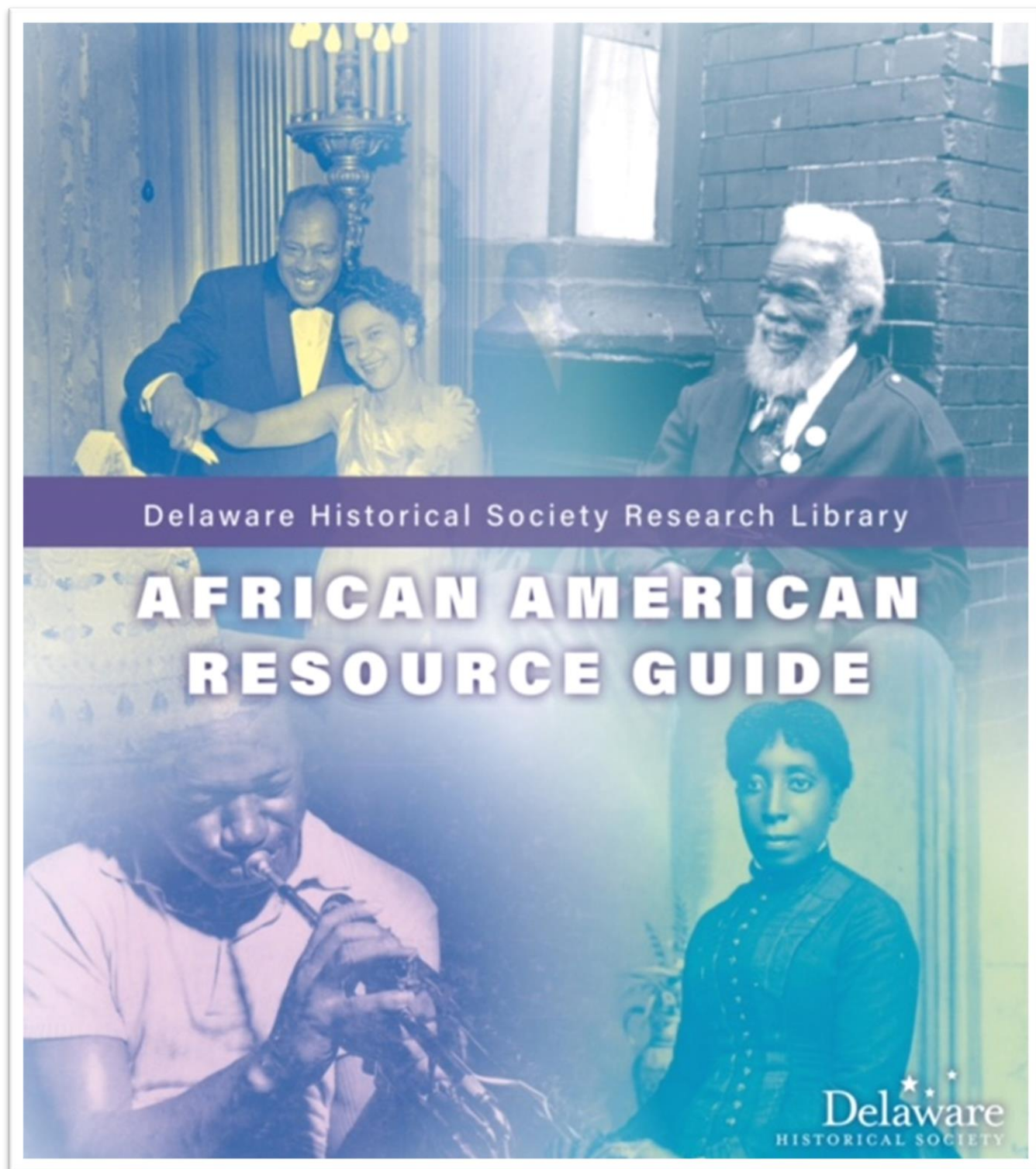
Eligible voters are more engaged when the presidency is on the ballot, but not so much during off-year and local elections. We need to change our mindset and become more engaged in local elections, and I include myself.

Those elected on the federal level are not responsible for banning Toni Morrison's books *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* or paring down the Black history that's barely part of the curriculum. State and local officials are responsible for that.

Those elected to serve in the federal government are not responsible for laws that allow the purchase of military style assault weapons without a comprehensive background check. State and local officials are responsible for that. And those officials were likely voted into office by a small subset of our community.

So, let's change our mindset about elections and which ones are more important. Let's get excited about voting in local elections and voting down-ballot in federal elections. It could change your life and the lives of our children.

The Delaware Historical Society's African American Resource Guide is online and available for download via this link: <https://dehistory.org/african-american-resource-guide/>



# Nothing About Us Without Us - What it Means to the Environmental Justice Movement

By Penny Dryden

The phrase *Nothing About Us Without Us* means different things to different people. For the Environmental Justice community or communities of color in Delaware it has been used to give voice to the idea that those who are affected by injustices or disparities have a right to influence ways to address these issues and how it is done.

This starts with meaningful community engagement *where community members are respected as a shared partner and a shared leader* in all this work. There must be a mutual understanding of what Meaningful Engagement means and looks like. Here are some factors to be considered:

## Inclusive & Intentional Engagement

- Partner with community leaders in the design of your engagement efforts from the very beginning. Include authentic community leaders with deep relationships with diverse communities often not engaged in civic efforts and those likely to be most impacted.
- Provide resources for community leaders to support engagement design, acknowledging and valuing the time and expertise they bring, similar to consultants. Identify philanthropic partners who may also have resources for supporting community capacity.
- For community engagement leadership, hire diverse staff with diverse lived experiences, especially

experiences that align with your communities' most vulnerable or least engaged populations.

## Transparency

- Communicate all key decision points in planning or policy process early in the engagement process. Key decision-making points include available committee membership opportunities, timelines, plan draft dates, hearings and votes by legislative bodies, zoning changes, etc.
- Communicate all final decisions to appropriate stakeholders.
- Communicate unknowns or areas where changes may occur in the process. The more transparent you are about the areas that are still being decided and who the ultimate decision-makers are, the more transparent you are about the limitations of your capacity and process.
- Make yourself accessible by showing openness and mutual respect in relationships. Share your contact information, phone, and email, where possible, to allow people to reach out if questions arise at any point or the community has new information to share.

## Empowerment: Sharing Power & Capacity

- Partner with community leaders to co-design local planning efforts where appropriate and solicit their feedback early on to implement meaningful and effective approaches, including trauma-informed strategies. Trauma-informed planning is an important tool for addressing community-level trauma caused by longstanding



systemic neglect, disinvestment, and poverty in low-income communities of color. By utilizing a trauma-informed lens, the focus is to build the capacity and power of community residents to meaningfully engage in decision-making and to advocate on behalf of themselves.

- Empower community members to take an active role early in the planning and policymaking process. This means:
  - Creating a participatory process for developing a shared vision for community change.
  - Engaging residents in documenting not only the inequities and conditions that merit change, but also community assets to preserve and build upon.
- Share governance and decision-making by, for example, setting aside resources to be shaped and decided on by community members. Resources can include grants for community engagement, land acquisition funds, the hiring of consultants, project selection, or participatory budgeting.
- Structure the planning, implementation, and evaluation process so community organizations and leaders can: 1) Shape agendas and issues, 2) Organize and lead convenings, and 3) identify concrete and measurable benchmarks for

success and responsible parties, for both procedural (community engagement) and substantive (program/policy) outcomes.

The message is clear to community members, as well as government, researchers, and others: that no decision making about marginalized communities, environmental, climate and social justice shall take place without the full, equitable and direct participation of a member from that group. Civil rights and EJ leaders have been making these very statements for decades, yet this critical message is ignored repeatedly, leaving out the voices of those who know best what their lived experiences are like, what their needs are or what is most important to them.

Community engagement does not exist unless community members are working side by side in full transparency; respecting each other's values; sharing decision-making early and throughout a process with benefits for all.

With that said, I urge everyone to get and stay engaged and ensure that *Nothing About Us Without Us* becomes a common theme within all efforts that impact our specific group.

*Penny Dryden is Founder and CEO of Community Housing Empowerment and Connections, Inc.*

THERE'S MORE  
to the Story

## The Black Mozart

### Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges

By Toni A. Barrett

Joseph Boulogne, was a champion fencer, violinist and composer. He was born December 25, 1745, in The French colony of Guadeloupe to George de Boulogne Saint-Georges, a wealthy planter and his mistress, Anne, who was a 17-year-old African slave.



When he became a Chevalier (knight), he took his father's suffix "de Saint-Georges and became known as Chevalier de Saint-Georges. He became a knight because he, as a Black man, fought a white master in fencing and won. As a result, King Louis XVI made him the only knight of color in the king's private guard.

Because his father was very wealthy, and took a liking to his son, Saint-Georges was free and was educated at the best schools. He was very bright and attended an elite and upscale boarding school for sons of the aristocracy located in Bordeaux, where he stayed for two years. He began to show great skill in fencing and was then sent to *Le Académie Royale Polytechnique des Armes et de L'Equitation*, where he excelled in both music and fencing. He became an expert



fencer and became known as the greatest swordsman in Europe. He was a remarkable swordsman, with

great speed, flexibility and grace which saved his life as he was once attacked by five anti-abolitionists while on his way to a performance. He defeated all five and continued on to his

performance. He was quite an accomplished musician and was a virtuoso violinist as well as a gifted composer and conductor. Among his published music were operas, string quartets, concertos and symphonies, all composed between 1771-1779. He conducted *Le Concert Olympique Orchestra* in France where he also performed his violin concertos. Famous

composer, Joseph Haydn, composed six symphonies, (known as The Paris Symphonies) all of which were conducted by Saint-Georges.

Saint-Georges endured a lot of racism throughout his life. In 1776, he was nominated to head the Paris Opera and his candidacy was challenged by



a group of white divas. They refused to take orders from a Black man. Although Louis XVI had approved the appointment, the divas ultimately won, and Saint-George was not

given the directorship. It is also said he died alone because, although he was of high social standing in the fencing and music world and admired by many, his dark skin preventing him from being an acceptable suitor.

You can read more about this gifted musician and fencer, Joseph Boulogne, also known as Chevalier de Saint Georges, also known as the Black Mozart in the book, *The Black Mozart: Le Chevalier de Saint Georges*, by Walter E. Smith.\*

*\*A lot of information about Saint-Georges has been lost and many facts about him differ from source to source.*