Raising the Volume
Episode XXXVII

C. Brian Williams, Dr. Felice Knight, and Toby Smith shed light on the Stono Rebellion freedom movement and its role in the transformation of Black lives and culture.

Middle School and Up
Mastery of core subjects and twenty-first century themes is essential for all students in the twenty-first century. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history and government, and civics. In addition to these subjects, schools must move forward to include not only a focus on mastery of core subjects, but also an understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving twenty-first century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects.

**Global Awareness**
1. Use twenty-first century skills to understand and address global issues.
2. Learn from and work collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work, and community contexts.

**Civic Literacy**
1. Participate effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes.
2. Exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national, and global levels.
3. Understand the local and global implications of civic decisions.

**Work Creatively with Others**
1. Develop, implement, and communicate new ideas to others effectively.
2. Be open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback into the work.
3. Demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work; understand the real world limits to adopting new ideas.
4. View failure as an opportunity to learn; understand that creativity and innovation is a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes.
5. Implement innovations.
6. Act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur.
Everyone has a story. It’s our place to take a moment to listen. Once you listen, your eyes open. You can put yourself in someone else’s shoes and try to comprehend their experiences. You may be inspired, you may come away with more knowledge, or you may find a bit of yourself in someone else.

“Raising the Volume” is a series of Black stories – about Black entrepreneurs, judges, authors, artists, and leaders in our community. Stories that need to be heard. Led by the Gaillard Center’s Artists-in-Residence, Charlton Singleton and Marcus Amaker, “Raising the Volume” gives a platform to Black community members and opens us all up to honest discussion.

As you introduce this series to your students, follow the bullet points below for discussion. Your students will find that they are challenged to think about uncomfortable things. Those conversations are what will help us change our world. In the words of Judge McFarland, “To break down racial barriers, start where you are.” Let’s start where we are and see what change we can bring to our community.

For each lesson, split your class into small groups for discussion or discuss as a whole. Choose the model that is the most comfortable for your students so they feel free to discuss opinions openly.

Teachers, if you are interested in scheduling a cross-school discussion on Raising the Volume, Episode XXXVII, please email Kailey Jones at kjones@gaillardcenter.org. Through cross-school Zoom calls, we can offer students from one school a different perspective on the video with students from a second school. We will schedule class-to-class meetings where whole groups can discuss various topics covered in Episode XXXVII.
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(CLICK THE IMAGE TO WATCH EPISODE XXXVII)
LESSONS

C. Brian Williams, founder of Step Afrika! and producer of Drumfolk, a rhythmic storytelling inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739; Dr. Felice Knight, Director of Education at the International African American Museum; and Toby Smith, Charleston Cultural Interpreter, discuss the little-known history of the Stono Rebellion and its role in the transformation of Black lives and culture today. In her opening remarks, Knight explains:

“Let’s clarify the terms. This was not a rebellion, it was a freedom movement. A legitimate and historic, heroic attempt by captive Africans to free themselves from illegitimate bondage... This freedom movement began on September 9th, 1739... just 25 miles away from here [The Gaillard Center] along the Stono River, and it lasted, by some accounts, for several weeks. And even one of the leaders of the movement, held out for his freedom for at least three months... So who was involved in this freedom movement? Over 600 enslaved Africans.”

The Stono Rebellion, a freedom movement began as a band of 20 enslaved Africans in the British colony of South Carolina, led by an Angolan slave named Jemmy. However, the freedom seekers continued to grow in size as they marched south towards promised freedom in Spanish Florida, waving flags, beating drums, and shouting “Liberty!”

Consider the time period of the Stono Rebellion. Without access to the internet, cell phones, or a formal postal service, how do you think that the enslaved Africans heard about the freedom movement and decided to join the march? If the Stono Rebellion, a freedom movement occurred today, how do you think that it would be different? Do you think that faster spread of information could have changed the outcome of the freedom movement?
LESSONS

Smith and Williams then go on to discuss their initial encounters and early knowledge of the Stono Rebellion.

Smith informs the audience that she grew up knowing the story of the Stono Freedom Movement, however, it was not until she was older that she recognized the larger impact of the Stono Rebellion and its close connection with her current role for Charleston County Parks and Caw Caw Interpretive Center.

Click here to learn more about Caw Caw Interpretive Center. Based on what you have read about Caw Caw, why do you think it was a chosen location for enslaved Africans to live? Can you infer why the freedom movement may have chosen to pass through this territory?

In contrast, Williams elaborates upon his foundational curiosity of stepping's roots and how it led to his discovery of the Stono Rebellion as an adult. “Why do we use the body as a drum?... The Stono Freedom Movement and the subsequent Negro Act of 1740 really becomes the basis of the work [of stepping] today,” said Williams.

Slave owners realized that the enslaved, despite their lack of common language, were using drums and rhythms to communicate; attributing this adaptation to the Stono Rebellion and other similar revolts of the time. The ensuing Negro Act of 1740 prohibited enslaved Africans from growing their own food, earning money, learning to read, gathering together, and using drums, horns, or other loud instruments, in an effort to curtail such freedom movements from occurring in the future.
LESSONS

To combat this ban, enslaved Africans began using their bodies to create percussive sounds, leading us to the origins of step dance. “Stepping” refers to the highly-energetic dance form performed by African-American fraternities and sororities. This unique style of percussion is highlighted and celebrated throughout Black culture and by dance groups like Step Afrika.

Watch the video here including highlights from Step Afrika’s production of Drumfolk. Having contextual knowledge of what the piece is about, how do you see the story of the Stono Rebellion conveyed? Is there anything that you notice about the performers that helps to embody the story?

As the conversation continues, Knight poses two questions that place a modern lens onto the generational effects of the Stono Rebellion:

“[How has] ...both your knowledge of this particular historic event and also Black history and culture... shaped the ways in which you practice your professions? And, how have you been able to use this knowledge through your professions to share Black history and culture in unique, transformative, and creative ways?”

Reflect on these questions. How do you think that Black lives today have been shaped by the history of slavery, oppression and more specifically, the Stono Freedom Movement? Had history been different, how do you think that this could have impacted modern Black culture?

In his response, Williams regards the importance and sense of mission that he finds in his professional work of bringing forth stories from history, similarly to the Stono Rebellion, that have been untold and underrepresented. He then goes on to compare the Stono Freedom Movement to the Boston Tea Party and other modern forms of American activism.

Can you think of any present-day examples of American activism that are similar to the Stono Rebellion? Do you think that these freedom movements have been inspired by the ones that came before them?


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LES S O N S

Smith explains that she considers herself privileged to be able to speak freely about history and to not have that language suppressed or censored, as it historically has been. She now navigates her professional career with the goal of storytelling and educating her community in mind.

Is it important to share history and untold stories? Why do you think historical events like the Stono Freedom Movement have been left largely untold? Watch the recent video [here](#) on increasingly restrictive access to literature in schools and public library systems in America. Why do you think that public access to this information is being limited? What are the possible consequences that may arise from this decision? Discuss with your group.

The interview concludes with a discussion of the ingenuity and skill exhibited by enslaved Africans in Charleston, specifically those who worked in rice fields. Knight remarks, “The engineering involved in creating those rice fields; the intelligence that was exploited... What if we had been paid for what we did? Where would my family be today?”

Unpack this statement. How do you think today’s society would be different if enslaved people were paid for their contributions to America’s economic and societal development?
ABOUT C. BRIAN WILLIAMS

C. Brian Williams is a native of Houston, Texas, and a graduate of Howard University. Brian first learned to step as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. – Beta Chapter, in the spring of 1989. While living in Southern Africa, he began to research the percussive dance tradition of stepping, exploring the many sides of this exciting, yet under-recognized American art form, and founded Step Afrika! in 1994. Williams has performed, lectured, and taught in Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and throughout the United States. Through Williams’ leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America’s newest cultural exports and inspired the designation of Step Afrika! as Washington, DC’s official “Cultural Ambassador.”

In 2022, the National Endowment of the Arts designated Williams as a National Heritage Fellow, the nation’s highest honor in folk and traditional arts. He is the recipient of numerous artist fellowships; the World Alive! Distinguished Artist Award by Arts Emerson; the Mayor’s Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities; Distinguished Arts Award from the Coalition for African Americans in the Performing Arts; and the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance. He is also featured in Soulstepping, the first book to document the history of stepping. He also earned the Mayor’s Art Award for Innovation in the Arts and has led the company to multiple Metro DC Dance Awards for “Outstanding New Work,” “Excellence in Stage Design/Multimedia,” and “Outstanding Group Performance.” Williams has been cited as a “civic/community visionary” by NV Magazine, a “nation builder” by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators and a “minority business leader” by the Washington Business Journal. His work is featured prominently at the Smithsonian Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington, DC.
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ABOUT TOBY SMITH

Toby Smith was born in Charleston, SC, but grew up in Philadelphia, PA. She’s a graduate of the University of South Carolina and has done graduate work at American University and Colorado Christian University. She began her professional career at the Central Intelligence Agency, where she served domestically and abroad. After eight years with the Federal Government, she returned home to Charleston and began working at the Charleston County School District as the public relations officer with the late Superintendent Sydney “Chip” Zullinger. Dr. Zullinger selected Toby to organize and coordinate the school district’s first bond campaign to repair dilapidated schools. That campaign marked her first foray into politics and, although that first attempt ended in defeat, Toby’s enthusiasm for the political process was cemented. After the bond campaign she joined the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce as the first African American director of the Public Affairs Group, where she served before moving to Georgetown, SC.

In May 2015, Toby, who is three generations from slavery on her Mother’s side, became the first African American woman to run for mayor of Charleston. Her platform included racial reconciliation and engaging communities in need. After that campaign Toby joined the Advisory Board of Jenkins Institute (formerly Jenkins Orphanage) and continued her work as a Cultural and Educational Consultant for Project Okurase, which facilitates a yearly cultural immersion trip to Charleston, SC, for visiting ninth grade students.

In 2020 Toby joined the interpretive staff at McLeod Plantation Historic Site. McLeod is one of two places in the country that intentionally examines the issue of slavery from the viewpoint of the Enslaved; additionally, the site is an affiliate member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. In her capacity as a Lead Interpretive Aide, Toby interacted with guests from all over the world, found descendants of the Enslaved, and planned cultural programming. In November 2021 Toby was promoted to the position of Cultural History Interpretation Coordinator for Charleston County Parks & Recreation Commission. In that capacity she assisted in the planning of an international conference on the Stono Rebellion; formed new partnerships with several regional entities; gained her Certified Interpreter Guide designation; and hired and trained new staff members. In October of 2022 Toby presented at a Clemson University symposium on cemeteries and in April 2023 spoke at a panel on international slavery held on the French protectorate of Reunion Island.
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Dr. Felice Ferguson Knight is a native of Charleston, South Carolina. She is the Director of Education at the International African American Museum. Her professional mission is to retrieve and share unheard stories from marginalized, ethnically diverse, and understudied communities. This includes applying her extensive track record in academia to support non-profit agencies or educational organizations as they build community engagement, motivate teams, and optimize project management. She has been employed as an Adjunct Faculty member in the Department of Humanities at Columbus State Community College, a Visiting Assistant Professor of Black Studies at Denison University, and a Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Accessibility consultant with Leilani Brown, LLC. She is also the past Co-Director of the Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Center at The Citadel and former Chair of the History and Culture Subcommittee for the City of Charleston Special Commission on Equity, Inclusion, and Racial Conciliation. Her most recent full-time employment was as an Assistant Professor of African American History at The Citadel (2019-2023). Dr. Knight received her Bachelor of Arts (History) degree from Furman University and has a Master's degree from the Joint M.A. in History Program at The College of Charleston and The Citadel. Her doctorate is in African American History from The Ohio State University.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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