



Exploring the Fight for Freedom North Carolina's United States Colored Troops (USCT)

Saturday, Nov. 12 | Tryon Palace

"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, & a musket on his shoulder & bullets in his pockets, & there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States." ~ Fredrick Douglass, "Should the Negro Enlist in the Union Army" July 6, 1863

9:00 – 9:30 **Coffee & Registration** | Commission House

9:30 – 10:00 **Welcome & Framing the Day**
Christie Norris | Carolina K-12
Ashley Adams | NC African American Heritage Commission
35th U.S. Colored Troops Interpretive Unit | Posting the Colors

10:00 – 10:45 **"Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom": The Importance of NC's United States Colored Troops**
Jerilyn Lee | Researcher & Community Historian; Creator of ["Stories of the USCT"](#)
During the period of the Civil War, many enslaved people and free Blacks engaged in the fight for their freedom in numerous ways, including service in the Union army. They put their lives at risk repeatedly to first earn the right to fight, and then on the battlefield itself, where they demonstrated talent, courage and commitment. This session will provide an overview of the rich history of the United States Colored Troops in North Carolina.

10:45 – 11:15 **Discussion and Break**

11:15 – 12:30 **Stories from the Fight for Freedom**
Dr. Sonny Kelly | Performer, Educator & Founder, [Legacy Heirs Productions, Inc.](#)
For enslaved people throughout the history of North Carolina and America, freedom was not something that was simple or gained overnight. From the enslaved people who freed themselves and the free and enslaved people who assisted them, to the Black people who joined the USCT to fight for freedom on the battlefields, to the rich and complex communities that were formed, a wholly accurate understanding of the period of enslavement must include attention to the various ways Black people strove to experience varied concepts of freedom. Dr. Kelly will offer performance excerpts and considerations of these themes, leading us to ultimately consider the individual and collective agency, resistance, and resilience of Black people throughout the period of enslavement and Civil War.

12:30 – 1:30 **Lunch, Break & Browse Encampment**
After lunch, head over to the [North Carolina History Center](#) where you can browse the exhibits, including a USCT encampment.

- 1:30 - 2:00** **Meet the 35th USCT** | Cullman Hall
Ms. Sharon Bryant, Mr. Bernard George & the [35th U.S. Colored Troops Interpretive Unit](#)
 After the Union occupation in New Bern, NC, freedom seekers flocked to the area and established a vibrant community of Black people engaged in the fight for universal freedom. This included the formation of the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers, to eventually become the 35th United States Colored Troops (USCT.) Today, you will have the opportunity to meet the 35th U.S. Colored Troops 35th Interpretive Unit, whose mission is to promote a better understanding of the role of African Americans in the fight for their freedom. The 35th USCT gathers and interprets the stories of soldiers who served on the original regiment, some told by their actual descendants.
- 2:00 – 2:30** **Songs of Freedom** | Cullman Hall
Bonita Burney-Simmons, Performer & Music Lab Coordinator | Craven Community College and the [Craven Community College Gospel Choir](#)
 Music and spirituals played an important role for Black people throughout the struggle for freedom. Music served as a way for enslaved people to maintain a sense of freedom of spirit and community, and to communicate (including even disdain for enslavers) through coded words of songs. For those serving in the USCT, music might offer inspiration and hope, entertainment during down times, or a beat to march to. In this session, we'll listen to some of the popular songs of the time from the Craven Community College Gospel Choir, as well as learn a bit about their history.
- 2:30 – 3:00** **Discussion, Break & Return to Commission House**
- 3:00 – 4:00** **Teaching About USCT**
 Before and during the Civil War, Black people were fully engaged in the fight for their own freedom. Providing students the opportunity to explore the many ways enslaved people and free Blacks – men, women, and children – contributed to the fight for their freedom is a critical component of a well-rounded social studies course. In this pedagogical session, we will take the time to explore ideas for conveying this important history to students, including utilizing primary sources, art, music, and more.
- 4:00 – 4:30** **Closing & Evaluations**



This event is hosted by the NC African American Heritage Commission, Carolina K-12, & Tryon Palace, and is made possible by a grant from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), funded by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Additional funding was provided by the North Caroliniana Society.