



Liberation Through Literacy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Freedom School to host a free, community-wide event in her hometown with nationally acclaimed authors after the local school district cancelled its African-American Read-In to comply with new federal directives.***

**Waterloo, IA**—The 1619 Freedom School will host a **free** community African American Read-In on Saturday, March 15 from 11am to 1pm CT at **Waterloo West High School's Kersenbrock Auditorium**. The event will feature readings from Tami Charles, whose book was originally selected for the Waterloo Community School District's read-in, as well as from award-winning children's book authors Derrick Barnes, Jacqueline Woodson, and 1619 Freedom School founder and Waterloo-native, Nikole Hannah-Jones.

The event is a response to the Waterloo Community School District's withdrawal from the statewide African American Read-In hosted annually by the University of Northern Iowa College of Education in February. That virtual event was estimated to reach 3,500 first graders from 73 public and private schools across Iowa. The event was part of the National African American Read-In, a nationwide initiative in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English to celebrate and promote African American literature.

Waterloo – Iowa's most heavily Black school district – was the only one to withdraw from UNI's event. An email sent to the district's elementary school teachers said it was canceling its participation because the district was advised that the book selected for this year's event, *All Because You Matter* written by New York Times bestselling author Tami Charles and illustrated by Bryan Collier, may not comply with new federal directives prohibiting "diversity, equity and inclusion" in public education.

Each child was to receive a copy of Charles' book as part of the program, but after the district withdrew from the event, it decided to allow community organizations such as the 1619 Freedom School to distribute the books instead. Waterloo's school district has been a long-time supporter of the 1619 Freedom School.

As educational and other institutions across the nation pulled back from or canceled Black History Month celebrations and are removing books on Black history and by Black authors from school and library shelves, Hannah-Jones saw a larger opportunity to raise awareness about the national scourge of book banning and to bring the entire

community together around the importance of the freedom to learn. Along with author readings, the 1619 Freedom School will give out hundreds of books for readers of all ages.

“We’re reinforcing the value and importance of Black History Month, Black books, and telling Black stories for children of all races in a political climate where these commemorations and texts are being banned,” says Nikole Hannah-Jones, Pulitzer Prize-winning creator of *The 1619 Project* and author of the children’s book *Born on the Water*. “Trump’s executive order and state bans like SF 496 have put school districts such as Waterloo’s in the position of having to make untenable decisions in order not to lose the essential funding that they rely on to serve their students. It is up to communities to step up and protect our children’s freedom to learn.”

In 2021, Iowa Republicans introduced a bill to ban the teaching of *The 1619 Project* in the state. The bill ultimately failed but the legislator later passed a so-called “divisive concepts” bill that restricts how students can learn about racial inequality and this nation’s history of racism.

At the community-wide event, 1619 Freedom School scholars will present a Reader’s Theater of *Born on the Water*. Charles will give a reading of her book *All Because You Matter*. Barnes and Woodson will read from their books. The first 300 families will receive a tote bag with *All Because You Matter* and other books and readers of all ages will be able to select from a variety of books to take home.

In 2023, Iowa passed one of the most sweeping and regressive book ban laws in the nation. Penguin Random House, which published *The 1619 Project*, has sued the state of Iowa over SF 496, which bans books in schools and limits instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity.

“All students deserve to see themselves reflected in the books and stories they encounter in schools,” says Jonathan Friedman, Sy Syms Managing Director of US Free Expression Programs at PEN America. “Unfortunately, the movement to ban books continues to rage in local communities, state legislatures, and now the federal government, with the censoring of Black stories and voices one of its central targets. Iowa has been no different, with bans on books by a breathtaking array of Black authors including Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Angie Thomas, Alex Haley, and Roxane Gay. We are proud to sponsor this event and any community coming together to celebrate the joy of reading and stand for the freedom to read.”

The 1619 Freedom School’s African-American Read-In is co-sponsored by Penguin Random House, Pen America, Veridian Credit Union, Believe Waterloo, Antioch Baptist Church, Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa, Simon & Schuster, University of Northern Iowa Jacobson Center for Comprehensive Literacy, and Annie’s Foundation. The Waterloo NAACP is partnering with the 1619 Freedom School to disburse Charles’s book to attendees and a number of community members have also donated to the event.

The 1619 Freedom School is supported by private grants and donations and does not receive government funds and so is not subject to the anti-diversity orders issued by the Trump administration or Iowa's so-called divisive concept law.

Donate to the 1619 Freedom School at [www.1619freedomsschool.org/donate](http://www.1619freedomsschool.org/donate) or via



###

### **About the 1619 Freedom School**

Launched in 2021, the 1619 Freedom School is a free, community-based, after-school literacy program where students improve literacy skills and develop a love for reading through liberating instruction centered on Black American history. The program serves Waterloo public school students grades 3-6 who are at least one grade level behind in reading.

Its Liberation Library is a functioning, lending library for the Waterloo community. Our books center Black history, culture, stories, and characters. The library has books for all ages including picture books, chapter books, series, novels, and nonfiction titles, including popular titles for children and adults. The Liberation Library is open on the first and third Saturdays of each month from 11 am - 1 pm.

### **About Nikole Hannah-Jones**

Nikole Hannah-Jones is the Pulitzer Prize-winning creator of The 1619 Project, staff writer at The New York Times Magazine, and the founder of the 1619 Freedom School. She has spent her career investigating racial inequality and injustice, and her reporting has also earned her the MacArthur Fellowship, known as the Genius grant, a Peabody Award, two George Polk Awards, the National Magazine Award three times as well as an Emmy for her six-part *1619 Project* docuseries on HULU. Hannah-Jones is a native of Waterloo and a graduate of Waterloo West High School, where she was inducted into the school's Academic Hall of Fame in 2018.

### **About Derrick Barnes**

Derrick Barnes is a National Book Award Finalist for his 2022 graphic novel *Victory. Stand! -Raising My Fist For Justice* (Norton Young Readers). He is also the author of

the critically acclaimed picture book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* (Agate), and three NY Times Bestsellers: *The King of Kindergarten*, *I Am Every Good Thing*, and the *Queen of Kindergarten*.

Amongst the literary awards he has earned for his contributions to children's literature are the Ezra Jack Keats Award, a two time Coretta Scott King Honoree, a Newbery Honor, the YALSA Excellence In Young Adult NonFiction Award, and a two-time Kirkus Prize for Young Readers recipient.

Derrick is a graduate of Jackson State University and was the first African-American male creative copywriter hired by Hallmark Cards. He is a native of Kansas City, MO, but currently resides in Charlotte, North Carolina, with his wife and four sons.

### **About Tami Charles**

Tami Charles is the New York Times bestselling author of *All Because You Matter* and numerous books for children and young adults. Her middle grade debut, *Like Vanessa*, earned Top 10 spots on the Indies Introduce and Spring Kids' Next lists, three starred reviews, and a Junior Library Guild selection. Her latest titles include YA novel-in-verse, *Muted*, a BuzzFeed Top 40 pick, and the follow up to *All Because You Matter*, *We Are Here*, spotlighted in the New York Times Book Review, an Amazon Editor's Choice, and featured on CBS Mornings. When Tami isn't writing, she can be found presenting at schools both stateside and abroad.

### **About Jacqueline Woodson**

Jacqueline Woodson received a 2023 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, and is the recipient of a 2023 E. B. White Award, a 2020 MacArthur Fellowship, the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award, the 2018 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, and the 2018 Children's Literature Legacy Award. She is the 2022 Kennedy Center Education Artist-in-Residence, and was the 2018–2019 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, and in 2015, she was named the Young People's Poet Laureate by the Poetry Foundation. She received the 2014 National Book Award for her New York Times bestselling memoir, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, which also received the Coretta Scott King Award, a Newbery Honor, the NAACP Image Award, and a Sibert Honor. She also wrote the adult books *Red at the Bone*, a New York Times bestseller, and *Another Brooklyn*, a 2016 National Book Award finalist. She is the author of dozens of award-winning books for young adults, middle graders and children; among her many accolades, she is a four-time Newbery Honor winner, a four-time National Book Award finalist, and a three-time Coretta Scott King Award winner. Her books include Coretta Scott King Award and NAACP Image Award winner *Before the Ever After*, New York Times bestsellers *The Year We Learned to Fly*, *The Day You Begin*, and *Harbor Me*; *The Other Side*; *Each Kindness*; Caldecott Honor book *Coming On Home Soon*; Newbery Honor winners *Feathers*, *Show Way*, and *After Tupac and D Foster*; and *Miracle's Boys*, which received the LA Times Book Prize and the Coretta Scott King Award. Jacqueline is also a recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement for her contributions to young adult literature and a two-time winner of the Jane Addams Children's Book Award.

Media Contact

Joy Harrington

1619 Freedom School

319-427-0314

[jharrington@1619freedom-school.org](mailto:jharrington@1619freedom-school.org)

[www.1619FreedomSchool.org](http://www.1619FreedomSchool.org)

[instagram.com/1619freedom-school/](https://www.instagram.com/1619freedom-school/)