

Northwestern

Dr. **Martin
Luther
King Jr.**

COMMEMORATION 2026

KEYNOTE PANEL

OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Kathleen Hagerty, provost

OPENING REFLECTION

Nekesa Josey, president, Master's in Public Policy and Administration
Student Leadership Council

"LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING"

Soul4Real

INTRODUCTION

Michelle Manno, associate provost, Office of Community Enrichment

MODERATED KEYNOTE DISCUSSION

Sylvester Johnson, chair and professor of Black studies, *moderator*

Laurice Bell, executive director, Shorefront Legacy Center

Leslie Harris, professor of history

Kate Masur, John D. MacArthur Professor of History

Morris "Dino" Robinson, production manager, Northwestern
University Press; founder, Shorefront Legacy Center

CLOSING REMARKS

Michelle Manno



Your feedback matters! Scan the QR code
to share your thoughts in a brief survey.

“LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING”

By James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list’ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast’ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.



MLK Commemoration information:
northwestern.edu/mlk

MLK COMMEMORATION 2026

Speakers & Panelists

BIOGRAPHIES

MODERATOR

Sylvester A. Johnson



Sylvester A. Johnson is Professor and Chair in the Department of Black Studies at Northwestern University. He teaches courses on AI, culture, race, religion, and the societal impact of emerging technology. He is also co-founder of an AI ethics public benefit company.

He held the 2024 Kluge Chair in Technology and Society at the Library of Congress's Kluge Center. Sylvester formerly served as Associate Vice Provost for Public Interest Technology at Virginia Tech, where he was the founding director of the Center for Humanities. His research has examined religion, race, and empire in the Atlantic world; religion and sexuality; national security practices; and the impact of intelligent machines and human enhancement on human identity and race.

Sylvester is currently writing a book on human identity in an age of intelligent machines and human-machine symbiosis. His publications include *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity* (Palgrave 2004), a study of race and religious hatred that won the American Academy of Religion's Best First Book award; *African American Religions, 1500-2000* (Cambridge 2015); *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11* (University of California 2017); and *Religion and US Empire* (NYU Press 2022).

PANELIST

Laurice Bell



Laurice Bell is an Emmy-nominated producer and director, and Executive Director of Shorefront Legacy Center, a community archive preserving and activating Black history on Chicago's suburban North Shore. Her career began in film and music video production, where she directed and produced work for artists including Miles Davis, 2Pac, Selena, MC Hammer, Digital Underground, and Midnight Oil—contributing to a pivotal era of expanded representation in visual culture.

Today, Laurice leads intergenerational oral history and storytelling initiatives, including the Intergenerational Interview Project and the Evanston Rules podcast. Her work emphasizes care, trust, and community memory in shaping how stories are preserved and shared.

PANELIST

Leslie M. Harris



Leslie M. Harris is Professor of History and Black Studies at Northwestern University. A specialist in Pre-Civil War African American history, she has authored or co-edited six books, including award winning *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City* (2003) and *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies* (2019). Harris has also participated in a number of public history projects and accompanying books. Harris is currently completing *Leaving New Orleans: A Personal Urban History*, a book that combines memoir with family, urban and environmental histories to explore the multiple meanings of New Orleans from its founding through its uncertain future amid climate change.

Harris received her undergraduate degree at Columbia and her doctoral degree at Stanford. Before moving to Northwestern, she taught for 21 years at Emory University. Her work has also been supported by the Newberry Library, Harvard Radcliffe Institute, the Mellon and Ford Foundations, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas, and the University of Maryland.

PANELIST

Kate Masur



Kate Masur is a historian of the nineteenth-century United States. She is the author of *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (2021), a Pulitzer Prize finalist and winner of multiple major book awards. Her other books include *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (2010) and, with Gregory Downs, *The World the Civil War Made* (2015). She recently coauthored *Freedom Was in Sight! A Graphic History of Reconstruction in the Washington, D.C., Region* (2024) and coordinated the digital exhibit *Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois: Creating Community, Demanding Justice*.

Masur has consulted widely with museums, the National Park Service, and media projects, including the documentary *Reconstruction: America after the Civil War*. She is co-editor of the *Journal of the Civil War Era*, a recipient of Northwestern's Ver Steeg Award for graduate mentoring, and a frequent public commentator on the Civil War, Reconstruction, constitutional history, and public memory.

PANELIST

Morris “Dino” Robinson



Morris “Dino” Robinson is the Production Manager at Northwestern University Press. Prior to working at Northwestern, he operated his own design firm and pioneered the establishment of Shorefront, an organization that documents the African American experience on the North Shore. Within Shorefront, he has written four books, launched the Shorefront Journal, hosted lectures and traveling exhibits, and built a public archive of over 700 feet of photographs, documents and ephemera public use.

He is past Board President of the Evanston History Center, Evanston Neighborhood Conference and charter board member of the Organization of Black Designers, Chicago Chapter (now Osmosis), and board member of the Black Metropolis Research Consortium.

Dino has appeared on various news and radio segments, newspapers, and magazines, and in the documentary film *The Big Payback*. He has received several awards, and the City of Evanston has presented Dino with the Key to the City, named a part of Church Street after him, and recognizes November 28 as Morris “Dino” Robinson Day for his work preserving the North Shore's Black history.

OPENING REFLECTION SPEAKER

Nekesa J. Josey



Nekesa J. Josey is President of the Student Leadership Council at Northwestern University's School of Professional Studies and a Master of Public Policy and Administration candidate.

She is a finance and policy professional with over a decade of experience across municipal government, county administration, and the private sector, with a focus on public finance, economic development, and institutional leadership. Her prior roles include work with the City of Chicago's Committee on Finance, the Cook County President's Office, and Mesirow Financial.

Nekesa holds an MBA and is a member of the Beta Gamma Sigma International Business Honor Society. She has also served on the Women's Board of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Navy Pier Associate Board.