



Celebrating Black History At The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library And Museum

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SPRINGFIELD – The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum will mark Black History Month with “Women of the Movement” creator Marissa Jo Cerrar, historian Tamika Nunley and the debut of a new theatrical presentation.

The ALPLM also has digitized a rare interview with track-and-field legend Jesse Owens and will make all six hours of audio available to the public for the first time.

February also includes Lincoln’s birthday. Admission to the museum will be free for everyone on Feb. 12.

“Black history is American history, and it must be celebrated all year long. But February offers a chance to put an extra spotlight on the tragedies and triumphs of African Americans,” said Christina Shutt, executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.



Shutt will interview Cerrar in a special online discussion on Feb. 17. Cerrar is the creator and writer of the mini-series “Women of the Movement,” which focused on Mamie Till-Mobley and her refusal to let the world forget the brutal murder of her son Emmett.

On Feb. 24, the ALPLM welcomes Nunley, author of “At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.” The award-winning book explores how African American women – enslaved, fugitive and free – managed to create new identities and new lives despite the oppression they faced in the nation’s capital as the Civil War approached.

Nunley’s free presentation is the first in the ALPLM’s new “For the People” series of fascinating speakers with unique insights into the American people of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The presidential library and museum has developed a theatrical presentation about Robert Smalls, one of the most amazing figures of the Civil War era. Born into slavery, Smalls commandeered a Confederate ship in Charleston Harbor and used it to take family and friends to freedom in 1862. He then piloted that ship for the U.S. Navy. After the war, he returned to the Charleston area and was elected to Congress.

Actor Reggie Guyton portrays Smalls in a brief one-person play, accompanied by music from Randy Erwin. After each performance, Guyton takes questions from the audience. The presentation debuts Feb. 23 and will also be performed Feb. 24, Feb. 25 and March 4. Tickets are free with regular museum admission.



Another amazing figure is Jesse Owens, who set numerous track-and-field records and won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. In 1961, he was interviewed for hours by an employee of the Illinois State Historical Library, which is now part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

To preserve the interview, which is on delicate reel-to-reel tapes, the ALPLM has created a digital copy and made it available at <https://bit.ly/alplmjesseowens>. Listeners can hear Owens talk about his childhood as the son of a poor sharecropper, whether he was snubbed by Hitler at the Olympics, or Chicago lagging behind in racial integration.

Here are further details on some of the Black History Month events:

- Feb. 10: ALPLM Executive Director Christina Shutt participates in an online discussion of Abraham Lincoln and race with Edna Greene Medford and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, hosted by the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library. 6 p.m. Central time. Register at www.WoodrowWilson.org.
- Feb. 12: Free admission. Visitors will be able to see artifacts such as rare copies of books by abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth and a letter in which Lincoln discusses emancipation and the importance of Black soldiers.
- Feb. 17: “Life and Legacy of Emmett Till,” with Shutt and Cerrar, along with Pamela Junior, executive director for the Two Mississippi Museums, and Steven D. Booth, archivist for Johnson Publishing Company Archive. Live on Facebook at 7 p.m. Central.
- Feb. 23: Debut of “Small Beginnings,” the story of Robert Smalls’ daring escape to freedom.
- Feb. 24: Nunley discusses Black women in Washington before the Civil War and how they tried to surmount the many obstacles they faced. 7 p.m. Central. Reserve a free seat at <https://www.tix.com/ticket-sales/ALPLMSpecialEvents/2469/event/1258045>.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum uses a combination of rigorous scholarship and high-tech showmanship to immerse visitors in Lincoln’s life and times. The library holds an unparalleled collection of Lincoln books, documents, photographs, artifacts, and art, as well as some 12 million items pertaining to all aspects of Illinois history.

For more information, visit www.PresidentLincoln.Illinois.gov or follow the ALPLM on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).