

## **\$400,000 in New Grants for Public Humanities Projects Filling in the Tapestry of History and Culture**

**12 wide-ranging projects showcase partnerships among  
scholars, nonprofits, and citizens across the US and beyond**

MAY 11, 2021. The humanities – subjects like history, literature, and philosophy – make transformative contributions to our world. When they step beyond the walls of a university, the humanities can enrich public life in unique and vital ways: amplifying unheard or forgotten stories, giving public discourse depth and context, and applying essential insights from the long history of human inquiry.

The [Whiting Public Engagement Program](#) (WPEP) is a distinctive national grant founded to champion the public humanities in all forms, and to highlight the roles scholars play in work to deploy the humanities for the public good. Since it began in 2016, the WPEP has given \$2.4 million to launch and expand projects in the US and beyond. Winners are selected through a highly competitive process beginning with nomination by a university, scholarly society, or state humanities council and proceeding through two further stages of peer review by expert public humanists.

Today we proudly award **seven \$50,000 Fellowships** & **five \$10,000 Seed Grants** to a vibrant cross-section of public-humanities collaborations. Their projects draw on topics from the vibrant multi-ethnic history of California's San Gabriel Valley to the philosophical underpinnings of the criminal justice system, and they use media from traveling exhibitions to K-12 curricula to historical bike tours.

Examples of this year's twelve winning projects include:

- **New high-school curricula that celebrate the diverse history of El Monte**, from the Tongva, the area's original inhabitants, to 21st century globalization, along with bike tours exploring local history
- **Public programs on incarceration** that reimagine public safety, exploring the philosophical and historical roots of prisons and their material and social consequences, featuring scholars, activists, and formerly incarcerated students
- **A traveling exhibit about Black cultural activism in Baltimore** co-created with local middle- and high- school students and grounded in the evolution of *Chicory*, an African-American literary magazine published in the 60s, 70s & 80s

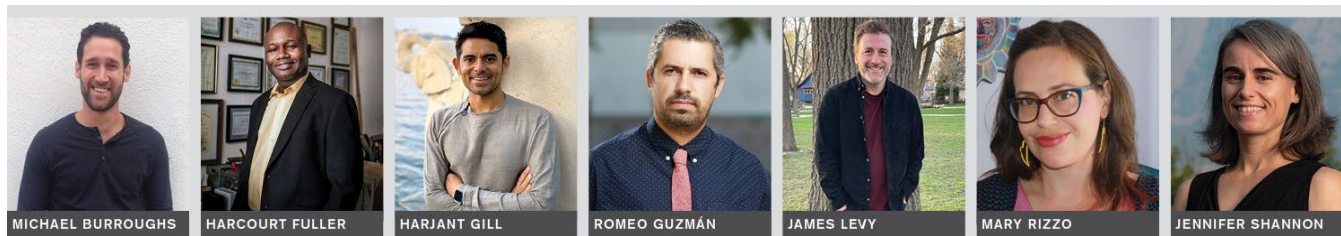
- **A podcast and story archive on Wisconsin and New York’s intertwined pasts** and the role of race in shaping land use, migration, and dispossession, informed by ongoing local research and public community conversations
- **An exhibit on the 1942 uprising in Tuchyn, Ukraine**, where 2,600 Jews fought and were massacred by Nazis 6 months before the Warsaw uprising, that will bring accounts of resistance and witness to 25 North Carolina schools
- **An oral history initiative in Nashville** illuminating the connection between the city’s environmental history and racism through a digital story map and repository that will serve as the basis for a series of community conversations

“The humanities make a crucial difference for all of us, in so many ways,” said Daniel Reid, Executive Director of the Whiting Foundation. “These twelve projects – and the many others being led by scholars and other public humanists in every part of the country – will build bridges within and across communities, enrich our understanding and help us interpret the world around us, and make our lives more meaningful through deep context, rich exchange, and careful inquiry.”

Full descriptions of the new [Fellows](#) and [Seed Grantees](#) and their projects are included below. For more information about the program and past winners, visit the [Whiting website](#). Inquiries and questions can be directed to Katy Einerson at [publicengagement@whiting.org](mailto:publicengagement@whiting.org) or 917-722-1461.

The **Whiting Foundation** provides targeted support for writers, scholars, and the stewards of humanity’s shared cultural heritage. In addition to the Public Engagement Program, Whiting’s grants include, in the United States, the [Whiting Award](#) for emerging writers, [Creative Nonfiction Grant](#) for works in progress, [Literary Magazine Prize](#), and, globally, a portfolio of grants to [preserve and disseminate endangered cultural heritage](#).

## The Seven 2021-22 Fellows



### Humanities Beyond Bars

**Michael Burroughs** (California State Univ., Bakersfield; Philosophy & Religious Studies)

The rate of incarceration in the United States is among the very highest in the world, but despite mass incarceration's pervasive effect on American culture and communities, the reality of the human condition both behind bars and upon release is too little seen and too often misunderstood. In California's Central Valley, a region with one of the largest incarcerated populations in the country, Michael Burroughs is leading the Humanities Beyond Bars Project in collaboration with CSU's Project Rebound and Historical Research Center to deepen understanding of the historical roots of imprisonment and its material and philosophical implications on people who live through it.

Following a tradition of influential thinkers turning a humanities lens on incarceration, from Socrates to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Antonio Gramsci, Malcom X, and Michel Foucault, Humanities Beyond Bars builds on a series of public programs begun in 2018 featuring luminaries such as Angela Davis, incarceration scholars such as Dr. Brady Heiner, and formerly incarcerated CSU students. Burroughs and his collaborators will use the Fellowship to expand this public programming to include a symposium on mass incarceration and reimagining public safety, bringing together formerly incarcerated scholars, activists, and other thought leaders for community dialogue.

Humanities Beyond Bars will also initiate an innovative oral history project focused on formerly incarcerated students, introducing a wider public to their life stories, experiences of re-entry after prison, and their unique successes and challenges while pursuing higher education. The recollections of formerly incarcerated students have never been systematically collected and, thus, this initiative will fill a substantial gap in historical knowledge related to the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons while serving as a central outlet for formerly incarcerated students to tell their stories. Their interviews will be audio- and video-recorded and stored on an open access web page.

Through a combination of live events, hands-on learning, and community-based research, Humanities Beyond Bars will fill significant gaps in public understanding of incarceration while building lasting relationships between formerly and non-incarcerated individuals.

## **Black Money Exhibit: World Currencies Featuring African and African Diasporic History and Cultures**

**Harcourt Fuller** (Georgia State University; History)

What can a 1,000-dinar Algerian banknote depicting prehistoric cave art teach us about the evolution of African civilization? What is the story behind a \$10 bill issued by the Bank of Canada featuring Viola Desmond, a Black businessperson and civil rights activist and the first Canadian woman to appear on a regularly circulating banknote? Because money has long played a pivotal role in how societies evolve, interact, clash, and make amends, a nation or culture's unique physical currency is a window into its history and values. [The Black Money Exhibit](#), conceived by Harcourt Fuller to educate the public about the importance of money as a visual source of knowledge, uses paper money to explore 10,000 years of Black history, cultures, and lived experiences.

Displayed on "money trees" inspired by the iconic baobab, or "tree of life," native to the African savanna, the exhibit includes over 300 rare, obsolete, and currently circulating banknotes from more than 80 countries and territories in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. These serve as jumping-off points to explore themes such as African civilizations and art, enslavement and freedom around the world, and Black music and dance. Following a successful pilot at the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History in 2018, Fuller and his collaborators will use the Fellowship to tour the exhibit across the US, produce an accompanying documentary and soundtrack, host a Black Money Talks discussion series, and develop lesson plans in consultation with middle- and high-school teachers.

With their multiplatform approach, Fuller and his team hope to use money – one of the most widely circulated forms of mass media in history – to engage a wide public in an examination of the cross-sections between history, culture, and currency, moving towards a richer understanding of Africa and the African Diaspora.

## **Tales from Macholand**

**Harjant Gill** (Towson University; Anthropology)

In 2014 the Indian Supreme Court moved to expand legal recognition of transgender individuals as "third gender," and in 2018 it officially decriminalized homosexuality. But social attitudes have not kept pace with these hard-fought legal recognitions. Mainstream Indian society retains strong homophobic, transphobic, and patriarchal currents, reinforced by Bollywood celebrities and cricketers with campaigns like "Be a MARD!" ("Be a Man!"). And even though the patriarchal values and the caste system – a combination Harjant Gill calls "Mardistan" or "Macholand" – benefit upper-caste men and maintain their dominance to the detriment of women and sexual minorities, many Indian men struggle with expectations for traditional masculine roles and constraints on who and how they love, marry, and build families.

Gill will use the Fellowship to create *Tales from Macholand*, a nine-part immersive virtual-reality series that explores masculinity in Indian society. Filmed across northern India, the 360-video will draw on a popular form of entertainment known as “chalchitra,” or bioscope-shows, dating back to India’s colonial period, when traveling showmen would bring hand-operated bioscopes—ancestors of today’s modern VR headsets—from village to village showing short films.

The series will chronicle the experiences of nine Indian men, women, and third-gender individuals of different caste and ethnic backgrounds who do not adhere to conventional gender roles and societal expectations. The immersive VR format, designed to foster experiential learning on mobile platforms, where Indian youth consume the majority of their media, will give audiences an opportunity to connect deeply with these stories on an interpersonal level. In collaboration with the Indian NGOs Men Against Violence and Abuse and The YP Foundation, Gill will use the series to engage Indian youth in conversations about how their lives are affected by gender, power, caste, and sexuality in Indian culture.

### **East of East: Recovering Greater El Monte's Lost Histories**

**Romeo Guzmán** (Claremont Graduate University; History)

The city of El Monte, in California’s San Gabriel Valley, has long championed its white pioneer narrative, celebrating American expansion and movement west by hailing pioneer ancestors as rugged innovators and town heroes. In 1934, white El Monte residents staged the first “El Monte Pioneer Homecoming,” with men, women, and children parading through the streets dressed in their grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ old overalls and sunbonnets, and mounted an ambitious 500-actor performance of *The End of the Santa Fe Trail* at El Monte High School. Later iterations of the celebration featured a 5-mile parade of covered wagons and horse-drawn buggies, rifle tournaments, and quilt and antiquity showcases.

This version of El Monte’s history has become engrained in the city’s landscape: it is still embedded in the official city logo, proudly memorialized at Pioneer Park, and narrated in the city’s museum. But in placing white pioneers at the center, the story El Monte tells about itself neglects the region’s many non-white ethnic residents past and present—from the Tongva tribe to Mexican braceros to thriving Asian neighborhoods—and their important place in local history.

In 2012, the South El Monte Arts Posse (SEMAP), a collective of writers, scholars, urban planners, and educators based in El Monte and South El Monte, took the city’s centennial as an opportunity to encourage new approaches to understanding and conveying the reality of El Monte’s past and present. They launched what would become a multi-year public history and place-making project titled “[East of East: Mapping Community Narratives in South El Monte and El Monte](#)” to uncover, organize, and publicize El Monte’s multi-ethnic history. Since then, SEMAP has worked with archivists, educators,

historians, artists, nonprofits and community members to host discussions and bike tours, conduct oral history interviews and digitize city and personal archives.

SEMAP co-director Romeo Guzmán and a host of collaborators will use the Fellowship to build on this work to tell a multi-ethnic history from the Tongva through twenty-first century globalization. They will create new curriculum for Ethnic Studies courses at El Monte high schools, design and lead thematic bike rides that engage the public in the complex history told by the city's streets and public spaces, and work with the community to design and paint a mural with new visual iconography for the city's past. In all their work, Together, Guzmán and SEMAP hope the cumulative effect of these initiatives will be to make El Monte's true past visible in its physical landscape, embed it in residents' minds and spirits, and bring a new generation closer to knowing its own history.

### **Whose Land?: Race, Settlement, and Dispossession in Wisconsin and New York**

**James Levy** (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater; History)

Over the past four hundred years government agencies and white settlers have seized as much as 1.5 billion acres of Native land in what is now the United States. In a more recent course of dispossession, since the peak of Black landownership in 1910, African Americans have lost ninety percent of their land holdings. Cumulatively, these patterns of removal and foreclosure have led to multi-generational losses of wealth and opportunity and the erasure of Black and Indigenous history from places where vibrant communities formerly thrived.

The Whose Land? Project explores histories of land loss, dispossession, and migration across New York and Wisconsin, two states with a unique connection. Between 1820 and 1870, thousands of First Nation members with ancestral homeland in the state of New York were forcibly removed to Wisconsin. In the same period, tens of thousands of Black and white abolitionists and farmers traveled from New York to Wisconsin to establish the Republican Party or follow the wheat boom. Remarkably, by 1850, one in two Wisconsinites was New York born.

James Levy and his collaborators will use the Fellowship to expand on the success of their [Lands We Share](#) project, which uncovered shared histories and claims to specific agricultural sites in Wisconsin and supported dialogue across cultural divides. Whose Land? will extend this work into a two-state community history and public dialogue project, starting with a series of community conversations that share and unpack ongoing local research. They will serve as the foundation for two public-facing undertakings: a podcast addressing how land has shaped race in America and an online oral history story map and website. As the initiative expands in future years, it will continue to revive shared stories of movement, settlement, and loss, fostering a shared understanding of land justice in the past and the future.

## **Cultural Activism and the History of Black Baltimore: A Traveling Exhibit by and for Youth**

**Mary Rizzo** (Rutgers University-Newark; History)

In 1966, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore published the first issue of *Chicory*, a magazine of poetry and art by Baltimore residents edited by local poet Sam Cornish. In the ensuing two decades, *Chicory* became the hub of a network of Black cultural production and activism in Baltimore, publishing pieces by residents with little editing, including snippets of overheard conversations and poems shared orally with editors. The magazine functioned as a public forum where community members, from children to elders, could use poetry to comment on politics, debate ideas, and imagine new worlds. Before it ceased publication in 1983, *Chicory* helped to develop a specifically African-American literary aesthetic, and in 1969, the *Baltimore Afro-American* called it, “The most authentic microphone of black people talking ever devised.”

The story of *Chicory*— rediscovered by Mary Rizzo after falling into relative obscurity and fully [digitized](#) in collaboration with Pratt Library—overturns the usual narrative of Baltimore’s Black history, which sees the riot in 1968 as the starting point of an inexorable decline leading to increased poverty, drug use, and violence, culminating in the 2015 uprising. Looking at Baltimore through the lens of *Chicory* reveals Black working-class neighborhoods as vibrant sites of cultural, social, and political activity. In its pages, debates raged over Black Nationalism and revolutionary Marxism and women and men questioned gender roles in the family, at work, and in society. Meanwhile, activists built new institutions from Black Power schools to bookstores to empower local communities.

In 2018, Rizzo used a Whiting Public Engagement Seed Grant to create the [Chicory Revitalization Project](#), hosting civic dialogues where young people interpreted and responded to poems from *Chicory* as historical sources. In collaboration with the Enoch Pratt Free Library, the nonprofits Writers in Baltimore Schools and Dewmore Baltimore, and Bard Early College High School, Rizzo will use the Fellowship to co-create a traveling exhibition about Black cultural activism in Baltimore from the 1960s-1980s as told through the story of *Chicory*. Middle and high school students in Baltimore will lead the curatorial process, defining themes and identifying which historical issues are most relevant to their lives today, and will work with Rizzo and undergraduates at Rutgers-Newark to write interpretive text and create accompanying audiovisual materials.

The exhibition will launch at the Central branch of the Pratt library, Baltimore’s free public library system, before touring the state. By involving young minds in the activation of a historical record of Black Baltimore’s resilience and creativity, the *Chicory* exhibition will connect past and present to resonate with Maryland audiences across generations.

## **Kumeyaay Comics: Indigenous Histories of California**

**Jennifer Shannon** (University of Colorado Boulder; Cultural Anthropology)

[NAGPRA Comics](#) was launched in 2017 by anthropologist Jennifer Shannon, archaeologist Sonya Atalay (Anishinaabe-Ojibwe), and comics creator John Swogger to tell true stories about repatriation from Native Nations' perspectives. Taking its name from the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990, the series helps Native peoples, museum professionals, university students, and others understand both the obligations and impact of the legislation. It also illustrates how, when tribes are equal partners in repatriation, the process can be a way for Native nations and museums to forge new and mutually beneficial relationships – and a way for museums to engage in supporting cultural continuity.

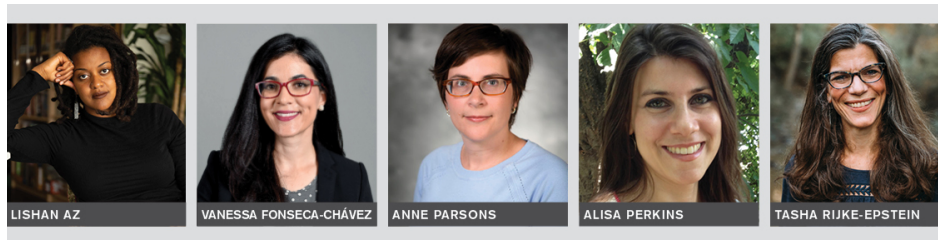
At San Diego Comic-Con in 2019, members of the NAGPRA Comics team met Mike Connolly, tribal historian of the Campo Kumeyaay Nation, a federally recognized tribe sixty miles east of San Diego, and Stan Rodriguez, tribal historian and professor at Kumeyaay Community College. Inspired by the success of NAGPRA comics, they began a new initiative to respond to the need for more accurate and Indigenous-centered accounts of California history in both mainstream schools and among Kumeyaay communities.

Shannon and her collaborators will use the Fellowship to support a Kumeyaay-directed, community-based research project on Kumeyaay history, which will inform a series of co-created comics that illustrate Kumeyaay history and lifeways. As a form of what Shannon and Swogger call “community engaged comics,” the project team will work with community members to conduct oral histories and archival research, visit museum collections, host comics workshops, advise Kumeyaay artists in making comics, and create a traveling banner exhibit for local cultural centers and schools.

Once the comics are created, the team will design associated lesson plans in collaboration with the San Diego Office of Education, answering the California Department of Education’s recent call for more Native American and Indigenous Studies curriculum with materials that underscore tribal perspectives on their own history. Going forward, Shannon and her collaborators hope Kumeyaay Comics will lead to a broader, multitribal community engaged comics series, *Indigenous Histories of the Americas*, that further contributes to public scholarship and public education.



## **The Five 2021-22 Seed Grantees**



### **In Search of Solid Ground**

*Lishan AZ* (University of California, Davis; Cinema & Digital Media) is collaborating with Dr. Jasmin Young and a team of artists to develop an immersive, hands-on game about the Great Migration, when tens of thousands of rural African-Americans moved to urban centers to escape racial violence and seek economic opportunity in the years surrounding the First World War. *In Search of Solid Ground* is the third in a series of interrelated games that explore the work of Black women who risked their lives to expose injustice at the turn of the twentieth century. AZ and team will engage high-schoolers as testers at each design phase in partnership with Sacramento Area Youth Speaks, and will host the in-person experience for classes and the general public.

### **From Where We Stand: Community Storytelling & Placemaking in Eastern Arizona**

*Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez* (Arizona State University; English) is collaborating with the Apache County Historical Society Museum and local libraries and communities to conduct storytelling and preservation workshops in rural eastern Arizona. The workshops will build on the ways the region's Hispanic communities sustain their histories, customs, and culture, and how they communicate their *querencia*, or sense of belonging. Community members will participate in oral history interviews, give presentations on their personal stories of place, and digitize family and cultural documents to be shared in a series of community events and on a project website.

### **Remembering Resistance: The 1942 Tuchyn Ghetto Uprising**

*Anne Parsons* (University of North Carolina at Greensboro; English) is curating a hybrid digital and physical exhibit that unearths and commemorates the history of a Jewish uprising in Tuchyn, Ukraine during the Holocaust. The exhibit will be grounded in primary sources and survivors' stories and will connect the Tuchyn uprising to the larger narrative of Jewish resistance in Eastern Europe. After the exhibit travels to high schools throughout North Carolina, Parsons will partner with Mnemonics, a Ukrainian public history organization, to adapt it for a Ukrainian audience and to organize a community-engaged memorial project in Tuchyn in 2022, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the uprising.

### **Religion, Race, and Revitalization: The Detroit Muslim Storytelling Project**

*Alisa Perkins* (Western Michigan University; Comparative Religion) is collaborating with Dream of Detroit, a community-based nonprofit, to create an interactive multimedia website, public archive, short film, and publications documenting the distinctive past and Muslim-led revitalization of a west Detroit neighborhood that is over 90% African American and overwhelmingly low-income. Once a flourishing center of African-American life, the neighborhood has been challenged by decades of marginalization and neglect due to uneven municipal development policies. Although Michigan is home to a thriving Muslim population, inner-city African American Muslim social justice initiatives are often distanced from larger Muslim networks due to race and class divides. This community-led initiative will safeguard the neighborhood's history and empower a new generation with knowledge about the past.

### **Archiving Waste: Community Histories of Race and Environmental Justice in Nashville**

*Tasha Rijke-Epstein* (Vanderbilt University; History) is collaborating with Professor David Padgett, a geographer at Tennessee State University, to create a digital archive that illuminates the connection between Nashville's environmental history and systemic racism. Rijke-Epstein and Padgett will work with local community organizations to train residents of neighborhoods that have been affected by environmental racism in oral history methodology, and the resulting oral histories will be collected on an online platform alongside digitized documents and an interactive storymap. The digital archive will serve as a foundation for a series of public conversations at local libraries and the creation of curricular materials.