

PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT NAME: Mary Liz Stewart, ED, Underground Railroad Education Ctr.
CONTACT PHONE: 518-779-4038 (cell)
CONTACT EMAIL: marylizugr@gmail.com
RELEASE DATE: Immediately

Pamela Newkirk Address on “Power of Portrayals” To Open Underground Railroad Education Center’s FreedomCon 2022

Award-winning journalist, scholar and author Pamela Newkirk will present the opening address at the Underground Railroad Education Center’s FreedomCon 2022 conference, speaking on “Locked In and Left Out: Ota Benga, The Diversity Industry and the Power of Portrayals” April 1 at Hudson Valley Community College and virtually.

Dr. Newkirk’s work presents multidimensional portraits of African American life across the full spectrum of U.S. history. Her FreedomCon 2022 presentation will primarily draw upon two of her best-selling books. *Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga* (HarperCollins, 2015) traces the deeply troubling tale of Ota Benga’s turn-of-the-century journey from the Congo to the United States, where he was exhibited at the St. Louis World’s Fair and in the Bronx Zoo Monkey House. The book received the 2016 NAACP Image Award and was listed among the Best Books of 2015 by NPR, the *Boston Globe* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Newkirk’s *Diversity Inc.: The Failed Promise of a Billion-Dollar Business* (Bold Type Books, 2019) examines how workplace diversity initiatives have turned into a profoundly misguided industry – and have done little to bring equality to American institutions and industries. *Diversity, Inc.* was included on *Time Magazine*’s 2019 list of Must-Read Books.

A professor of journalism at New York University, Dr. Newkirk’s other books include *Within The Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*; and two collections of letters written by African-Americans over the past three centuries, *A Love No Less* and *Letters from Black America*. Before joining the NYU faculty in 1993, she was a daily news reporter at four news organizations, including the Albany *Knickerbocker News* and *New York Newsday*, where she was part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning team. Her articles on race, media and African American culture have been widely published, including in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *Time*.

Pamela Newkirk is a native New Yorker who as a child was surrounded by the ephemera of African American life — the posters, letters, books and photographs — collected by her father. Those images became a life-long inspiration, nourishing her scholarly interest in the unexplored history of the African Diaspora and the ways in which racial portrayals shape cultures, societies, institutions, public policies and the lives of individuals. She holds undergraduate and graduate journalism degrees from New York and Columbia universities, and a Ph.D. in Comparative and International Education from Columbia University.

Saturday, April 2 FreedomCon events will include workshops on themes including:

- Social entrepreneurship by Black, Hispanic and other agents of change;
- The role of historical research and historical fiction in promoting social change;
- Defense of democracy as the frontline of freedom and antiracism;
- Antiracist instruction in the classroom;
- Environmental racism; and
- Teens as agents of change.

On Sunday, April 3, the Underground Railroad Education Center will hold an open house at the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence, 194 Livingston Avenue, Albany, which was a regional center of Underground Railroad and Black abolitionist activity. Additional information on the April 1-3 FreedomCon event, including registration, is at <https://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/freedomcon/#schedule>. Focusing on America's unprecedented and long overdue examination of systemic racism, the Albany-based Underground Railroad Education Center connects the historical Underground Railroad, the first civil rights movement in the United States, with current struggles to dismantle injustice, oppression and the false idea of White as superior.

Contact: Mary Liz Stewart, Underground Railroad Education Center Executive Director, at marylizugr@gmail.com or 518-779-4038 (cell) or 518-621-7793 (office).