

The North Carolina

African American

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Commission

Education and Interpretation Specialist

By Rodney Dawson

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Rodney Dawson's Biography

Good day my name is Rodney Dawson and I serve as the Education and Interpretation Specialist for the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission.

As a native of High Point, North Carolina where I attended Guilford County Schools, and upon graduation, I entered the United States Army where I served stateside and overseas to include South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq. My time in the military afforded the opportunity to build relationships with people of different cultures. While in the military, I received many recognitions to include the medal for meritorious service in combat during the Persian Gulf War. After the military, I returned home to Greensboro, North Carolina working in radio and in education as a behavioral support liaison, CPI Instructor, media specialist and technology teacher for K-12 schools. I had a determination to go to college at the urging of my mother. So, for her, I obtained a bachelor's degree in music production. I quickly wanted to learn more on how to best engage learners; consequently, I sought and received a master's degree in Instructional Technology. I then wanted to improve my skills in assisting educators with today's digital native learner. So, I obtained an Education Specialist degree in Educational Leadership. I was then led to seek a doctorate in Educational Leadership which I'm currently pursuing. I've worked with and served on committees for Association for the Study of African American Life and History, the Curriculum writing and review team for The History of Black Education in North Carolina: A Teaching Guide for High School Educators, the North Carolina Humanities Council, Guilford County Schools Enrichment Fund, Greensboro Historical Teacher's Alliance, and as the present Polemarch/President of the Burlington Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated. Education has always been the tool that I use to promote and help others achieve "Educere" the Latin derivative of the word education which means to lead someone to their fullest potential.

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### Education and Interpretation Specialist: Overview and Priorities

The education and interpretation Specialist role as I see it is one where I seek to learn, I seek to teach and one where we will promote learning. For the upcoming year, we'll strategically focus on three areas to connect our commission and other statewide entities which shall include K-12 schools, institutions of higher learning particularly our HBCUs, museums, and heritage institutions. As the education and interpretation specialist, I with the help of my team members will focus on establishing and managing resources, professional development, and collaborations with other stakeholders. The goal aligns with the mission statement to preserve, protect, and promote North Carolina's history, arts, and culture for all people with an emphasis on our K-12 learners, youth in general and families.

### 2022 Education Resources and Professional Development

The importance of developing relationships with statewide educational institutions, civic groups, heritage institutions and museums begin by identifying the needs of those within the learning community as well as providing tools to support the instruction and awareness of African American heritage germane to the state of North Carolina. The goal will be to meet the need of formal and informal educators both in and outside of the classroom. The commission and the office have begun this work by obtaining literature that can be used in our communities to promote reading, increase comprehension, foster discussion, and strengthen critical thinking skills all of which align with state curriculum standards. This month we will distribute copies of the 1619 Project Book: A Brief History of the 1619 Project. We have both the adult and children's version of the book (*Children's version: 1619 Project: Born on the Water*). The books were written by investigative journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones. We aim to cover multiple regions across the state.

East (E), Piedmont (P), or West (W).

Greensboro (P)

Forsyth (P)

Neuse Regional (E)

Albemarle Regional (E)

Wilson County (E/P)

Catawba County (W)

Orange County (P) OR Southern Pines OR Mooresville\*\*

Fontana Regional (W)

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AMY Regional (W)  
New Hanover County (E)

We hope that the discovery and examination of the book will help students by raising awareness of African American history and offering more opportunity for learners to see African Americans represented in the learning environment. Helping us with this effort will be the State Libraries of North Carolina.

Additionally, we have launched an education curriculum entitled: The History of Black Education in North Carolina: A Teaching Guide for High School Educators. The curriculum is a user-friendly collection of lesson plans and interactive tasks that delve into the educational barriers Black North Carolinians have faced throughout history while also illustrating how African Americans overcame said barriers. The lessons and activities cover a range of topics which includes:

- From enslavement to reconstruction
- Jim Crow and Desegregation
- Black Boarding Schools
- North Carolina's Rosenwald Schools
- North Carolina's HBCUs
- Teacher Planning section

Within the History of Black Education in North Carolina: A Teaching Guide for High School Educators, there is a teacher preparation section before each lesson plan. The preparation offers a listing of resources listing of resources that provide essential background knowledge. The intent is to have content that serves as a grounding for the lesson, plus ensure that the educator has the appropriate content knowledge for the topic covered. There are three planned Professional Development workshops where among others we'll invite classroom instructors and administrators to attend. We are selecting areas or locations that can strategically and geographically serve educators in the Eastern, Piedmont, and Western parts of the state. An added benefit will be the collaboration with area community sites and their constituents which should prove fruitful for future initiatives and educational programming.

Additional professional development for the Education and Interpretation Specialist includes an upcoming Drupal training for website management which will be helpful in managing the education landing page. Training with the National Association for Interpretation will begin in March and take place over a series of four weekends. In December, I attended an Accessibility in Arts workshop which helps me design programming and learning tools that consider the diverse

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needs of the education community as well as maintaining American Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) Compliance.

The education and interpretation office will also develop ways to use existing features from the NC African American Heritage Commission such as:

- African American Music Trails
- Freedom Road
- Africa to Carolina
- NC Civil Rights Trail
- Juneteenth
- Black History Month

I am actively developing ways to provide educational tools and experiences for our audience by inserting educational components centered around the features. We have begun contacting area educators at both the classroom and administrative levels to discuss how best to serve student needs. These educators represent various types of schools. Some of the early feedback has been to provide tools that are:

- Easy to understand or user-friendly
- Immediately assessable or evaluated
- Engaging
- Representative of their student population
- Not overly reliant on the use of computers
- Short assignments that can be covered in 2-4 hours

Ideas on how best to address the needs expressed are still preliminary, but immediate thoughts are to develop (3) digital learning resources for educators, heritage practitioners, and NCAAHC stakeholders in the form of one interactive and downloadable classroom activity (grades 3-5), one musical playlist with historical audio vignette insertions grades (6-8) & (9-12), and one audio podcast highlighting AAMT grades (9-12 & post-secondary). In many cases and along with these the aides, we hope to supplement the learning experience for students by offering push-in opportunities. This is where we can virtually join a class to offer additional resources, delve deeper in the learning process, answer questions, or simply put a face to the learning resource.

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### Upcoming Opportunities

History happens every day. This can mean that some of today's history makers may get overlooked. To counter this, the Education and Interpretation Specialist will look for and develop content that highlights the contributions of people that may fall in this category. The Education and Interpretation Specialist will step strongly into Black History Month by spotlighting the impact of HBCUs & Hip Hop in North Carolina and beyond. Beginning in February the office will launch its inaugural webinar series:

**2/16/23 6PM** From Carolina Grassroots to Carolina Classrooms: How Hip Hop Expressed a Movement.

A Discussion with Hip Hop Scholars Professors Bryon Turman and Kyesha Jennings along with Grammy Award Winning Songwriter "Rasheem "Kilo" Pugh. All are North Carolina residents and have had national impact in the realm of Hip Hop, Social Justice, and Education.

**2/23/23** Empower in the Shelter: The HBCUs Role in Covering Tomorrow's Leaders

A Discussion with Dr. Jelani Favors Henry E. Frye Distinguished Professor of History at NC A&T State University and his latest work "Shelter in a Time of Storm" on how HBCUs cultivated countless leaders and activists.

**3/2/23 – 3/3/23** North Carolina Council for Social Studies Presentation: The History of Black Education in North Carolina: A Teaching Guide for High School Educators