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For Immediate Release

BLACK HISTORY EVENTS

February-March, 2016

Voices of Change/ Online

View this online collage of archival photos documenting the Civil Rights movement in Hartford in the 1960s. Photos are from the Hartford Times, Associated Press and others, and includes buses leaving Hartford in 1963 to attend Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream " speech in Washington DC; civil rights activists boarding a plane at Bradley Field to march in Selma and Montgomery, AL; and housing protests in the North End of Hartford in 1967. <http://bit.ly/1ZYAR50>

Sunday, Feb. 7, 3-4 pm., First Floor Atrium. Baby Grand Jazz Series.

Warren Byrd, piano, and Saskia Laroo, trumpet, with special guest Jay Hoggard, vibraphonist, perform a concert, featuring the work of black musicians and a history of jazz. Byrd is based in Hartford and attended the Hartt School.

Tuesday, Feb. 16, 6-7 pm. "Transgressing Hartford's Color Line: The Life of Charles Ethan Porter" Hartford History Center, 3rd Floor.

A co-presentation about Charles Ethan Porter, a local African American artist, by Craig Hotchkiss, retired high school history teacher and former education program manager at the Mark Twain House; and Elisabeth Petry, attorney, journalist, and author of *"Can Anything Beat White?: A Black Family's Letters,"* and *"At Home Inside: A Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry. Charles Ethan Porter.*

More about Porter here from a 2012 Courant story by Susan Dunne:

Porter (1847-1923), one of the country's foremost African-American painters, was born in Hartford and raised in the Rockville section of Vernon. He studied art in the northeast, and was one of the first black artists to exhibit at the National Academy of Design. He had a studio in Hartford in his early years, and drew the admiration of well-established artists including Frederic Church.

Later, he studied in Paris — Mark Twain wrote him a letter of recommendation — and afterward Porter relocated back to Hartford and later back to Rockville. He lived at 23 Spruce St. near the top of Fox Hill, and had a studio at the summit of the hill.

In his later years, when his fortunes were down, he sold paintings door-to-door in Vernon, sometimes aided by his friend, Bavarian artist Gustave Hoffman, because many Vernon residents didn't want to buy the work of a black man. At other times, he bartered his work for food or clothes, or offered to do chores for those who didn't want to buy his work.

According to Hildegard Cummings, author of "Charles Ethan Porter: African American Master of Still Life," the catalog to a 2007 exhibit at New Britain Museum of American Art, in those later, lean years "he was referred to as respectfully as Professor Porter and as disparagingly as Charles the Nigger."

Porter sank into obscurity. After his death, his reputation rebounded. Today he is represented in many museums nationwide, including the Whitney in New York, the Smithsonian in Washington, and in Connecticut at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme, Lyman Allyn in New London, Connecticut Historical Society and New Britain Museum of American Art.

Douglas Hyland, director of New Britain Museum of American Art, called Porter "really a pioneer.

"In the 19th century ... very, very few African Americans were admitted to any form of formal artistic training in this country, or went to Paris to receive the instruction he received," Hyland said. "Only two or three other people in the whole country had that kind of early instruction in academic art."

Saturday, Feb. 20, noon to 3 pm, African American History Bee, Center for Contemporary Culture, Main Floor.

Hartford State Rep. Brandon L. McGee Jr., (D-5th District), and Robert Dobson, a social studies teacher in Connecticut's technical high schools, set up a history bee. Students from five Hartford schools will compete. The schools are: Thirman Milner, Fred E. Wish, MLK Jr., John C. Clark, and Simpson-Waverly. Organizers were involved in the initiative to have 100 black men welcome children back to school last August on opening day at Martin Luther King Jr. School.

Saturday, Feb. 20, 9:30 to 2 pm, Stomp the Violence; Focusing On Solutions, 50 Williams St., Hartford

The Hartford Public Library is one of the sponsors for this conversation between Hartford Police and community members about building relationships and preventing violence. Hartford's Proud Drill Drum & Dance Corps will perform. Lunch is included. Information: Terry Starks, tstarksnortheast@gmail.com and 860-913-8282, and Sgt. Steven Austin, austs001@hartford.gov and 860-436-7323.

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 6-7 pm, Hartford History Center, 3rd Floor, Hartford Public Library.

John Lobon speaks about "Leveling the Playing Field: The Story of the Syracuse Eight."

In 1970, black players from the Syracuse University Football team -- including Hartford's John Lobon, Class of 1973 -- were fed up with discrimination from their coach and the athletic department. The players boycotted the spring 1970 practice and petitioned for access to the same academic tutoring as their white teammates; better medical care of all team members; starting assignments based on merit, not race; and better integration of the coaching staff, which had been all white since 1898.

David Marc, a former Syracuse University Magazine writer, is the author. The book's forward is by social activist Jim Brown, a Syracuse football star and former Cleveland Browns running back.

Saturday, Feb. 27, 10:15-12:15, Hartford History Center, 3rd Floor, Connecticut Poetry Society, Selected Poems of Tanure Ojaide, moderated by Joyce Ashuntantang.

Tanure Ojaide is a Nigerian poet, who has 17 poetry collections. His most recent is "Love Gifts." He has a PhD from Syracuse University in English. He received a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship, two Fulbright fellowships, and is currently the Frank Porter Graham Professor of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Joyce Ashuntantang, who grew up in Nigeria, as an associate professor of English at Hillyer College at the University of Hartford.. The public is invited to participate in the discussion.

Tuesday, March 1, 6- 7:30 pm, The Life and Song of Nina Simone: A Tertulia, Hartford History Center, 3rd Floor.

Margaux Hayes will perform some of Nina Simone's best-known songs. Gail Woldu, a professor of music from Trinity College, will discuss Simone's life and music.

Nina Simone (1933-2003) grew up playing piano by ear in her mother's church in North Carolina and studied classical music. When she was denied admission to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, she turned to performing the American Songbook, and her career was launched.

Wednesday, March 2, 6-7 pm. Jamal Joseph, "Panther Baby," Center for Contemporary Culture, Main Floor.

Jamal Joseph, author of "Panther Baby," writes about his personal story. Growing up in the Bronx as Eddie Joseph, he was a high school honors student who joined the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s when he was 15. A year later he was in prison at Rikers Island, charged with conspiracy to bomb and attack two police stations in the Panther 21 case. The trial lasted eight months. All were acquitted in May, 1971. Jamal Joseph became the spokesman for the New York chapter of the Panthers, served 6 years in Leavenworth Penitentiary for his role in the murder of Sam Napier in 1971; and then was sentenced to 12 ½ years for the Brink's robbery in 1981, that led to the death of two police officers and an armored car driver. While in prison Joseph earned two college degrees, wrote five plays and two poetry collections. He is now a full professor and former chairman of the Columbia University's graduate film division.

Joseph was a friend of Charles "Butch" Lewis, founder of the Hartford Black Panthers, who died in September, 2015. This program is presented in honor of Butch Lewis, and was planned in collaboration with his family and friends from the community.

(To see The Hartford History Center's collection of Butch Lewis' digital archives: <http://bit.ly/20qZMA5>)

Books, Music and Film

Three displays of books, music and film are planned for Black History month. Books about African American artists will be outside the Hartford History Center on the 3rd floor. Books relating to African Americans will be on the main floor. A display highlighting African Americans in film and music will be found near the Media and CD collections on the main Floor.

Ongoing Events

ARTWALK

Maurice D. Robertson's photo exhibition, Expressions In Sound and Motion, continues through March 4 in ARTWALK, 3rd Floor. Hours: Monday-Thursday, 10 am to 8 pm; Friday and Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; and Sunday, 1 to 5 pm.

Robertson has spent 30 years shooting concerts in Connecticut, New York City and Massachusetts.

His 62 concert photos include Jackie McLean, Natalie Cole and Art Blakey. More information here: <http://www.courant.com/entertainment/museums-galleries/hc-artwalk-hartford-jazz-photos-0121-20160119-story.html>

Hartford History Center, 3rd Floor, Hartford Public Library.

Making Freedom, the Life of Venture Smith: In His Own Voice, continues through Feb. 29. Open Tuesday through Saturday, 1 to 5 pm.

Venture Smith, the son of an African prince, was kidnapped by slavers, and purchased in 1739 for four gallons of rum and a piece of calico by the steward of a Rhode Island slave ship. After years of slavery, including time on Fishers Island, New York, and Stonington, CT, Smith, 36, bought his own freedom, worked to free his family, and settled in Haddam Neck. By 1778 he owned 130 acres. In 1789 his memoirs were published by The Bee in New London. He died in 1805.

The exhibit is presented in partnership with the Documenting Venture Smith Project.

Saturday, Feb. 27. 1 pm. Hartford , Guided Tour of Venture Smith Exhibition, Saturday, Feb. 27. 1 pm. Hartford History Center, 3rd floor .

Michael John Wilson, presents a guided tour of the Venture Smith exhibition as told by the story-telling puppet Djelibaba. Hear stories about the origins of African American culture, traditions, and heritage.