



**Network to Freedom:  
Exploring the Agency, Resistance, & Resilience of North Carolina's Freedom Seekers**

Thursday May 6, 2021 | 4pm – 7:30 pm via Zoom

**4:00 – 4:20**

**Welcome and Introductions**

*Christie Norris | Director, Carolina K-12 at UNC-Chapel Hill  
Angela Thorpe | NC African American Heritage Commission  
Bob Hopkins | Historic Edenton*

**4:20 – 4:40**

**Spirituals Along the Journey to Freedom**

*James Shields | Historian, musician and performer*

Music has been an important part of the fight for freedom throughout history, from maintaining community and culture, to fueling unity and resilience, to powering determination and resilience. As an entry point into our program, James Shields will ground us in the spirituals and songs of North Carolina's freedom seekers.

**4:40 – 5:50**

**Panel Discussion: Exploring the Agency, Resistance, & Resilience of North Carolina's Freedom Seekers**

- Moderated by **Adrienne Nirdé** | Associate Director, NC African American Heritage Commission
- **Dr. Freddie Parker** | Emeritus of American History, NC Central University, and author of *Stealing a Little Freedom: Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840*
- **Dr. Adrienne Israel** | Emeritus of History and Intercultural Studies and former Vice President and Academic Dean, Guilford College
- **Leesa Payton Jones** | Executive Director, The Washington Waterfront Underground Railroad Museum

While we often think of slavery in only a binary (that people were either enslaved or they were free) below the surface there was more complexity, as well as rich community. This panel discussion will address the myriad of ways enslaved people in North Carolina, through their own agency, sought their freedom, from carving out their very own communities to escaping via North Carolina's Underground Railroad network.

**5:50 – 6:00**

**Musical Interlude and Break**

Please feel free to grab your dinner as we prepare to enjoy a staged reading from MOJOAA Performing Arts.

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6:00 – 6:45

**Performance Excerpt from *Escape to Freedom***

[MOJOAA Performing Arts](#) | Introduction & Discussion by Kyma Lassiter, Arts and Outreach Coordinator, NC African American Heritage Commission

In this staged reading of an excerpt from *Escape to Freedom*, we will explore the complex and oppressive world of enslavement that was an excruciating reality for thousands upon thousands of North Carolinians, as well as the ways those enslaved exhibited resistance and resilience despite their unjust circumstances. After the staged reading, the artists will join us for a discussion of their work.

6:45 – 7:20

**Curriculum Connections**

Christie Norris | Director, Carolina K-12 at UNC-Chapel Hill

Dr. Hasan Jeffries wrote in his preface to “Teaching Hard History” that “the saga of slavery is not exclusively a story of despair; hard history is not hopeless history.” While the study of slavery is filled with complex and difficult narratives of injustice and oppression, it is imperative that we not teach history as a recounting of victimization only. While unveiling the “hard history,” we must also teach the ways various individuals, groups, communities, etc. resisted. The study of North Carolina’s rich history of freedom seeking is one such way to do this. We will close with reviewing the detailed and ready-to-implement lesson plans on these topics designed with these particular themes in mind, as well as hear about the rich primary source resources and historic sites our state offers to explore this history.

7:20 – 7:30

**Closing Message from the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom**

Sheri Jackson | Southeast Regional Manager of the National Park Service