

Doing History: Hands-on Strategies to Bring History Alive

MODERATOR

Andy Horowitz, Ph. D.
CT State Historian

Andy Horowitz is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Connecticut and serves as the Connecticut State Historian. A scholar of the modern United States, his research focuses on disasters and the questions they give rise to about race, class, trauma, inequality, the welfare state, extractive industry, metropolitan development, and environmental change. His scholarship is meant to help people think through problems that are often imagined to be without precedent. As a public historian, he works to support communities as they engage in acts of collective autobiography.



Andy is the author of *Katrina: A History, 1915–2015* (Harvard University Press, 2020), which won the Bancroft Prize in American History and was named a Best Nonfiction Book of the Year by *Publishers Weekly*, and he has published essays in *The Atlantic*, *Time*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*. As state historian, he serves as a member of the Historic Preservation Council, the State Capitol Preservation & Restoration Commission, the Connecticut State Historical Records Advisory Board, the Connecticut Coalition for History, and the Connecticut Semiquincentennial Commission, as well as on the boards of the Museum of Connecticut History, *Connecticut History Review*, and CT Humanities. Andy grew up in New Haven, received a Ph.D. from Yale, and previously served as the founding director of the New Haven Oral History Project.

PANELISTS

Rhonan Mokriski

Teacher of Coloring Our Past
at Salisbury School

Rhonan is a recovering administrator who has been reinvigorated by a return to the classroom. Challenged by Covid and the brutal murder of George Floyd during the 2019-20 school year, he realized that these moments demanded a reimagining of history education—not as rote learning but as an engaging journey of discovery. He champions a student-led approach, turning learners into historians recovering Connecticut's rich history that has too often been lost, buried, or ignored.



His vision materialized with local partnerships and culminated in the Troutbeck Symposium, co-created with peers from a dozen local schools and the historic Troutbeck in New York. This platform empowers students to share their historical research with our broader community.

Entering its third year, the symposium has grown to involve over two hundred students, affirming the power of active learning. This May's event, the third of its kind, stands as a tribute to the enduring impact of hands-on historical exploration.



Valerie Tutson

Rhode Island Black Storytellers

Valerie Tutson graduated from Brown University with a Masters Degree in Theatre Arts and a degree in a self-designed major, Storytelling As A Communications Art. Valerie has been telling stories in schools, churches, libraries, festivals and conferences since 1991. She draws her stories from around the world with an emphasis on African traditions. Her repertoire includes stories and songs she learned in her travels to South Africa, her experiences in West Africa, stories from African American history. In addition, she is

gaining quite a reputation for her exciting retelling of age-old Bible stories. She not only delights listeners with her tale-telling, she also teaches workshops and classes to students of all ages, and hosts CULTURAL TAPESTRY, an award-winning show for COX 3 celebrating the diverse cultures around us. Valerie has most recently served as the co-Director of the National Black Storytelling Festival in Providence, RI.

Fiona Vernal
University of Connecticut

Fiona Vernal is the Director of Engaged, Public, Oral, and Community Histories (EPOCH) and Associate Professor of History and Africana Studies at the University of Connecticut. In 2023 she will serve as the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the History Department, Interim Associate Director of Africana Studies, PI on CT Humanities Partnership Grant to establish an infrastructure for oral history in the state, and Co-PI on the University Capacity Development Program with the Global Training and Development Institute (GTDI) in Global Affairs.



Her teaching and research center African, Caribbean, African Diaspora histories. She curates a number of public-facing projects, all of which center oral history as part of its core methodology. Current and past exhibits include: "A Home away from Home: Greater Hartford's West Indian Diaspora;" "From Civil Rights to Human Rights: African American, Puerto Rican, and West Indian Housing Struggles in Hartford County, Connecticut, 1940-2019," (2020); "Child Labor and Human Rights in Africa: The Hidden Costs of Chocolate," (2018); "Children of the Soil: Generations of South Africans under Apartheid," (2016). Her book, *The Farmerfield Mission* (Oxford, 2012) explores the African vernacularization of Christianity in nineteenth century South Africa. Her new book and digital humanities project, *Hartford Bound*, integrates oral histories, archival research, and GIS methodologies to offer new visual and spatial histories of race, ethnic belonging, community formation, and community succession. She was awarded the *University of Connecticut's Provost Award for Excellence in Community Engaged Scholarship* in 2021.

