



## The Newsletter of the NPS Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program

*Humanities Matters* shares updates from the program and information about upcoming events open to all. We also launch exciting digital tools and products to help diversify storytelling across NPS.

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## Welcome!

### Forward from Barbara Little

*NPS Cultural Resource Office of Interpretation & Education*

As the Project Director of the NPS Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, I am delighted to present this Fall 2024 newsletter. Welcome!

The Fellowship Program is a signature program of NPS' 250th Commemoration. In striving to tell stories of all Americans, the National Park Service is expanding its efforts to fully reflect the diversity of the American population. The mission and vision of the program link in-depth humanities research with innovative and inclusive storytelling. A generous grant from the Mellon Foundation to the National Park Foundation makes this work possible. Highlighting the humanities – exploring the human condition – helps us to see ourselves and each other in the past, present and future of the ongoing American experiment. Explore with us!



### Our Mission and Vision

The mission of the [NPS Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program](#) is to expand and improve inclusive research and interpretation, fostering a sense of belonging that inspires this and future generations. We fulfill this mission through providing recent PhD's with professional development and meaningful opportunities to perform humanities research and to assist NPS in interpretation and education that harnesses the power and authenticity of place to advance equality and justice for all.

This program is made possible through the National Park Service by a grant from the National Park Foundation (NPF), through generous support from the Mellon Foundation. American Conservation Experience (ACE) joins NPS and NPF as a key partner.

The Mellon Humanities program is underway at 30 NPS sites from Guam to New England and involves Fellows working alongside dozens of NPS staff, mentors, and external partners. Mellon Moments offers snapshots of their activities, illustrating the depth and diversity of humanities work across NPS.



## Humanities at NPS Boosted By Arrival of New Fellows

What could be better than *one* cohort of postdocs digging deep into America's stories and places to enrich NPS visitors' experiences? TWO cohorts! In September, 15 new Mellon Fellows joined National Park Service sites nationwide, bringing innovative research methods and specialized expertise to preserve and share American stories. With diverse academic backgrounds, these Fellows will make significant impacts through research, project development, and community engagement. [Click here to learn more about the 2024-2026 Mellon Humanities Fellows.](#)

The [15 host sites](#) span the country from Alaska to Massachusetts and include historical parks, memorial sites, National Heritage Areas, a Regional Office, and a national monument. Fellows will delve into the history of free and unfree labor at the Schuyler Estate, gather oral histories of nuclear testing in the rural West, and explore the cultural significance of American rivers, among many other stories.

With the first cohort midway through their tenure and the [250th commemoration](#) approaching, it's an exciting time to double the size of the Mellon Fellowship Program, which promises to deepen visitors' experiences at NPS sites and invite reflection on the magnitude and multitude of American stories.

THESE SOLDIERS WERE JUST 6 MILES FROM A NUCLEAR TEST IN NEVADA IN 1951. SIMILAR TESTS EXPOSED PEOPLE NEAR AND FAR TO RADIATION. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO.

## Oral History Workshop Series

In Summer 2024, the NPS Mellon program offered a 5-part oral history workshop series. Oral history is a powerful tool for raising awareness of historically non-dominant narratives. Fellows are applying oral history practice and other tools to foster community engagement and place-based interpretation across the NPS.

Oral history practitioners shared their expertise, on the following subjects:

- ["The History of Oral History"](#) - Drs. Anna Kaplan and Dan Kerr (American University)
- ["Ethics and Oral History"](#) - Sarah Milligan (Oklahoma State University)
- ["Bridging Theory and Practice"](#) - Dr. Francena Turner (NPS Mellon Program)
- ["How to Prepare and Lead an OH Project"](#) - Dr. Lu Ann Jones (NPS, retired)
- ["Collections Management & Best Practices in Preservation"](#) - Anne Foster (NPS)

The series welcomed NPS Mellon hosts, mentors, and Fellows, and it intended to serve audiences with a range of experience and interest. While geared toward projects with the NPS, lessons emphasized skills that carry beyond work with the Federal agency. Invited speakers shared relevant readings, all of which—along with the recordings—can be found on the NPS Mellon SharePoint (DOI access only).

The NPS Mellon program plans to run a version of this series again in 2025.

A WOMAN SPEAKS INTO A MICROPHONE AT THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH OFFICE IN 1943—OVER A COLLAGE OF TAPE RECORDER ADVERTISEMENTS. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO.





From history and anthropology to music and literature, Mellon Fellows apply their expertise in a wide array of humanities disciplines to produce original research related to the cultural heritage and special places NPS preserves for the American public. "Research Round-Up" shares some of the Fellows' most recent findings.



## Knowing and Grieving Two Massacres

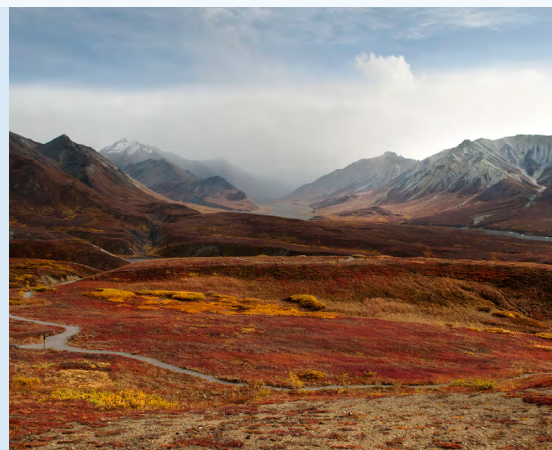
In September 2024's *Alta*, Mellon Fellow Dr. Laura Dominguez recounts an 1871 massacre in Los Angeles, which killed 18 Chinese Americans, and an 1885 attack in Rock Springs, WY that left 28 Chinese Americans dead and an entire community in ashes. The history of violence can vanish from a physical landscape while lingering in memory, Dominguez notes. Historical place-making can memorialize the dead and honor a community's own healing traditions, while offering space to consider alternatives to violence. [You can find the full article here.](#)

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE ROCK SPRINGS MASSACRE FROM AN 1885 ISSUE OF HARPER'S WEEKLY.

## Humanities Research Methods Can Help Parks Avoid Overburdening Tribes

In the Summer 2024 issue of *Park Science Magazine*, Dr. Lisa Fink finds that while National Parks have long collected Indigenous Knowledge, it often went unused. Fink demonstrates how humanities methods like archival research can help managers access this knowledge effectively, using examples from an NPS Alaska Region initiative. This approach could be crucial for decision-makers seeking to incorporate Indigenous perspectives without overburdening tribes. [Learn more here.](#)

THE VIEW FROM DENALI'S TUNDRA LOOP TRAIL, NPS PHOTO / TIM RAINS



## Forest Joe and the Complicated Legacy of Freedom Seeking

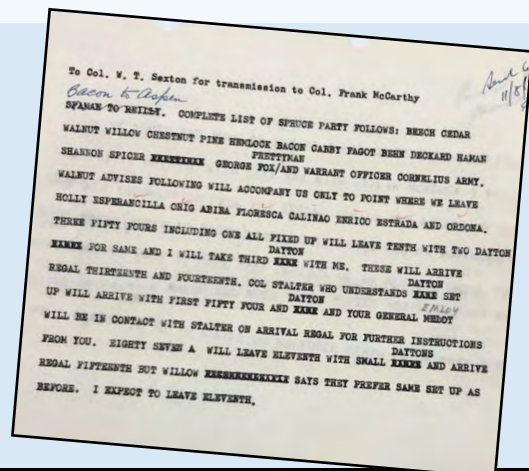
In a [new article on NPS.gov](#), Mellon Fellow Dr. Joshua Strayhorn tells the story of Forest Joe, a self-emancipated slave who hid in the dense green landscape of lowcountry South Carolina and whose violent raids of nearby plantations involved threatening and attacking free and enslaved people. Forest Joe's story is a tale of freedom-seeking that casts new light on slavery's complex web of social relationships.

CONGAREE NATIONAL PARK, NPS PHOTO

## The Secret is Out: Code Names for FDR's Mobility Aids

Deep in the archives at Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Mellon Fellow Dr. Shelby Landmark made a surprising discovery: Secret Service agents assigned code names for ramps and speaker stands used to accommodate Roosevelt's disability. Breaking down the coded language in the plans, Dr. Landmark shows that the secrecy surrounding the ramps only underscores the very public nature of Roosevelt's disability. To learn more, [find the full article here.](#)

THIS SECRET SERVICE MEMO SHOWS X'S AND CODE WORDS—LIKE "DAYTON"—WHERE "RAMP," AND OTHER MOBILITY AIDS WOULD HAVE GONE. FDR PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES.



While Fellows focus on research, they also share their work in digital formats. Here, we highlight tools that make Fellowship insights accessible to NPS visitors, both online and in person.



## Voices of Guåhan (Guam) Oral History Tour WWII Oral Histories Now Available in the NPS APP

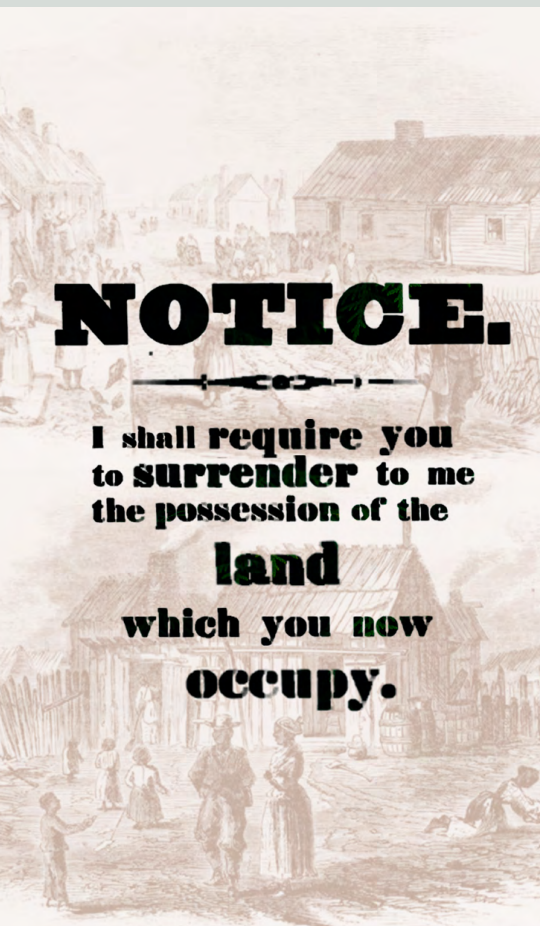
Visitors to [War in the Pacific National Historical Park](#) – and anyone who downloads the [NPS app](#) – can now listen to firsthand accounts of the wartime Pacific, as experienced by Chamoru people and soldiers who were present during the bombardment of Guåhan (Guam). Digitized by Mellon Fellow [Dr. Jenny Craig](#) and made broadly available for the first time through the NPS app, the [Voices of Guåhan oral history tour](#) allows audiences to hear directly from community members about what the war was like for them and their families.

THE AUDIO TOUR, SHOWN HERE IN THE NPS APP, EXPLORES WWII IN GUAM. THE BACKGROUND IMAGE SHOWS US TROOPS LANDING DURING THE BATTLE OF GUAM, NATIONAL ARCHIVES.

## Food for Thought

Considering Recent Talks by Mellon Humanities Fellows

“Food for Thought” is a regular feature in our newsletter in which we summarize key takeaways from Fellows’ and invited speakers’ presentations on humanities research, as well as share reflections and responses to their work.



## “We are Willing to Die in Her Defence” James City and the Fight for Land and Self-Determination in the 1800’s

Mellon Fellow and historian Dr. Joshua Strayhorn’s research chronicles the experiences of emancipated black folks in Eastern North Carolina after the Civil War. His presentation, [available to NPS and public audiences online here](#), explores how their experiences during slavery and in refugee camps during the Civil War shaped their claims for freedom, land, and rights in the late nineteenth century.

National Park Foundation Mellon Program Coordinator Aleyah Gowell had this to say about what she found meaningful in Dr. Strayhorn’s talk:

- Dr. Strayhorn illustrates how James City serves as an example of a Black community’s self-determination in deciding to migrate or remain in the place they called home.
- The James City community used geography, armed resistance, and litigation to protect and maintain autonomy over their home after the Civil War.
- I was especially struck by Dr. Strayhorn’s argument that while other communities dispersed, the people of James City decided to stay and maintain control over their community because of the strong communal bonds they formed through shared experiences during and after the Civil War.

JAMES CITY RESIDENTS RECEIVED THREATENING NOTICES, INCLUDING THE TEXT SHOWN ABOVE. BEHIND THE TEXT, AN ILLUSTRATION TITLED “TRENT RIVER SETTLEMENT” DEPICTS A FREEDMAN’S VILLAGE IN NORTH CAROLINA, FROM AN 1866 EDITION OF HARPERS WEEKLY.



When it comes to the humanities at NPS, the Mellon Program is hardly the only game in town! So much inspired humanities work is happening everyday across the many parks and programs of NPS. Some of our recent favorites:



## Guidebooks and Accessibility Article *NPS Park History Program*

[Guidebooks and Accessibility](#), a new article by Ellie Kaplan of the [NPS Park History Program](#), asks the question: how have disabled people enjoyed NPS treasures over the years, given the innumerable barriers they have faced? Highlighting three guidebooks written specifically by and for disabled people, Kaplan traces the evolution of “accessibility” as a concept and a practice over half a century of NPS history.

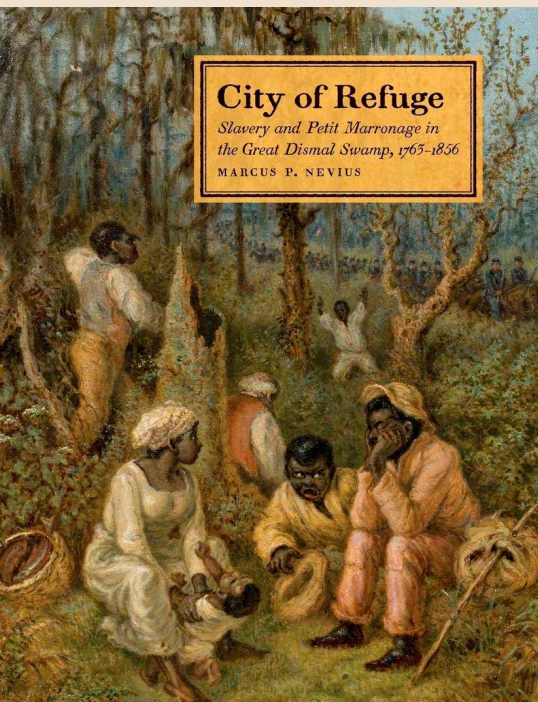
## High Tide Trail Audio Tour *Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area*

[The High Tide Trail Audio Tour](#) by the [Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area](#) team blends history, ecology, cultural heritage, and environmental science to tell the story of coastal Boston and its many life forms - and to make some significant predictions about the future.

THE COVERS OF THREE DIFFERENT BOOKS WRITTEN ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY IN NATIONAL PARKS. BACKGROUND PHOTO OF ORGAN PIPE CACTUS NATIONAL MONUMENT, NPS PHOTO.

## Upcoming Events & Presentations

Interested in the humanities at NPS? Check out any of these upcoming events, including presentations of original research, roundtable discussions, and webinars on topics of interest to many across the Service. Join us!



## City of Refuge: A Discussion about Marronage 2 pm ET, October 31 - [Link to Register](#)

Book talk! Dr. Marcus Nevius, a historian of marronage and freedom-seeking in the United States, will speak on his recent book “City of Refuge: Slavery and Petit Marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp, 1763–1856.” Thursday October 31, 2:00 p.m. Open to all! [More info and registration here](#).

## Virtual Convening of NPS Mellon Fellows December 3-5

Virtual Convening of NPS Mellon Fellows, Cohort One! Over two days, Cohort One Fellows will share research and findings in a series of virtual presentations. December 3-5. For more information and to register, please email [MellonFellowship@nps.gov](mailto:MellonFellowship@nps.gov).

THE COVER OF THE BOOK “CITY OF REFUGE.” THE PAINTING IS TITLED “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN THE DISMAL SWAMP, VIRGINIA” BY DAVID EDWARD CRONIN, 1888, NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

This newsletter was made possible through the National Park Service by a grant from the [National Park Foundation](#) through generous support from the Mellon Foundation. The Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowships are administered through a partnership between NPS, NPF, and [American Conservation Experience](#).

For more information, please visit our website: [NPS Mellon Humanities Program on NPS.GOV](#)

