The Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series

The Annual Marion Thompson Wright Lecture (MTW) series was co-founded in 1981 by Clement A. Price, Giles R. Wright, and the MTW Study Club, who launched the series with the conviction that understanding the historical context of racism would aid in organizing struggles building a beloved community and a better world.

The conference is named in honor of East Orange native Marion Thompson Wright (1902–1962), the first black female to earn a history PhD—the focus was on “The Education of Negroes in New Jersey” (Columbia University, 1941). Her research helped the NAACP overturn the “separate but equal” doctrine in “Brown v. Board of Education.” Later, she joined the faculty of Howard University where she was devoted to nurturing students.

In her honor, the Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series brings outstanding thinkers and doers of African and African American life and history. Diverse, civically engaged, and devoted to lifelong learners, the MTW Series is one of the nation’s most distinguished and longest running lectures. The Clement A. Price Institute is devoted to building deep historical justice in our region and beyond.

**Marion Manola Thompson Wright** was born in East Orange, New Jersey on September 13, 1902, the youngest of four children. In 1927, she graduated magna cum laude from Howard where she also went on to earn her master’s degree in education the following year. She began graduate work at Columbia University where she completed her dissertation, “The Education of Negroes in New Jersey”. Marion Thompson Wright was the first black woman to receive a PhD from Columbia, which in 1941 published her dissertation. She was arguably one of the first American women to receive the doctorate for historical scholarship. In 1940, she joined the Howard University faculty as an assistant professor of education, at that time one of only two female assistant professors on the Howard faculty.
Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and honor that Rutgers University-Newark is located on the ancestral lands of the still living, still sovereign Munsee Lunaape (lu-naa–pau) peoples, communities, and nation. We recognize, as well, the many and diverse Native American/Indigenous peoples who call this region home—past, present, and future.

And we acknowledge these same ancient alive and biodiverse lands have been the site of colonial violence, extreme extraction of what had been living, and occupation—dispossessing, enslaving, and impacting the lives of all to this very day.

And it is with these thoughts in our heart and soul, we seek more Indigenous Local Knowledge (ILK). This intimate ecological understanding is key to surviving and rebalancing our common, public well-being in this age of chaotic extreme greed, driving further global warming and global disruption.
Remembering the Pavonia massacre

On February 25th, 1643, Dutch soldiers, under cover of night, attacked an encampment of Tappan, Hackensack, and Wickquasgeck peoples on the west side of the Mahicannituck (or Hudson River) at Pavonia, now known as Communipaw, NJ. At the same time, armed Dutch citizens attacked others encamped at Corlears Hook, in the current-day Lower East Side.

These were emergency encampments of several hundred people who had been driven south from their villages by Mahicans seeking tribute payments. Pavonia was an ideal place, as it was home to Dutch landholders who were their trading partners and friendly to the tribes; and was adjacent to riverfront oyster beds which would have been a steady source of food in winter.

More than 120 Indigenous people were killed in both encampments. The sounds of the slaughter in Pavonia carried across the Hudson and were noted with horror by Dutch colonist David DeVries, one of the few chroniclers of the event, “...about midnight I heard a great shrieking, and I ran to the ramparts of the fort, and looked over to Pavonia.” (The only records we have are colonial, no first-hand Indigenous accounts remain).

The attacks were ordered by Willem Kieft, Governor of New Amsterdam. He was corrupt and ineffective by many accounts, and his brutal campaign to gain power over Indigenous peoples of the region sparked a violent response by affiliated Munsee-Mahican tribes. “Kieft’s War” lasted more than two years, in which many Indigenous and colonial lives were lost, and little was gained. Kieft was recalled by the Dutch West India Company in 1647, and he drowned in a shipwreck on the way back to the Netherlands.

The Public History Project and the Price Institute are assisting three Munsee Lunaape communities in New Jersey and Ontario, Canada, in creating an annual commemoration of this event.
"One Begins Again"
Notes from the Price Institute Director

"When the dream was slaughtered . . . not everything is lost. Responsibility cannot be lost, it can only be abdicated. If one refuses abdication, one begins again."


I have the honor of directing the Clement A. Price Institute at Rutgers University-Newark at a special time in a special place. We're one of the most diverse campuses in North America with a genuine campus leadership commitment to social justice. This is why I came to Rutgers to truly devote my work to these students, their families, and to those on the frontlines of social change. My recent work with Munsee Lunaape communities, the original people of the region, has shifted my framing as a historian to focus on the deep, unacknowledged entwined histories of the dispossessed and the enslaved of this place. And how all experiences after this colonized place, are entangled with the changes wrought by these foundational injustices which continue to ramify today. I want that story to come alive to help us understand why we're in the mess we're in today.

Given this moment that Arundhati Roy calls "the pandemic portal" and before everyone rushes to "return" to the unacceptable business-as-usual and life as "normal," we want MTW #41 to glean more and deeply from this historic moment.

The Baldwin quote above, is played out in his last novel Just Above My Head, amidst the intensified activities of the KKK, White Citizens Council, and the John Birch Society, with the following insight for the future well-being of children: "I am now . . . no longer terrified of suffering, and knowing something of joy, too, I know that we must attempt to be responsible for what we know. Only this action moves us, without fear, into what we do not know, and what we do not know is limitless." Baldwin conjoins the knowingness of the incessant threat of lynching and White "command and control" strikes with the victims "taking responsibility" for the moral high-ground of the nation, the America that never was, into the unknown future when necessarily "one begins again."

With the critical, practical awareness of that living past, organizers face those historic risks, take deep breaths with the resolve that "...one begins again."

This pivotal, historic year, we wanted to double down on the thematic of organizing with the historical imagination. Given how Black women have organized and elected this new President, we understand their gritty determination picking up the divided and leadership-challenged Democratic Party and "taking responsibility" clearly means advancing the vision of what Langston Hughes described as “The land that never has been yet—And yet must be.” Indeed, it is clear Indigenous populations of the Americas and Black communities have the
deepest sense of shared historical memory separate from whatever each nation state and their public cultures acknowledge as their respective civic histories or ignore.

For this year’s MTW, we wanted to underline the public significance of Black organizing for the heart, soul, and understanding of the American people as a whole—especially envisioning a just, joyous, and sustainable future. We will be honoring the Elders and youth activists, as well as those at the various frontlines organizing for food and climate justice, and all related issues.

We welcome you to and welcome you back to our MTW community, as conceived by Clement A. Price, Giles R. Wright, and the MTW Study Club to rebuild a post-redlined Newark—maligned for its ‘67 uprising/resistance—focusing on the beloved community of teachers, city workers, social workers, community organizers, small business folk, activists, and residents. Of the hundreds who join in every year, many have stayed with us from those early years. I have the privilege of joining them. This annual event is for them and more-and-more for their adult children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren. And, I’m tweaking this tradition to build solidarity with "new" migrants, immigrants, and refugees.

Jack Tchen
Director, Clement A. Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture and the Modern Experience
Lift Every Voice and Sing
Words by James Weldon Johnson
Music by J. Rosamond Johnson

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 has 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.
Program
Saturday, February 20th 2021 | 9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. EST

9:30 a.m.: Blessing

Chief Vincent Mann, Chief of the Turtle Clan, Ramapough Lenape Nation; Water Protector and Community Organizer; Co-founder of the Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm

9:35 a.m.: Welcome to the 41st Annual MTW Lecture Series

Jack Tchen, Director, Clement A. Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience, Rutgers University-Newark

9:45 a.m.: Performance

Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”
Performed by the Rutgers University-Newark Chorus

9:50 a.m.: Opening Remarks

Ras Baraka, Mayor of the City of Newark
Tahesha Way, Secretary of State of New Jersey
Shané Harris, President, The Prudential Financial Foundation
Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Rutgers University-Newark
Jonathan Holloway, President, Rutgers University

10:10 a.m.: Marion Thompson Wright Speakers

Bill Fletcher Jr., Labor organizer; Senior Scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies; Editorial Board Member of BlackCommentator.com and Author of “They’re Bankrupting Us!”: And Twenty Other Myths About Unions

Cara Page, Black Queer Feminist Cultural/Memory Worker; Curator; and Organizer
Alicia Garza, Principal at Black Futures Lab; Co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter; and Author of The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart

11:15 a.m.: Discussion

Barbara Ransby, Moderator, John D. MacArthur Chair, and Distinguished Professor, in the Departments of African American Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, and History at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

With Bill Fletcher Jr., Cara Page, and Alicia Garza

12:15 p.m.: Words from Reverend Lennox Yearwood Jr., President and Founder, Hip Hop Caucus

12:25 p.m.: Presentation of Giles R. Wright Award

Larry Greene, New Jersey Historical Commission: Presentation of the Giles R. Wright Award to the Enslaved African Memorial Committee (Teaneck, NJ) and the Monmouth County Historical Association (Freehold, NJ)

Giles Wright Award recipients:

Enslaved African Memorial Committee (Teaneck, NJ)
Project: Enslaved African Memorial

Monmouth County Historical Association (Freehold, NJ)
Project: Interpreting Slavery at Monmouth County Historical Association Historic Houses

12:30 p.m.: Performance

Helena D. Lewis, Poet

12:45 p.m.: Thank you & Closing Remarks

Jack Tchen, Director, Clement A. Price Institute, Rutgers University-Newark

Jacqueline Mattis, Social Psychologist & Dean, Rutgers University-Newark
About Our Participants

**Ras J. Baraka** is the 40th Mayor of the City of Newark. A native of Newark, whose family has lived in the City for more than 70 years, Mayor Baraka’s progressive approach to governing has won him accolades from grassroots organizations to the White House. With a forward-thinking agenda that reduced crime to its lowest levels in five decades, addressed affordability while maintaining steady growth, lowered unemployment, and returned local control of schools after more than two decades, Baraka defied expectations during his first term in office. Mayor Baraka’s futurist agenda includes the implementation of a groundbreaking partnership called Hire. Buy. Live. Newark, a program that marks the first time that any US city has sought to transform its economy by combining employment, procurement, and residential strategies. These types of initiatives caught the attention of Amazon, which named Newark as a finalist city in its search to establish its second global headquarters. Mayor Baraka was educated in the Newark Public Schools. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and History from Howard University in Washington, D.C. and a Master’s Degree in Education Supervision from St. Peter’s University in Jersey City. His father, the late Amiri Baraka, was a legendary poet and playwright. His mother, Amina Baraka, is herself a renowned poet. Doting husband, and father of three daughters and a son, Mayor Baraka is a published author and is well-regarded in the entertainment industry for his appearance on the Grammy-award winning album, “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill” in his authentic role as an educator, and for his EP “What We Want.”

**Nancy Cantor** is Chancellor of Rutgers University–Newark, a diverse, urban, public research university. A distinguished leader in higher education, Cantor is recognized nationally and internationally as an advocate for leveraging diversity in all its dimensions, re-emphasizing the public mission of colleges and universities as engines of discovery, innovation, and social mobility, and achieving the fulsome potential of universities as anchor institutions that collaborate with partners from sectors to help their communities thrive. At Rutgers University–Newark, she leads and promulgates efforts to leverage the university’s many strengths, particularly its exceptional diversity, tradition of high-impact research, and role as an anchor institution in Newark, New Jersey, through strategic investments in five broad areas in which the university’s strengths align with those of cross-sector partners: educational pathways from pre-K through college; equitable growth through urban entrepreneurship and economic development; cultivating creative expression through the arts and culture; strong, healthy and safe neighborhoods; and science in the urban environment.

**Bill Fletcher, Jr.** is a senior scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, editorial board member of The Black Commentator and founder of the Center for Labor Renewal. Longtime labor, racial justice, and international activist, Fletcher got his start in the labor movement as a rank and file
member of the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America. Combining labor and community work, he was also involved in ongoing efforts to desegregate the Boston building trades. Fletcher has worked for several labor unions in addition to serving in leadership positions at the national American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. Fletcher is the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum, a national non-profit organization organizing, educating, and advocating for policies in favor of the peoples of Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Fletcher is also a founder of the Black Radical Congress and is a Senior Scholar for the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC. Fletcher is a graduate of Harvard University and has authored numerous articles and speaks widely on domestic and international topics, racial justice, and labor issues. He is the co-author of *Solidarity Divided, The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice* and author of *They’re Bankrupting Us! And 20 Other Myths about Unions & Solidarity Divided*.

**Alicia Garza**, Author, Political strategist, Organizer, and Freedom Dreamer founded the Black Futures Lab to make Black communities across the country powerful in politics. In 2018, the Black Futures Lab conducted the Black Census Project—the largest survey of Black communities in over 150 years. Alicia is the co-creator of #BlackLivesMatter and the Black Lives Matter Global Network, an international organizing project to end state violence and oppression against Black people. The Black Lives Matter Global Network now has 40 chapters in four countries. She also serves as the Strategy & Partnerships Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the nation’s premier voice for millions of domestic workers in the United States. Additionally, Alicia is the co-founder of Supermajority, a new home for women’s activism. Alicia has become a powerful voice in the media and frequently contributes thoughtful opinion pieces and expert commentary on politics, race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity with her work being featured in Time, MSNBC, The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Guardian, Elle, and Essence. Alicia’s first book, *The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart*, released October 20, 2020 with One World (Penguin Random House.) She also shares her thoughts on politics and pop culture on her podcast, Lady Don’t Take No.

**Larry A. Greene**, Professor of History at Seton Hall University and early member of the MTW study club. He earned his B.A. in History from Montclair State University (1968), M.A. in History from Seton Hall University (1970), and PhD in History from Columbia University (1979). He joined the History faculty of Seton Hall University where he has taught for more than forty years. Dr. Greene chaired the Seton Hall University History Department for thirteen years and directed the Multicultural Program for twelve years. During that time, he served on the editorial board of the Journal of African American History as well as serving as the vice-chair and later chair of the Advisory Board of the New Jersey Historical Commission. In 2005-2006, he was awarded a teaching and research Fellowship at the University of Muenster in Germany where he taught courses in African American History, Civil War History, and
conducted research on the image of a multicultural America in the Third Reich. Professor Greene is the co-chair of the Board of Associates of the Drew University Center for Holocaust and Genocide Study. He co-edited with Anke Ortlepp, Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange, co-edited with John Duff, Slavery Its Origins and Legacy, and co-authored with Lenworth Gunter, The New Jersey African American History Curriculum Guide. Professor Greene has authored twenty articles and chapters in books, journals, and encyclopedias on topics from New Jersey African American History to “Langston Hughes, Russia, and the African American Press,” but he is most proud and thankful for his early collaboration and his second publication with the pioneers of black history in New Jersey: Clement Price, Lee Hagen, Leonard Harris, “New Jersey Afro-Americans: From Colonial Times to the Present” in The New Jersey Ethnic Experience edited by Barbara Cunningham (Union City, NJ: Wise and Co. 1977).

Shané Harris leads Social Responsibility and Partnerships at Prudential and is President of The Prudential Foundation. Her responsibilities include leading the company’s philanthropic strategy, overseeing the distribution of over $62 million in grants and charitable contributions, as well as managing Prudential’s skills-based volunteering and multicultural partnership programs. She is also a member of the senior leadership team for Inclusive Solutions, a Prudential business function that harnesses the power of capital markets to drive financial and social mobility, inclusive economic opportunity, and sustainable growth. Harris serves as Chairman of the Newark Trust for Education, a local education fund, Co-Chairs the Racial-Equity Narrative Change Working Group, a national initiative of Living Cities and was recently appointed as a Trustee for the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, established to fight the medical, social, and economic impact of Covid-19 on New Jersey’s most vulnerable residents. Harris joined Prudential in 2004 where she held a series of leadership positions with increasing responsibility focused on strategic grantmaking, business aligned initiatives, and purpose-driven brand visibility. Prior to joining Prudential, she was the director of the New Jersey Nets and Devils Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the New Jersey Nets Professional Basketball Team and the New Jersey Devils Professional Hockey Team. She has a bachelor’s degree in biology from Columbia University and holds a master’s degree in public administration from the New York University Wagner School of Public Service.

Jonathan Holloway, a U.S. historian, took office as the 21st president of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, on July 1, 2020. He also serves as a University Professor and Distinguished Professor. President Holloway’s scholarly work specializes in post-emancipation U.S. history with a focus on social and intellectual history. He is the author of Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941 (2002) and Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America Since 1940 (2013), both published by the University of North Carolina Press. He serves on boards of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Academic Leadership Institute. He previously served on the Executive Committee of the
Organization of American Historians and the boards of the Chicago Botanic Garden, Illinois Humanities, the National Humanities Alliance, and the Society for United States Intellectual History. In April 2020, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy appointed him to the Governor’s Restart and Recovery Commission, and in May 2020, New Jersey Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin appointed him to his Economic Advisory Council.

Helena D. Lewis, DSW, LCSW, LCADC, is a theatrical scholar-practitioner who uses qualitative research and social work theories to illuminate the nuances of social justice issues that impact marginalized and incarcerated voices. After obtaining her BA in Biology from Rutgers University, Helena developed, implemented, and supervised a drop-in center for sex workers with substance use disorders (SUD) for the Community At Risk Reduction (CARR) Program in Newark, New Jersey and helped develop a vocational rehabilitation component for a Department of Corrections (DOC) Residential Community Release Program (RCRP) for women. Helena spent three years working on a CDC/HRSA Correctional Demonstration Project providing prevention case management to HIV positive male inmates. She is the former program manager of three transitional housing programs for formerly incarcerated men and women and is currently the SUD Treatment Director for a residential facility for women inmates. She obtained her Doctor in Social Work (DSW) from the Rutgers School of Social Work. Helena’s research interests include topics related to incarcerated women focusing on grief and loss and the intersectionality of autoethnography and theater.

Chief Vincent Mann, Turtle Clan Chief of the Ramapough Lenape Nation, which encompasses Passaic County NJ, as well as Warwick and surrounding areas in NY. He is the co-founder, with Clan Mother Micheline Picaro Mann, of the Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm. He received the Russ Berrie Foundation’s highest award for being an unsung hero for his efforts, together with his community, to fight back after the Ford toxic dumping. Working with the NYU Institute of Environmental Medicine, he helped create a community health survey, and he has been at the forefront of protecting the drinking water used by four million people, as well as working in the area surrounding the Ringwood Mines Superfund site, formerly as a member of the Citizen Advisory Group. He also serves on the Legacy Council of the Highlands Coalition. Chief Mann is also working to rebuild a church founded by Samuel Defreese, a Ramapough, and now listed on the National Historic Registry as a Historic Native American Church—one of the two churches the Ramapough communities attend. He has been a guest speaker at Ramapo College in the Environmental Masters Program on pipelines and environmental justice and the University of Dayton in Ohio on the effects of toxic dumping on his people. As an advocate for cultural and environmental issues, he continues to this day to offer up prayers for humanity and for our natural environment.
Jacqueline S. Mattis, Rutgers University-Newark SASN Dean, earned her B.A. in psychology from New York University, and her M.S. and PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Michigan. Prior to assuming the role of Dean of SASN, she served as Professor of Psychology and Associate Department Chair for Diversity Initiatives in the Department of Psychology at the University of Michigan. She also co-directed the Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context. She previously served as Chairperson of the Department of Applied Psychology at New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Her research focuses on the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of African American and Afri-Caribbean youth and adults, and on the factors that are associated with positive psychological and psychosocial development of urban-residing African Americans and Afri-Caribbeans. In particular she uses quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the factors that contribute to volunteerism, civic engagement, altruism, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, optimism, and positive parenting among urban-residing African American and Afri-diasporic people. She has co-authored numerous articles and has served on the editorial boards of numerous journals. She co-authored (with collaborator Fulya Kurter) two books on counseling in the Turkish cultural context, including a handbook entitled “Culturally sensitive counseling from the perspective of Turkish practitioners” (Bahcesehir University Press).

Cara Page is a Black Queer Feminist cultural/memory worker, curator, and organizer. For the past 30+ years, she has organized with LGBTQGNC, People of Color, and Indigenous liberation movements in the US and Global South at the intersections of racial, gender, and economic justice, healing justice, and transformative justice. She is leading a new project, Changing Frequencies, an archival/memory and cultural change project to intervene on generational trauma; seeking to unveil and hold accountable the Medical Industrial Complex as an extension of state control and policing. She is also building care and safety strategies within global movements which she began organizing nationally at the 2007 US Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta; and the 2010 USSF in Detroit at the Health & Healing Justice People’s Movement Assembly. She is one of the architects of the healing justice political strategy, which is deeply rooted in Black Feminist traditions and shaped by Southern Black radical traditions. She is co-founder of the Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective; and the former ED of The Audre Lorde Project. She is a recent recipient of the Soros Equality Fellowship (2019-2020) and an ‘Activist in Residence’ at the Barnard Research Center for Women. She continues to work with many organizations nationally and internationally, which have included: Southerners on New Ground (SONG), Project South, INCITE!, the Young Women’s Empowerment Project, & the Committee on Women, Population & the Environment towards building economic, racial, and gender justice strategies for our liberation, care and protection.

Barbara Ransby is the John D. MacArthur Chair, and Distinguished Professor, in the Departments of African American Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, and History at the
Dr. Ransby is a historian and writer who has written several books and received various awards for her work. She is the author of three books: *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (2003), *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (2013), and *Making All Black Lives Matter: Re-imagining Freedom in the 21st Century* (2018). She has also been honored with the 2018 Angela Y. Davis Prize from the American Studies Association for her scholarship in service of the public good. Dr. Ransby has been deeply involved in the anti-Apartheid/Free South Africa movement and has co-founded several organizations, including The Ella-Baker Nelson Mandela Center, Ella’s Daughters, and African American Women in Defense of Ourselves. She is also a founding member of the national organization Scholars for Social Justice and works closely with The Movement for Black Lives and the multi-racial coalition, The Rising Majority.

Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, Director of the Clement A. Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture & the Modern Experience. He is a historian, curator, and writer devoted to anti-racist, anti-colonialist democratic participatory storytelling, scholarship, and opening up archives, museums, organizations, and classroom spaces to the stories and realities of those excluded and deemed “unfit” in master narratives. At Rutgers University-Newark his priority is reimagining what a 21st century public research university can be. Professor Tchen has been honored to be the Inaugural Clement A Price Chair of Public History & Humanities at Rutgers University-Newark and Director of the Clement Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture & the Modern Experience, since Fall 2018. Most recently, he is engaged with the global warming crisis and the deep history of the region, founding the New York Newark Public History Project (NYN PHP), funded by the Ford Foundation. The PHP is reframing the history of the estuarial region starting with the twin foundational histories of dispossession and enslavement (work emerging from serving as a Commissioner on the NYC Mayor’s Commission on Monuments). His ongoing series of work on eugenics in the New York City region surfaces how patrician elites fashioned a tested, measured, sorted tiered hierarchic system of “fit” European-descended “Nordics” on top, and the rankings of the great majority of “unfit” below—resulting in the Immigration Act of 1924 and practices of sterilization and incarceration all still impacting US political culture to this day. His Below the Grid Project is exploring creative historical storytelling with smart, location-sensitive wearable tech. He was the senior historian for a New-York Historical Society exhibition on the impact of Chinese Exclusion Laws on the formation of the US and also senior advisor for the two-hour “American Experience” PBS documentary on

**Tahesha Way, Esq.** is the New Jersey Secretary of State, serving as New Jersey’s top election official, overseeing the state Division of Elections and its work in securing our democracy and ensuring broad, fair access to the right to vote. Ms. Way also chairs New Jersey’s Complete Count Commission, a 27 member non-partisan commission established to encourage full participation in the 2020 Census. In addition to the critical work protecting what Secretary Way calls the “fraternal twins of democracy,” Ms. Way also oversees the state government offices supporting New Jersey’s vibrant arts, culture, history, and business communities. Prior to becoming Secretary of State, Secretary Way was an Administrative Law Judge for the State of New Jersey. Secretary Way also previously served on the Board of Directors for the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, a leading national think tank geared towards advancing dialogue and policy for improving women’s lives and their families.

**Rev. Lennox Yearwood Jr.** is the President & Founder of Hip Hop Caucus, a minister, community activist, and US Air Force veteran. The goal of Hip Hop Caucus is to build a powerful and sustainable organization for the culture’s role in the civic process and empowerment of communities impacted first and worst by injustice. As a non-profit, non-partisan, multi-issue organization, Hip Hop Caucus focuses on addressing core issues impacting underserved and vulnerable communities, with programs and campaigns that support solution-driven community organizing led by today’s young leaders. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Rev. Yearwood established the award-winning Gulf Coast Renewal Campaign where he led a coalition of national and grassroots organizations to advocate for the rights of Katrina survivors. As a national leader and pacemaker within the Green Movement, Rev Yearwood has been successfully bridging the gap between communities of color and environmental issue advocacy. With a diverse set of celebrity allies, he has raised awareness and action in communities that are often overlooked by traditional environmental campaigns and elected officials. He has received numerous awards for his work, including being dubbed as a New Green Hero by *Rolling Stone* and recognized by the Obama White House as a Champion of Change. In 2018, he helped launch **Think 100%**, Hip Hop Caucus’ award-winning climate communications and activism platform. Be sure to listen to the album **Home** and **The Coolest Show** podcast.
Rutgers University-Newark Chorus is directed by Dr. Brian Harlow. The Chorus was founded by noted musicologist Alfred Mann in 1947 and from 1979 to the Spring of 2015 was conducted by John Floreen. During his tenure the Chorus began a tradition of international touring, receiving enthusiastic receptions from audiences and critics in Germany, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, France, England, Scotland, Italy, Spain, and Wales, including performances at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican, and St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Most recently, in 2019, the chorus toured throughout Hungary and performed with a choir from a local University. In addition, the chorus has produced five CD recordings and has performed in New York City and many communities in northern New Jersey. The diversity of the Rutgers University-Newark community is reflected in both the membership of the chorus and the choice of repertoire from around the world. The group is also notable for the number of alumni who continue to rehearse and perform after graduation.

Lift Every Voice and Sing performed by: Inique Bristol, Jada Cox, Rafaeelle Danta, Nicole Elorduy, Jose Gutierrez, Marcel Vaughn Handy, Florianna Heun, Zoe Holt, Lynette Jackson, Anqi Jiang, Jada Law, Janet Lazar, Jianer Mao, Abigail Mason, Monben Mayon, Adrian Rey, Denise Rodriguez, Zulma Romero, Bruno Silva, Jonathan Slyker, Christopher Sousa, Elizabeth Surles, Nelson Val, Emanuel Vizzotti, Chenyang Wang, Kiyanda Williams and Lauren Wolfe
The MTW Study Club in Retrospect | *Deep Flourishing Roots*
By Jack Tchen

The foundational, eminent historian Sterling Stuckey, author of *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*, among many works, and the keynote speaker at the first Marion Thompson Wright Lecture in 1981, has written of this series:

Nowhere else in the country, over decades, did first-class scholars lecture while not talking down to listeners from the community as during the Thompson-Wright lecture at the Paul Robeson Center in Newark . . . to make it perhaps the most distinguished lecture series directed by African Americans in the 20th century. (Sterling Stuckey, Professor Emeritus, UC Riverside, 1932-2018)

I would only quibble with the great Professor Stuckey to say, as a historian myself, the qualifier “perhaps the most distinguished lecture series” is too cautious – MTW is the most distinguished lectures series in the Americas and if not of all continents except for Africa.

Why is this claim true? I can hear Clement Price’s voice chime in here about “the power of place and memory”—Where else but Newark do we find a glorious day of public scholarship, sustained over forty years and counting, in the Paul Robeson Center, on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the historically important “river town” in what the African American historian of New Jersey E. Frederic Morrow called New Jersey—‘Way Up North, Down South.’

Ever the historian, Clement Price placed his own work as that of a third or fourth generation of African American public scholars who built upon the work of the Negro History Movement dating back to the 1880s through the 1930s—encompassing the foundation-building work of George Washington Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and John Hope Franklin. Woodson, as we know, established “Negro History Week” to promote race pride and “to convince all that we have a heritage” (Gavins 2016).

George Washington Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and John Hope Franklin were pioneers and role models for generations of progressive historians, including those in the formulation of the MTW Lecture Series. George Washington Williams, both minister and politician, was one of the first generation of non-academically trained African American historians who produced serious scholarship with his *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* (1882).
This was a time period prior to the establishment of doctoral graduate programs in history and white historians, like George Bancroft and Francis Parkman, were also self-trained. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson were both academically trained historians and received their PhDs from Harvard University in 1895 and 1912 respectively. They were the pioneers for future generations of academically trained black historians like John Hope Franklin. Franklin received his PhD also from Harvard, in 1941. It wasn’t a question of formal academic training because Du Bois, Woodson, Franklin, and others were academically trained, but rather their rejection of the racist interpretations of the Black experience in America that dominated the historical profession. It was through their efforts and Woodson’s *Journal of Negro History* (now *Journal of African American History*), first published in 1916, that African American historians had a regularly published forum to challenge the dominant racist historiography on such topics as slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction era and deconstruct and decolonize American History.

After the 1967 Newark riots, rebellion, revolution, a group of young scholar-organizers founded aesop, where these young upstarts evoked that ancient fable-teller’s wisdom—“degrees in our back pocket, hot-off the Black revolution train with afros, listening to the Black Poets and Gil Scott-aesop] zoned us in to focusing on Jersey and key areas of concentration. We provided workshops on education, housing, and politics across the state. We learned to respect and appreciate . . . Newark.” (Regina Quince) Self-defined as a non-hierarchical discussion group that presented community forums, its members–Leonard Harris, Barry Jackson, Dusty Jackson, Leonard Muse, Rose Muse, Clement Price, Kevin Quince, Regina Quince, Jerome Walker, Rebecca Walker and Cozetta Williams–saw this work as an essential and inevitable legacy of their own principled upbringing. They reported “The value of forum discussions paralleled the value of knowledge gained by aesop [members] in organizing them.” (Leonard Muse) Indeed, shortly after the creation of the New Jersey Committee (now Council) for the Humanities, aesop was among its initial, and perhaps only, African American grantees.
It was out of the aesop movement that Clement Price and his colleague and friend Giles R. Wright, head of the Afro-American History Program at the New Jersey Historical Commission, evolved the Marion Thompson Wright lecture series. Typical of their desire to include diverse voices, lay and professional historians, and members of the movement, they drew together a group of friends and advisors. Among them were Leonard Muse, Barry Jackson, Larry Greene, Jeanette Cascone, Lee Hagen, Lenworth Gunter, and others who, joining together, organized a larger, more ambitious public program. Clement dubbed them the MTW Study Club, named after the first African-American woman to earn a PhD in History.

The MTW Study Club and the MTW Lectures Series itself was an open and ongoing and challenging conversation amongst committed students of history—produced from tough, honest, rigorous discussions that flourished due to deep bonds of trust and shared commitments. Inviting the very best, emergent scholars, the MTW Study Club insisted there be no pretense to be “speaking from Mount Olympus”—not abiding the dominant “professional” exhortation to be disinterested and disengaged.

Professor Stuckey noted: “The absence of a divide between scholars and others owed much to Clement Price’s way of relating to his own students in history classes at Rutgers in the 1970s. It was a time of especially smart students from whom Price was known at times to take advice, even altering reading lists at the suggestion of very bright students who were reading widely.” Vickie Donaldson noted: “Clem challenged us and we challenged him—we all were the better for it . . . . I argued often with Clem—with him being reasonable and cool and gentlemanly, and me being extreme and not always polite. But we were friends and a
whole lot of respect can quell a whole lot of disagreement.” (Vickie Donaldson, NCAS ’72, School of Law ’82)

This liberating pedagogic relationship with young people has been a hallmark of organizers, from freedom schools of the past to the present day, always seeking to empower next generations. (Roediger 2014) Describing this spirit of MTW, Cheryl Clarke, an eager annual attendee, experienced a “multi-cultural, multi-generational, multi-ethnic, multi-sensory celebration/observance of Black life and history from slavery to our varied forms of so-called freedom.” This was true publicly engaged scholarship for “New Jersey citizens, teachers, musicians, neighbors, students, working people, scholars, church people, children, people you hadn’t seen since college or high school, and people you might could have done without seeing, but . . . such is the nature of reunions.” (Cheryl Clarke, 1969-2013, Dean of Students, Livingston Campus, 2009-2013 and Director, Social Justice Education and LGBT Communities, 1992-2009)

It is in that tradition that Professor Clement Price and the members of aesop and the MTW Study Club continued the decolonizing of American history, but also enacted the process of involving the community in a dialogic search for a progressive, accurate, and usable past. The MTW Lecture Series continued that tradition that DuBois began when he assumed the editorship of the NAACP *The Crisis Magazine* more than a century ago and Black history and experience in America.

Yet, the grace of this deep well of community engagement has been deceptive, too easily misunderstood as the chemistry of individual persons. This was the loving and tiring labor of hours of in-person discussions, and one-on-one late-night phone calls pushing the formulation of the thematic and title just right and making sure each and every speaker understood the public engagement at stake. This is the behind-the-scenes, hidden work of public historian practitioners at their most committed. This curated back and
forth dialoguing, shaping and refining, opening up access while not “dumbing down,” has been at the heart of what the MTW Study Club practiced.

In these forty years, African American history, once marginalized as a poor cousin to “real” scholarship, has now been totally transformed as foundational to the new American history and essential to the ongoing struggle for more freedom to this day. As historian John Hope Franklin has written, his generation’s “challenge was to weave into the fabric of American history enough of the presence of blacks so that the story of the United States could be told adequately and fairly.” Indeed, since its opening, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, led by Founding Director Lonnie Bunch (raised in Belleville and Clement’s friend and colleague), has set the highest standard for the public display of American history.

Thank you, the MTW Study Club. Happy 40th anniversary!

P.S. I would appreciate hearing from early participants of the MTW Study Club to share your stories with me. I may be reached at: Jack.Tchen@Rutgers.edu

This short essay about the MTW Study Club is made possible with the insights of Leonard Muse, Larry Greene, and Mary Sue Sweeney Price. Thanks for sharing your remembrances and keeping the memories of those early years real and vivid. All omissions and errors, however, are mine.


Marion Thompson Wright Lecturers & Themes (1981-2020)

1981  Sterling Stuckey, historian, Black Studies Through the Prism of Paul Robeson

1982  Max Roach, percussionist and educator, The Sacred and Secular Traditions of Black Music

1983  John Blassingame, historian, Black Historical Scholarship and the Black Historian

1984  Vincent Harding, historian, The Role of Religion in the History of Haitians, Jamaicans and Afro-Americans

1985  Esther Rolle, actress, Not Without Laughter: Humor in the Past and Thought of Afro-Americans

1986  James Farmer, civil rights activist and educator, Marching to Different Drummers: A Civil Rights Movement Retrospective

1987  Robert C. Weaver, economist, educator, and administrator, The New Black Urban Experience

1988  Basil Davidson, historian, The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

1989  James A. Moss, Jr., clinical psychologist and educator (son of Marion Thompson Wright), Marion Thompson Wright and the Writing of New Jersey Afro-American History

1990  Gerald Davis, anthropologist and folklorist, Folkways and Black History

1991  Arnold Rampersad, literary scholar and biographer, The Use of History in Afro-American Literature

1992  John Bracey, historian, The Age of Christopher Columbus: Legacies for Africa and the Americas
1993  **Nell Irvin Painter**, historian, *Black Women in Afro-American History*


1996  **Derrick Bell**, legal scholar and novelist, *Separate But Equal: Plessy v. Ferguson in Historical Perspective*


1998  **Sterling Stuckey**, historian, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Life and Times of Paul Robeson*


2000  **Ali Mazrui**, historian and philosopher, *Time…Africa and the Diaspora*

2001  **Bettye Collier Thomas**, historian and archivist, *Every Wise Woman Buildeth Her House: Sisterhood in the Black Church*

2002  **Spencer Crew**, historian and museum director, *Old Stories, New Venues: African American History in Public Spaces*

2003  **David Levering Lewis**, historian, *W.E.B. DuBois in Africa*

2004  **Roger Wilkins**, historian and journalist, *Brown v. Board of Education in Retrospect*


2006  **Cheryl Wall**, literary scholar, *Black Creativity and Modern American Life*

2007  **David Blight**, historian, *Time Longer Than Rope: Historical Memory and the Black Atlantic*
2008  **Bernice Johnson Reagon**, cultural scholar, *Private Grief and Public Mourning in African American Life and History*

2009  **Deborah Gray White**, historian; **Bob Herbert**, columnist, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: Lincoln, the NAACP, and the World They Created.*

2010  **Annette Gordon-Reed**, historian, *Laboring in the Vineyard: Scholarship and Citizenship*

2011  **Deborah Willis**, art historian and photographer, *Beauty and the Black Body: History, Aesthetics and Politics*


2013  **Steven Hahn, Thavolia Glymph, Tera Hunter, and James Oakes**, historians, *Emancipation and the Work of Freedom*

2014  **Bob Moses**, civil rights movement veteran and founder of The Algebra Project; **Diane Nash**, civil rights movement veteran, *Tending the Light: Community Organizing and the Modern Civil Rights Movement*


2017  **Thomas J. Sugrue**, historian, *City Moves: Black Urban History since 1967*

2018  **Stefon Harris**, vibraphonist and educator, *The Space Between the Notes: The Social Life of Music in Black History*

2019  **E. Patrick Johnson**, ethnographer & performer, *The Erotic as Power: Sexuality and the Black Experience*

Readings and links

*The Cause of Freedom: A Concise History of African Americans* by Jonathan Holloway


*Black New Jersey 1664 to the Present Day* by Graham R. G. Hodges

Graham R. G. Hodges, the George Dorland Langdon, Jr. Professor of History and Africana & Latin American studies at Colgate University, highlights the work of Marion Thompson Wright in his new publication.

*In Search of The Color Purple: The Story of an American Masterpiece* by Salamishah Tillet

Mixing cultural criticism, literary history, biography, and memoir, an exploration of Alice Walker’s critically acclaimed and controversial novel, *The Color Purple*.

*The Sacrifice Zone* by Talking Eyes Media

The Sacrifice Zone follows Maria Lopez-Nuñez, a Honduran-American resident of the Ironbound district of Newark, as she leads a group of environmental justice fighters determined to break the cycle of poor communities of color serving as dumping grounds for our consumer society. She is part of the Ironbound Community Corporation, one of the most effective environmental justice organizations in the country.

*MLK/FBI -Documentary by Sam Pollard*

In this virtuosic documentary, award-winning editor and director Sam Pollard lays out a detailed account of the FBI surveillance that dogged King’s activism throughout the ‘50s and ‘60s, fueled by the racist and red-baiting paranoia of J. Edgar Hoover. In crafting a rich archival tapestry, featuring some revelatory restored footage of King, Pollard urges us to remember that true American progress is always hard-won.
Virtual Exhibition Debuts in February 1

**Black Power! 19th Century: Newark’s First African American Rebellion**


- **Explore** Maps of *Black Power! 19th Century* Sites in Newark and greater New Jersey.

- **Learn and read** new research on Newark’s Black abolitionist community and its connection to national movements.

- **View Monumental Spirit: Reimagined Sites of 19th Century Newark** photo collages of *Black Power! 19th Century* sites on the Rutgers University-Newark campus.


* In-house exhibition debuts in the spring at the Newark Public Library 5 Washington Street, Newark, NJ.

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Alexandra Chang, Interim Associate Director

Claudia Sepulveda, Administrative Director

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