

# We Hold Some Truths to Be Self-Evident: For the Common Good

## **Merle McGee**

Everyday Democracy

Merle McGee is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Everyday Democracy. Merle brings over 25 years' experience in non-profit settings fighting alongside historically marginalized and excluded communities for dignity and racial, gender, and economic justice. Before joining Everyday Democracy in May 2022, Merle served as Chief Equity and Engagement Officer at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York, where she led organizational transformation through community engagement initiatives and by conceiving and implementing Reviving Radical, an initiative to reckon with the organization's history and build accountable relationships with communities of color.



Prior to her work at Planned Parenthood, Merle served as Chief Program Officer at YWCA of the City of New York and taught non-profit consulting and Race and Identity in Organizations at New York University's Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service.

Merle earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, and a Master of Science in Nonprofit Management from the New School. She is also co-facilitator and leader with the Anti-Racist Alliance and the co-founder of the The BIPOC Project, an antiracist collective committed to building solidarity among people of color. Merle received the inaugural Planned Parenthood Federation A.P.P.L.E Justice award for Reviving Radical and was named City & State's 50 over Fifty Influential New Yorker in 2021.

## Ramin Ganeshram

Westport Museum for History and Culture

Ramin Ganeshram, is an award-winning journalist and historian who is currently the Executive Director of the Westport Museum for History & Culture (formerly Westport Historical Society) in Westport, CT.

Ganeshram's area of study is colonial-era African American and Caribbean history, focused on the culinary histories enslaved African-Americans and mixed-race people. She spent ten years researching and writing *The General's Cook*, a process that even continued after the novel was

published, leading to Ganeshram discovering the fate of her protagonist Hercules, the enslaved cook of George Washington, and solving a 218 year old mystery.



Ganeshram has been widely recognized for evolving the 131 year old Westport Museum toward an inclusive interpretation of local history as part of the larger American story by focusing on race, ethnicity and gender. In recognition for her work as curator of Westport Museum's 2018-19 exhibit, *Remembered: The History of African Americans in Westport*, Ganeshram received the prestigious award for Leadership in the Museum Field from the New England Museum Association (NEMA). *Remembered* won awards of merit from the Connecticut League of History Associations (CLHO) and the Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

Under Ganeshram's leadership Westport Museum for History & Culture has partnered closely with organizations focused on the BIPOC experience including Bridgeport's Mary & Eliza Freeman Center, Hang Time Real Talk, the town of Westport's diversity action committee and the Open Communities Alliance. With Ganeshram at its helm, Westport Museum has been recognized by museum-industry leaders as a standard-bearer for how small to midrange museums can truthfully and faithfully address American history around race and identity—particularly relating to slavery and civil rights.

Ganeshram's work has extended to working with the town of Westport to replace European-colonist centered monuments and signage that effectively erase BIPOC contributions to the town. She has been involved in ensuring the installation of wayfinding message that commemorates African-American history in Westport, for the first time in the town's history nearly 400-year history. Ganeshram is an alumna of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. In 2019, she was a Paul Cuffee Memorial Fellow for the For the Study of Minorities in American Maritime History at Mystic Seaport's Munson Institute and a Fellow at the George Washington Presidential Library in 2022 and 2023. She is currently completing a book about how heritage Caribbean foodways influenced American cuisine.