

James Weldon Johnson Foundation

June 2023 - May 2024 Report

June 20, 2024

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON
FOUNDATION

Contact: Rufus E. Jones, Jr., President, James Weldon Johnson Foundation
646-894-6023 | rufus@jamesweldonjohnson.org | <https://www.jamesweldonjohnson.org>

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James Weldon Johnson Foundation

June 2023 - May 2024 Report

In May 2024, Mellon Foundation (Mellon) awarded the James Weldon Johnson Foundation \$575,000 for historic preservation and accessibility planning and the National Football League (NFL) doubled its commitment to \$50,000 from \$25,000 paid over two years to support artist residencies, historic preservation, and general operations

**Mellon Foundation
National Football League**

In 2023, the Phase 1 Writing Cabin rehabilitation project, completed in early 2023, was funded by grants and donations from

**African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund 2022
of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
Mildred Jones Keefe Fund for Massachusetts
of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation Massachusetts in partnership with The 1772 Foundation
National Football League
The Jane & Jack Fitzpatrick Trust
Timothy and Michele Barakett Foundation
Gail and Gilbert Ahye
Kenneth and Susan Austin
James Adams and Julio Santiago
Individual Donors**



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WELCOME 3 NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Election of three new independent directors, February 5, 2024



Enshalla Anderson is the Director and Global Head of Brand Strategy & Creative for Google Cloud. Enshalla's career has taken her from Wall Street to management consulting to "agency land"—with stops along the way in New York, London, Istanbul, and Caracas. And now as the Global Head of Brand Strategy and Creative for Google Cloud, Enshalla is growing brand love for Google's fast growing cloud portfolio. Enshalla earned her BA in History from the University of Pennsylvania, and her MBA from Harvard Business School. When not working, Enshalla is busy with her husband and two sons, who share her passion for Star Wars and Marvel.



Terry Denson is widely acknowledged as a dynamic media business leader, content strategist and innovator instrumental in the shaping of the multichannel, OTT, direct-to-consumer, and digital platform consumer models over the past 15 years. Proven creativity, ingenuity and ability in assessing consumer behavior and identifying high growth trends commensurate with consumer aspirations and technical, process and business model innovations, resulting in industry leading subscriber growth, revenue, and customer adoption.



Cindy Dishmey Montgomery is the Head of Data Strategy at Morgan Stanley Real Assets. She oversees their global data strategy which allows her to work with start-ups that have a big vision of disrupting their industry. Her unique acumen in technology, finance, leadership, and strategy, along with Her utilization of data and analytics, gives her clients a competitive advantage and data-driven solutions. Named one of Crain's Business 2021 Notable Women on Wall Street, she has 15 years of experience in data, finance, and global markets. She brings both a creative and responsible approach to data use delivering inventive and unprecedented solutions designed to positively impact the world and particularly communities of color. Cindy earned a bachelor's degree in computer science from New York University and a master's of science in business analytics from the New York University Stern School of Business.

PHASE 1 PRESERVATION WORK

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON WRITING CABIN

COMPLETED JANUARY 2023

Before



After



Recreation/installation of missing window sash: The windows were restored or recreated to match in a specialty shop devoted to that purpose. The small square awning windows had sash that were mostly intact and were used as the pattern for millwork profiles. The larger double casements that show in historic photos are gone, but the photos showed the muntin divisions, the hinging and other details.

Before



After



Replacement of cedar shake roof and copper flashing: The original roof was cedar shakes on closely spaced wooden board sheathing on top of tongue-and-groove beaded board, with the beaded board fastened from above to the rafters and running at 90 degrees to the rafters. No roofing nails penetrated the beaded board when constructed. The roof is restored using a two-way ventilating wood grid on top of building paper ("tarpaper") laid over the beaded board, with the lower members parallel to the rafters, directly on top of them and secured through the beaded board to them.

Before



After



Fieldstone masonry repairs to chimney and foundation: The fieldstone foundation and chimney were in generally good condition and required repair in places. The original stones were mostly where they fell and were collected for reuse. Weakened joints were deeply scraped and repointed. The introduction of small amounts of Portland cement into masonry mortar was underway at the time of the cabin's construction and may explain why the masonry is still in relatively sound condition.

Before



After



Repairs to wooden slab siding and trim; staining: The wood slab siding and trim were mostly intact, but had areas needing repair. The species is believed to be white cedar, and has been matched for repairs. It has held up extremely well, in part because the amount of direct sun on the cabin was limited by tall well-spaced surrounding evergreens. Yet the trees did not create an overly moist environment either, which would tend to compromise the building's outer services with moss and discoloration due to mildew and fungus. Most damage that has occurred to the siding has been either a result of proximity to grade or invasion by pests such as bees and raccoons. The finish of the exterior wood siding and trim is linseed oil. A light coating of linseed oil will rejuvenate the cedar, which is naturally oil-infused wood.

SITE VISITS, TOURS & CURRICULUM



Writing Cabin Tours: Field trips have a “positive, lasting impact” on students’ education and career. (NEA.org). The Writing Cabin helps with engagement, curiosity and interest in and out of school.

Curriculum: Students and faculty from Bard College at Simon’s Rock have been building and implementing a curriculum around the Writing Cabin and Johnson’s work since 2020.



History and Architecture: Writing Cabin Tour (May 2024)

David Glassberg, Professor Emeritus
Department of History
Lecturer, Department of Architecture
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Testimonial

“...the students came to see the architecture; I don't think any of them knew Johnson by name, though a few recognized "Lift Every Voice and Sing" after I hummed a few bars. However, all of the students were visibly moved by the power of the place--what Tom Ingersoll has called the site's unique "convergence" of land, water, and history.”

“Our visit was clearly a memorable experience, one that demonstrated to these future architects, far better than my words could have done, the importance of preservationists understanding and protecting not just a building, but the spirit of a place.”



Community Engagement: Black Heritage Bike Ride Tour at Five Acres (May 2024)

Elizabeth Adams
Board Member
Multicultural BRIDGE, Great Barrington

Testimonial

“To look across the stream to the Writing Cabin gave me goosebumps. We walked around to the cabin, looked at archival photos, read aloud the selection you sent from his autobiography, read aloud the lyrics to "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and spoke about his leadership in the Civil Rights movement, the Harlem Renaissance, as well as his relationship with Du Bois.”



Join us!
Berkshire Bike Month & BRIDGE Present:
**GREAT BARRINGTON
Du Bois Black History Bike Ride**
Sunday, May 19, 2024 | 10:00 AM



CONVENING AT FIVE ACRES

Advancing the Legacy VI: A Celebration of James Weldon Johnson
Saturday, June 17, 2023, Five Acres, Great Barrington



Dinner and Auction



Music



Five Acres March



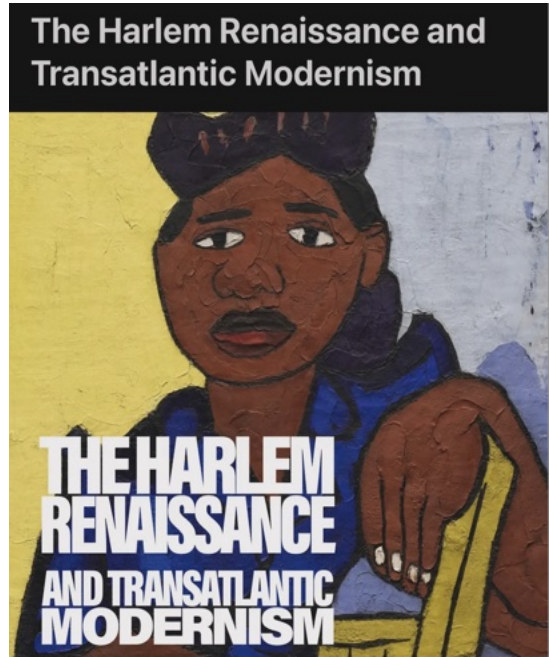
2023 James Weldon Johnson Fellows in the Arts



Singing Johnson's "National Hymn"

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Private Tour with **The Met's Merryl H. and James S. Tisch Curator at Large Denise Murrell**. Dr. Murrell joined the Museum as the first Associate Curator of 19th- and 20th-Century Art in 2020 and led us through her major exhibition on the **Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism**, which illuminated the significant influence and legacy of James Weldon Johnson, April 2024 New York.



FELLOWS CURATION & EXHIBITIONS

Bergdorf Goodman & Kaleidoscope Project celebrates diversity in the arts by curating and exhibiting the **works of James Weldon Johnson Fellowship in the Arts** recipients at the iconic Bergdorf Goodman home floor, including other esteemed artists and designers from across the country, April 2024 New York City

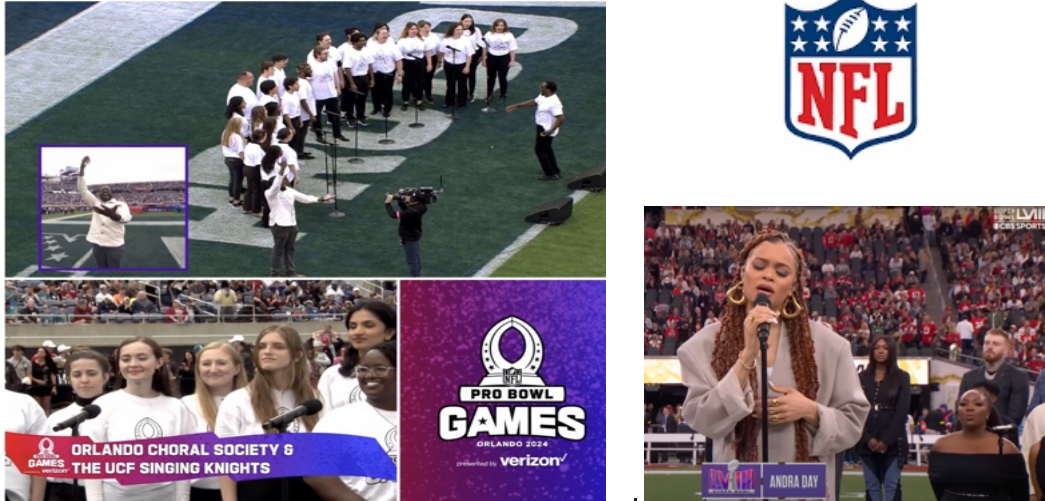


"REFLECTIONS Women in Jazz" at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem is a **collaboration between James Weldon Johnson Fellows in the Arts**, Meclina Gomes, Noland Andrews and Kamil Peters, that explores through words, metal, paper and wood, how women in jazz have and continue to nourish our collective souls. The seeds of this collaboration may be traced back to their artist residency at Five Acres, March 2024 New York City



2024 NFL PRO BOWL & SUPER BOWL

Twenty-Five (25) select members of the **Orlando Choral Society and UCF Singing Knights**, representing a diverse and inclusive community choir within Central Florida under the direction of Dr. Jeffery Redding, perform a Roland Carter arrangement of **"Lift Every Voice and Sing"** at the 2024 NFL Pro Bowl Games in Orlando, Florida. **Andra Day** performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at Super Bowl LVIII, February 2024 Florida.



PULITZER PRIZE PHOTOGRAPHER

Pulitzer Prize Winner Robin Hood of *Chattanooga News-Free Press* and his wife visited Five Acres in May 2024 to photograph the James Weldon Johnson Writing Cabin for a coffee table book for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Black & white photos at Five Acres circa 1930 (James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University)



Writing Cabin

Grace on Bridge

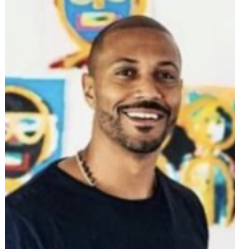
James, John, Grace

James and Guest at Cottage at Five Acres

2024 James Weldon Johnson Fellowship in the Arts

Artist Residency Program, June 22 - July 6, 2024

The **residency program** seeks to support established, mid-career and emerging visual artists, writers, scholars, musicians and others whose work exemplifies the values that James Weldon Johnson dedicated his life to: social equity, creative expression, erudition, social justice and community. Since 2017, James Weldon Johnson Foundation has partnered with **Bard College at Simon's Rock** for its annual artist-in-residence program for thirty-two artists, including the 2024 Fellows:



Ekpe Abioto

Brian Poli-Dixon

Isabel Randall

Emorja Roberson

Tobey Renee Sanders

Ekpe Abioto: Ekpe (pronounced "eck-pay"), a "musical philanthropist" and artistic director of GENIUS UNLIMITED, specializes in children's music and cultural entertainment. Since his career began in 1974, people of all ages and cultures have enjoyed and been enriched by Ekpe's performances, recordings, workshops, and lectures. His motivational learning workshops on self-esteem, creative thinking, conflict resolution, drug prevention, and gang awareness have been well received by students, teachers, and administrators. As a musician, producer, recording artist, songwriter and arts educator, he plays African instruments (djimbe drum, kalimba (thumb piano), shakere, and others), flute and saxophone.

Brian Poli-Dixon: At Art Basel 2021 in Miami, Brian Poli-Dixon received the Best New Exhibitor Award (Spectrum Miami). Some critics have described his art in the lineage of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Pablo Picasso, Carmen Herrera, and Wilfredo Lam, but Brian simply desires to share his interpretations of color, words, and emotions with the world. Brian uses his love for photography to assemble stories in his mind before using his paint brush and hands to convey those stories on canvas. His studio and The Brian Poli-Dixon Art Gallery aka "The House Of GeniUS" are located in South Florida.

Emorja Roberson: Emorja Roberson is the Assistant Professor of Music and African American Studies at Oxford College of Emory University. He recently performed as the baritone soloist for Brahms' Requiem at with the Notre Dame Children's Choir where he also debuted his commissioned piece, "Joy, it's on the Way," under the direction of Mark Doerries. He has three published works, "Lord, I Am Grateful" with MorningStar Music Publishers, and two with GIA Music, "He'll be With You" and "Seek Ye First," which has been performed by the University of Arkansas Inspirational Chorale, Notre Dame Folk Choir, and South Bend Community Singers. He was selected as a 2023 Arts & Social Justice Fellow.

Isabel Randall: Isabel is a civic-engaged librettist, opera singer, and poet from Rota, Spain, and is passionate about making opera more accessible and performing contemporary works. Isabel was an Apprentice Artist at Des Moines Metro Opera for their 2022 & 2023 festival seasons. She holds a Graduate Performance Diploma in Voice from Longy School of Music of Bard College, a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from Azusa Pacific University and a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Baylor University.

Tobey Renee Sanders: Tobey R. Sanders, with over 18 years of fine and decorative art experience, is widely recognized for her faux finish techniques and beautifully crafted line of contemporary art. In 1997, Sanders launched FauxDecor, a super talented decorative painting company that provides both residential and commercial establishments with uniquely custom designed faux finishes. Tobey has been featured on TBS 'Movie and a Makeover', K. Michelle My Life, HGTV Smart Home 2018, as well as, The Real Housewives of Atlanta and Love and Hip ATL.

Five Acres is Five Acres Again

AGREEMENT: "Taylor and Jones own property adjacent to each other which property is located on Seekonk Road and Alford Road, Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Jones owns property formerly owned by James Weldon Johnson, which contains **James Weldon Johnson's writing cabin** which was believed to contain **five (5) acres more or less**. Surveys of the land have indicated that the boundaries of the Jones parcel likely contain approximately 3.4 acres more or less. Taylor and Jones desire to restore the traditional five (5) acres believed to have been owned by James Weldon Johnson and to accomplish that goal they have agreed to enter into this agreement, whereby Taylor will convey to Jones 1.6 acres more or less which will restore the Jones property to the original five (5) acres." **GB PLANNING BOARD APPROVED 6/1/2023**

Five Acres back intact

Gift of parcel restores historic Great Barrington estate

By HEATHER BELLOW
The Berkshire Eagle

GREAT BARRINGTON — Over the years, James Weldon Johnson's "Five Acres" estate somehow lost around three of its acres. A 1.6-acre slice of pasture next to the Harlem Renaissance founder's writing cabin had apparently been shaved off by an earlier abutter and folded into a larger parcel. Property lines shifted and so did fences. Even surveyors couldn't figure out where the boundary line was. At Town Hall, old property surveys were missing. The abutting pasture was sold, split off and sold again, leaving Five Acres with just under two.

That's all changed. The current landowner, Jeffrey Taylor — who is selling the abutting 9-acre pasture — donated the 1.6 acres to Rufus Jones and Jill Rosenberg Jones, owners of the historic property and stewards of Johnson's legacy. The town's Planning Board approved it earlier this month. The Joneses, who bought it in 2011, had worried for several years that it would all be sold before they could make the historic property whole again. They also wanted a buffer around the cabin where Johnson wrote poetry and his autobiography. Eventually they'd like to buy that 9 acres to make Five Acres available to the public and handicapped accessible. They've started raising the money.

FIVE ACRES, Page 5



PHOTO PROVIDED BY JAMES WELDON JOHNSON FOUNDATION
James Weldon Johnson, standing behind his writing cabin in Great Barrington at "Five Acres," his summer property off Alford Road. The owners of the cabin, and the foundation they established in Johnson's name, have been working for a decade to property preserve the cabin where Johnson worked and sought refuge in the 1920s and 30s.

Five Acres

FROM PAGE 1

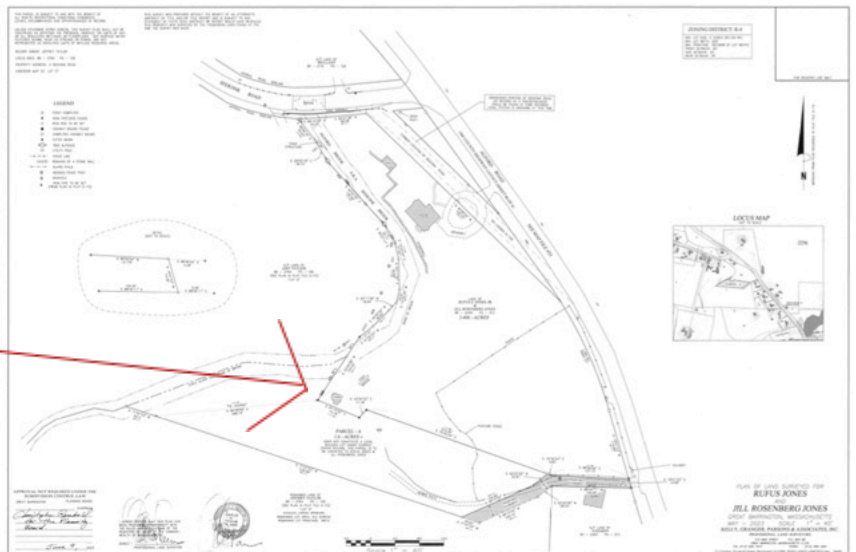
"For 12 years I've been trying to get my 2 acres back," Rufus Jones said. How the acres and surveys disappeared, he added, is "a great mystery."

Johnson and his wife, Grace Nail Johnson, bought the 5-acre estate in 1926 as a retreat from New York City, and the fraught and hectic life of an early civil rights leader working for the NAACP in the 1920s. His doctor told him he needed to slow down.



This photo shows the cabin in Great Barrington where poet, lyricist, author and Harlem Renaissance founder James Weldon Johnson wrote in during the late 1920s and '30s. Part of a pasture behind it that used to be part of the property will be rejoined to the larger estate known as "Five Acres."

EAGLE FILE PHOTO



Mellon, Williams College & Other Collaborations

Next Steps

The mission of the James Weldon Johnson Foundation is to advance the legacy of James Weldon Johnson through historical preservation and educational, intellectual, and artistic works that impact the contemporary world and exemplify his enduring contributions to American history and worldwide culture. JWJ Foundation's work centers around "Five Acres," the Great Barrington, Massachusetts property purchased by James Weldon and his wife, Grace Nail, in 1926 in The Berkshires. Johnson, his family, and friends sought refuge, retreat, and inspiration at Five Acres. Moreover, this place, including the surrounding landscape, is where Johnson designed a Writing Cabin and wrote some of his best-known poetry, books, and papers. The James Weldon Johnson Foundation's five pillars of organizational vision—**Convene, Think, Revive, Create, and Energize**—are deeply tied to the protection, preservation, and sustainable use of this place for artist residencies, community convenings and the celebration of Black history and achievement.

Mellon Grant Summary

Over the next three years, James Weldon Johnson Foundation will complete the following:

1. Restoration work on Johnson's historic Writing Cabin.
2. Critical accessibility and preservation planning.
3. Research and documentation of the Writing Cabin and its old-growth forest.

Planning will address short—and long-term needs and ensure this sensitive site's long-term sustainability. James Weldon Johnson Foundation is uniquely qualified to steward the legacy of this singular historic site and undertake preservation planning that will protect it for the benefit of people of every age. James Weldon Johnson Foundation's leaders are among the nation's African American preservationists, including Johnson's literary estate executor. They have personally secured and protected Five Acres for over a decade while establishing a nonprofit to promote the advancement of Johnson's legacy well into the future.

Preservation Master Planning: The preservation planning work proposed incorporates an estimated two-year planning process with the primary aim of establishing a Master Plan document for the Writing Cabin at Five Acres and **the surrounding landscape**, the foundational wellspring for the larger mission of the James Weldon Johnson Foundation.

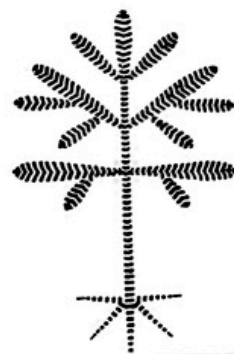
Sustainability Management Plan: This work will be supported by **Williams College**, specifically the **Zilkha Center for Environmental Initiatives**, in partnership with the James Weldon Johnson Foundation. The Zilkha Center, which serves as the College's campus sustainability office, is well-versed in leading collaborative processes to develop Sustainability Management Plans, including ecological site management, operational processes for resource use and waste minimization, and designing for equity.

Timeline: The three-year timeline supports the James Weldon Johnson Foundation's intention to complete the Writing Cabin Restoration project before its 10th-anniversary celebration in 2026.

Key Partners/Collaborators:

- **Williams College** is working with the James Weldon Johnson Foundation to create a multi-disciplinary partnership to support the project's research and documentation initiatives, conservation efforts, and sustainability objectives
- **Emory University's James Weldon Johnson Institute for the Study of Race and Difference** selected the first Emory University scholar to participate in the 2024 James Weldon Johnson Fellowship in the Arts residency program
- **New York University's James Weldon Johnson Professorships** aspire to use Five Acres as an annual convening space for their community of scholars, designed to spark the kinds of creativity, collaborations, and pursuit of beauty and justice exemplified by Johnson's legacy.

Testimonials: Bard College at Simon's Rock Students



Dear Rufus,

Thank you for two tremendous visits to the always stunning and wonderfully evolving Writing Cabin!

Many thanks,
John

Academy 9th Grade

November 2023

Dear Rufus Jones, Thank you for giving all of us the chance to meet with James Weldon Johnson's spirit. Before this I had no idea who he was, but now I know his importance first hand. Thank you again for this opportunity, It was truly inspirational to be able to see where this great writer wrote his work, and the energy he left.

Thank you,
Lukas Friedmann

Dear Rufus

Thank you so much for teaching us about James Weldon Johnson and 5 acres. I had no idea that the home was there and how much importance it held. Your vivid descriptions connecting the Creation to the world around us really made the story come to life.

Thank you so much Rufus,

I found it so amazing how you and your wife were able to preserve such an amazing and interesting place. The world should be grateful that we aren't losing a historical place to time.

-Mohammed Drop

Dear Rufus,

Thank you for sharing your knowledge of James Weldon Johnson and his home. I've always loved learning about the history of the place I live, and this was something new to me! I love living in a place with so much history and people like you intent on preserving and sharing it.

P.S. I looked at the Yale Archives you recommended!

Best,
Beck

Dear Rufus:

Thank you for leading the trip. It was extraordinary and I learned that it is really important to hear from yourself, and find your own voice in writing.

Best Regards,
Aaron Siheng Liang

END