

2023-2024

SPEAKERS

A forum for learning from our communities

PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Message from the Directors

BY AARON D. COBB & LYNN STALLINGS

The mission of the Civil Rights and Civic Virtue Society is to foster civic identity, commitment, and civic-mindedness through community-engaged learning opportunities. In our first year of funding, we hosted a launch event featuring two keynote presentations and organized a speaker series featuring eight different community heroes and exemplars. In our second year, we featured an additional eleven talks by scholars, community heroes, and exemplars through our speaker series, the 2024 Out of the Box Teaching Workshop, and special speakers for AUM's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Reflections Breakfast and the Juneteenth Commemoration hosted in collaboration with other campus offices and grants.



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“I left the event with a desire to create a positive impact with urban planning decisions, and a yearning to prevent decisions like those that were made in Montgomery from happening again.”

MADELYN BARFIELD



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Speaker Series: Jocelyn Zanzot

Our first speaker was Jocelyn Zanzot, Urban Design Planner for the City of Montgomery, Economic and Community Development Department. She is a landscape architect, community planner, project manager, artist and teacher dedicated to community health and the aesthetics of equity.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Zanzot’s teaching and practice focuses on radically regenerative planning, transformative design+build and public art projects in collaboration with diverse community partners towards civic health and delight. In her talk, she drew on her co-authored research about interstate highways and urban planning decisions to address the impacts of politics and power involved in decisions about where interstate highways are routed through cities. She described the historic options and decisions involved in routing I-85 and I-65 through Montgomery’s downtown as well as the long-term implications for community health. She concluded by exploring the future of urban planning and sharing design tools for building equity and justice.

Speaker Series: Rich-Joseph Facun

Our second speaker was Rich-Joseph Facun, a photographer of indigenous Mexican and Filipino descent whose clients have included The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. His photographic series, Black Diamonds, examines Ohio coal-mining towns. Facun, who works at Ohio University, set out to meet the people who lived in his community, leading him to create images that challenge Appalachian stereotypes.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

In his own words, Facun's work "aims to offer an authentic look into ways in which individual identity is influenced by the economic, geographic, and community norms of a given landscape." Facun gave an artist talk about the installation of his works in McDermott Art Gallery at AUM. This event was made possible through a grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and additional support from the Dean's Office in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and the Department of Fine Arts.

"I started looking at books and ... asking myself why are all the photography books mostly done by white males? And how do I change that landscape? How do I bring a different narrative, from a different, very different person, with a different life experience?"

RICH-JOSEPH FACUN



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

“Seeing beyond the problems and situations, we figure out how to look problems in the eye, and purpose in our heart that we’re going to roll our sleeves up and do work that we can do to help.”

KEN AUSTIN

Speaker Series: Ken Austin

Our third speaker was Pastor Ken Austin, the Executive Director of Mercy House / MAP Montgomery, a non-profit organization that is addressing issues related to poverty and its impacts on the community through a wide range of wrap-around services that address the varied needs in central and west Montgomery.



The services they provide include serving as a day shelter that provides access to food, clothing, showers, and laundry, acting as a satellite location for GED courses, after school and summer enrichment programs for local youth, counseling, and business/copy needs. For this work, Pastor Austin has been recognized as a Community Hero by the Montgomery Advertiser and he was the 2019 recipient of the Leadership Montgomery Unity Award. He serves on multiple boards and is a tireless advocate for those he serves. His talk focused on building a chain to help address issues of poverty together.

PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS



Speaker Series: Derreck Kayongo

Our fourth speaker was Derreck Kayongo, founder of the Global Soap Project, a humanitarian aid organization that collects discarded and unused soap from thousands of hotels worldwide, reprocesses it, then distributes it to in-need populations around the world. He was recognized as a CNN Hero and received the Max Award for best innovative entrepreneur.



PHOTO CREDIT: HYOSUB SHIN

Kayongo serves on the board of advisors at Sharing Sacred Spaces, an organization devoted to building local, sustainable interreligious communities working together for peace and civic change. In his Living Exemplar talk, he described his life as a Ugandan refugee and the inspirational path that led him to become a successful entrepreneur, CEO, and renowned human rights activist. He shared his vision of the key factors for personal and professional success, which he described using the acronym S.E.L.F.: Service, Education, Leadership and Faith.

“Don’t seek perfection.
Seek balance. Seek
consistence. Seek
justice. Seek passion.
Seek a cause for
humanity, and your life
shall have meaning.”

DERRECK KAYONGO



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAM

“Art making is not just a personal journey. So, when creating art, consider some of the contemporary problems in our society, consider how you make your art, and use it as a catalyst to bring about awareness and social change.”

CELESTIA MORGAN

Speaker Series: Celestia Morgan

Our fifth speaker was Celestia Morgan, a photographer and postdoctorate research associate at University of Alabama. Some of her recent exhibitions include the National Public Housing Museum’s Undesign the Redline in Chicago, Illinois and Ogden Museum of Southern Art’s New Southern Photography, curated by Richard McCabe in New Orleans,



Her artist talk, “Disparities,” reflected on her experiences growing up in Birmingham, in communities impacted by policies involving racial zoning and housing discrimination. She writes, “Building on the theme from a previous series entitled “Redline,” [my photos analyze how] . . . the impact of racial zoning and housing discrimination is intertwined with the concerns related to community grocery stores, restaurants, and toxic landscapes.”



Speaker Series: Anthony Brock

Our sixth speaker was Anthony Brock, co-founder and head of school at Valiant Cross Academy, a school that seeks to transcend the challenges facing young African American males in Montgomery, Alabama, by developing men of character through rigorous academics and leadership training.



Valiant Cross was awarded the 2023 Yass Prize, a \$1 million prize for “Sustainable, Transformational, Outstanding and Permissionless education.” Mr. Brock has been recognized for his numerous contributions with accolades including the Martin Luther King Jr. Spirit Award for Central Alabama and Entrepreneur of the Year at the Alabama Black Achievers Gala. Several fraternity and sorority chapters have honored him with recognitions such as Citizen of the Year, Community Hero Award, and Community Leader Award. His talk, titled “Standing in the Gap,” focused on the important role of educators in preparing young black men for futures filled with hope and opportunity.

“Every man and woman is born into the world to do something unique and something distinctive and if he or she does not do it, it will never be done.”

BENJAMIN MAYS





“I fell in love with people inside of a place that is meant to destroy them, who had the bandwidth and the stamina and the vulnerability to say I am going to learn anyway. I am going to create anyway. And I want this for myself and I also want this for my children and my community.”

KYES STEVENS



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Speaker Series: Kyes Stevens

Our fifth speaker was Kyes Stevens, founder and director of the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project (APAEP), an outreach program that works with the underserved adult prison population in Alabama. Auburn University and APAEP offer a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, combining emphases in Business, Leadership, and Human Development and Family Sciences at Staton Correctional Facility and Tutwiler Prison for Women



PHOTO CREDIT: AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Stevens has been recognized with the Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach at the 2018 Auburn University Faculty Awards and the 2019 Alabama State Council on the Arts’ Governor’s Arts Award for her efforts. Stevens spoke about the importance of educational access within the criminal justice system, encouraging participants to consider this as an important focus of our focal virtue of justice.



Teaching Workshop: Ashley Jones

At our annual teaching workshop, we hosted Ashley Jones, Alabama's poet laureate (2022-2026). Her work has been featured on various news outlets and her poems and essays appear or are forthcoming in many journals and anthologies.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Her debut poetry collection, *Magic City Gospel*, was published by Hub City Press in January 2017, winning the silver medal in poetry in the 2017 Independent Publishers Book Awards. Her second book, *dark // thing*, won the 2018 Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize for Poetry from Pleiades Press. Her third collection, *REPARATIONS NOW!* was published by Hub City Press in 2021. This work was on the longlist for the 2022 PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry. Her presentation focused on how creativity has created room for her own voice in her life, and it has made room for empathy and a true desire to make space for others. This has manifested in her work as an educator, nonprofit director, poet, and now poet laureate.

"If being black meant being a part of Harriet Tubman's story, it was something to celebrate. Those people who saw me as less, were wrong. I could be joyful in my identity and in the history of my people."

ASHLEY JONES



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

“Virtue of any kind, and perhaps civic virtue most of all...cannot be cultivated solely within the confines of one’s mind or heart. It is foundationally embodied and collaborative. It is, in a sense, a kind of muscle, and like all muscles needs to be exercised regularly.

PAIGE MCGINLEY



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Teaching Workshop: Paige McGinley

One of the keynote presentations featured at the teaching workshop was Paige McGinley, associate professor of Performing Arts and Director of the Program in American Culture Studies at Washington University, St. Louis. Her research and teaching interests include theater and performance history and historiography; popular entertainment and performance; African American theater and performance; and contemporary theater.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Her current book-in-progress, *People Get Ready: Practice and Performance in the Long Civil Rights Movement* is an in-depth look at a culture and ethos of embodied practice that permeated the mid-century Black freedom struggle. She drew from this work to explore how embodied practice was widely used by Movement organizers to prepare volunteers in mind, body, and spirit for nonviolent direct action. She will also consider the role of embodied preparation in an age of digital organizing.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast: Shelley Stewart

We collaborated with several campus offices to host Shelley Stewart. His talk described the steps he took to overcome poverty and family tragedies to become one of Birmingham, Alabama's best-known radio personalities as well as a prominent African American businessman and philanthropist.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Central parts of his talk focused on his role as a radio personality during the 1960s civil rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama. Stewart has been honored by the Smithsonian Institution for his radio career and was the first African American inducted into the Alabama Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in 2008. In September 2019, he was inducted into the National Black Radio Hall of Fame. Stewart serves in his community as president and founder of the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation (MCSF), a national non-profit organization dedicated to reducing the dropout rate.

“Darkness cannot
drive out darkness,
only light can do
that. Hate cannot
drive out hate,
only love can do
that.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

“It doesn't matter what you get. If you can't serve your fellow woman, your fellow man, it means nothing.”

CATHERINE COLEMAN
FLOWERS



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

Juneteenth Commemoration: Catherine Coleman Flowers

Our Juneteenth Commemoration featured Catherine Coleman Flowers, an American environmental health researcher, writer, and founding director of the Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice. She was the 2020 MacArthur Fellow for Environmental Health Advocacy.



PHOTO CREDIT: FRANK WILLIAMS

She is an American environmental health researcher, writer, and founding director of the Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice. Flowers has dedicated her career to fighting for environmental justice. Much of her work focuses on improving sanitation and water infrastructure in Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and poor rural communities in the United States. Her presentation focused on her life's work in advocacy for climate and environmental justice. She also spoke to the ways her upbringing in Lowndes County, Alabama and in her experiences at a historically black university enabled her to find a passion for her advocacy work.