

2022-2023

SPEAKERS

A forum for learning from our communities

PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Message from the Directors

BY AARON D. COBB & LYNN STALLINGS

A generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation titled "From Civil Rights to Civic Virtue: Forming Character through Community," has enabled the Civil Rights & Civic Virtue Society to host multiple speakers. In addition to this kick-off conference, we hosted guest speakers through a Speaker Series and collaborated with other offices in support of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast and a Juneteenth Luncheon. This booklet features brief descriptions of these events, focusing most of the attention on the Speaker Series. This series provides a forum to learn from individuals who have distinguished themselves through their lives of service within the community or from scholars who can help our community learn more about civil rights, civic virtues, or character education.



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Launching the Grant

On August 25-26, 2022, AUM launched the grant by hosting a conference on community-engaged learning and character education. The conference featured two keynote presentations:

- Dr. Julie Hatcher, Professor Emeritus, IUPUI, Developing Civic-Minded Graduates through Community-Engaged Teaching, Research and Service
- Dr. Jason Baehr, Professor of Philosophy, Loyola Marymount University, Intellectual Virtue & Civic Education



PHOTO CREDIT: WILL FENN

We also provided opportunities for faculty and staff to participate in several field trips, including a trip to visit Shady Street Park, a new urban park project of the City of Montgomery. At this field trip, participants met with Jocelyn Zanzot and Darryl Washington, from the City of Montgomery Economic & Community Development, to hear about this park and the city's efforts to revitalize downtown areas through parks and trailways. The second field trip involved a visit to the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice. This museum is a unique and innovative retelling of the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. It narrates this story through immersive design elements and traces the legacies from slavery to mass incarceration.

"Part of what it is to educate students is to prepare them to become good citizens."

JASON BAEHR



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"...we use realistic principles to be able to make the impact and, as we see the impact in the lives. what we find is is that individuals are willing to make the change if the barrier can be removed."

RICHARD WILLIAMS



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Speaker Series: Richard Williams

The goal of the speaker series is to provide a forum to learn from individuals who have distinguished themselves through their lives of service within the community or from scholars who can help our community learn more about civil rights, civic virtues, or character education. Our first speaker was Reverend Richard Williams, who was recognized by the Montgomery Advertiser as a local hero and was honored with the 2022 Leadership Montgomery's Unity Award.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Williams is founder and executive director of The Beacon Center, a ministry of the Metropolitan United Methodist Church in the Ridgcrest Community in Montgomery. This center houses more than thirty social services: from counseling services to a full-service food pantry to GED and literacy programs to community health advocacy to advocacy within the district court system and much more. Pastor Williams's 11/16/22 address, "Your Voice Matters," was a call to members in the audience to think about ways their voice can make a difference. He described the ways the congregation at Metropolitan United Methodist Church and the staff and volunteers at the Beacon Center are removing barriers "so our neighbors can have a better life." His talk enabled us to think deeply about service to community as an expression of virtue.

Speaker Series: Steve Murray

Our second speaker was Mr. Steve Murray, Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Mr. Murray has been recognized by the Montgomery Advertiser as a local hero for his work, especially in connection with the 2020 statement of recommitment “to the mission of illuminating the path that brought us here, and thereby equipping all of us, together, to build a future characterized by justice, human dignity, and a commitment to the wellbeing of all people.”



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Mr. Murray is leading an initiative to help enable the Archives to tell a more inclusive story of Alabama's history. His 1/25/2023 lecture, titled "Our Historical Moment," provided an opportunity for reflection about the role of the Archives in telling this story. As the statement of recommitment notes, “If history is to serve the present, it must offer an honest assessment of the past.” Mr. Murray spoke about the ways this recommitment has impacted him as a person, the challenges he has faced in this work, and the ways he has sought to address these challenges. His talk enabled us to think deeply about Alabama's history and contribute to the goal of increasing civil rights literacy.

"We can stay on our present trajectories with rival visions of America or we can choose to find a new basis for an American story that celebrates our ideals while recognizing our shortcomings and pledging our commitment to the fulfillment of our best potential."

STEVE MURRAY



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS



"...having
humility enough
to be vulnerable
dictates how
you show up for
each and
everybody."

JONATHAN AVANT



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Speaker Series: Jonathan Avant

Our third speaker was Jonathan Avant, an accountant at Aldridge, Borden & Co whose portfolio focuses on small and minority-owned businesses. He has served as the president of the Downtown Business Association and as vice president of the Montgomery County Community Cooperative District. He also serves on multiple boards, including the Board of Directors of the River Region Trails Project and Valiant Cross Academy.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

He is an accomplished trumpeter, producer and co-owner of a local live music studio. Mr. Avant was recognized as a community hero for his work and service in Montgomery. His 2/8/2023 talk, "America's Trauma, Montgomery's Promise," reflected on the legacies of slavery in the local region while offering a hopeful vision for the future. Focusing on service to the community, he described ways we might put our passion and purpose toward lifting up the community.



Speaker Series: Jannah Bailey

Our fourth speaker was Jannah Bailey, President and CEO of River Region United Way. Prior to that, she served as Executive Director of Child Protect for 21 years. She also served on the Montgomery School Board. She is a Montgomery native and a 1983 alumna of Auburn University at Montgomery. For her service to community, she was recognized as a community hero.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Bailey's 2/22/2023 address, titled "Pot Pies, Jackie Gleason, Me-ma, and Saturday Nights," reflected on the influences of her maternal grandmother in impressing upon her the value of service. In the context of her talk, she spoke about her experiences during desegregation efforts within Montgomery. She also described ongoing needs within a local community devastated by a tornado. Following her talk, the CRCV Society organized a work day for faculty, staff, and students to help clean up the tornado damage at a historic cemetery in this neighborhood.

"She instilled in me the hope that I could be anything I wanted to be, but I needed to be a servant first."

JANNAH BAILEY



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS



"Our goal for the museum was to humanize history, to give stories of the past the power to inform our present, and to embolden visitors to make future change."

L'RAI ARTHUR-MENSAH



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Speaker Series: L'Rai Arthur-Mensah

Our fifth speaker was L'Rai Arthur-Mensah, a Project Director with Local Projects. Her credits include exhibition design at The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, The Fashion For Good Experience in Amsterdam, Netherlands and The Greenwood Rising Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This event was cosponsored by Office of the Chancellor, the Dean's Office in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, the AUM Lecturers Committee, the Department of Fine Arts, the AUM HERStory Series.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Professor Breuna Baine invited Arthur-Mensah to speak about her company's philosophy of "Listening Differently," a method that explores how they listen, who they listen to, and how they change when what they learn defies their assumptions. They aim to listen to their clients' communities, so that their design work helps cultural institutions become more inclusive. Arthur-Mensah's 3/8/2023 talk, titled "Design for Impact," drew attention to the ways practices of listening can support the work of justice-informed design in museums and exhibits.

Speaker Series: Henry Allen, Jr.

Our sixth speaker was Mr. Henry Allen, a local exemplar. Mr. Allen was a student activist in the Civil Rights movement, served the country in the Vietnam War, became the first African-American to enlist in the Alabama National Guard, Selma's first African-American firefighter, and Selma's first Fire Chief. He was the recipient of a Civil Rights Legend award from former President Barack Obama.



We were privileged to have Mr. Allen's daughter, Madison, a current student at AUM introduce her father. Mr. Allen's 3/22/2023 presentation focused on his experiences as a student activist during the Civil Rights Movement. In his high school years in the early 1960s, Allen met Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leader Bernard Lafayette, Jr.. Along with other high school students, he was trained on peaceful responses to violence and recruited other students for peaceful protests. Between 1963-65, he was numbered among the thousands of students who protested against segregation laws in public accommodations and in voting rights in Selma, Alabama. He was a participant in the original march from Selma to Montgomery.

"Working in the civil rights movement taught me character and cooperation. We didn't have time for hatred...The movement was focused solely on obtaining what was just and right, and that was a lesson I took to heart and used throughout my life."

HENRY ALLEN, JR.





"It's not just a piece of art, it's a way to teach and integrate this conversation of maternal health and respect and dignity for humankind."

MICHELLE BROWDER



PHOTO CREDIT: [HTTPS://WWW.ANARCHALUCYBETSEY.ORG/](https://www.anarchalucybetsey.org/)

Teaching Workshop: Michelle Browder

At the opening of our annual teaching workshop, we hosted Michelle Browder, a highly acclaimed local activist and artist whose work—including the Anarcha Lucy Betsey Memorial, Mothers of Gynecology monument and the You May Feel a Little Pressure mural—has been widely recognized in major national outlets such as NPR, The Washington Post, PBS Newshour, and USA Today, among many others. This talk was cosponsored by a grant from the Alabama Humanities Alliance.



PHOTO CREDIT: MICKEY WELSH

As the founder and creative director of the organization More than Tours, Browder creates immersive and interactive experiences that explore the history and culture of Montgomery, while amplifying the stories of marginalized communities. She has also been involved in numerous initiatives aimed at creating greater equity and access for all, including work in education, health, and economic development. In her 5/4/2023 talk, Browder described the ways her work as an artist and activist has enabled her to become a voice for social justice in Montgomery, Alabama and beyond.

A photograph of the AUM water tower and surrounding campus buildings under a clear sky.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast: Calvin Williams

We collaborated with the Office of the Chancellor, the Human Resources Office, and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, to host Judge Calvin Williams for AUM's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast. In 2021, Judge Williams made news by expunging the criminal record of Claudette Colvin, a civil rights hero, who had been unjustly convicted in 1955.



Judge Williams is a Montgomery native who served his community and his country through a distinguished career as a military officer, a police officer, an attorney, and, now, as a judge. Judge Williams's 1/17/2023 presentation, titled "Together we Can," focused on the opportunity he had to participate in this work of justice in restoring Ms. Colvin's good name. In addition to recognizing her courage as a civil rights activist, he was able to engage in a concrete act of moral repair by correcting the wrong that had been done to her through the criminal justice system.

"...she stood up for right, and now I'm the beneficiary and byproduct of that and I can correct the wrong that was done to her. That's the significance of it."

JUDGE CALVIN WILLIAMS





"Let us hope, pray,
and act with
compassion. But
above all, let us act
and not just speak."

GEORGETTE NORMAN



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Juneteenth Commemoration: Georgette Norman

We collaborated with the Office of the Chancellor, the Human Resources Office, and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to host Georgette Norman, a historian, thespian, and local activist. Norman was named the first director of the Troy University Rosa Parks Museum, where she hosted more than 500,000 visitors globally and held 70 art exhibitions during her tenure.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

After 13 years as director of the Rosa Parks Museum, Norman retired from the position in 2014. She has worked as project historian for the Alabama African American Civil Rights Heritage Consortium. Her work with the consortium involved identifying 20 meeting sites or worship centers throughout Alabama that were significant in the civil rights movement. Her 6/20/2023 address, titled "Juneteenth: A Trajectory from Then to Now," described the cycles of hope and disappointment so many have faced in the struggle for freedom. She encouraged the audience to draw from these lessons and use them as an impetus for action in pursuit of what's good.