

Monticello Awarded \$3.5 Million Mellon Foundation Grant for Getting Word African American Oral History Project Expansion, Digital Archive

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CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – The Mellon Foundation, the nation’s largest supporter of the arts and humanities, recently awarded \$3.5 million to Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello to expand the UNESCO World Heritage Site’s pioneering *Getting Word* African American Oral History Project (<https://gettingword.monticello.org>). Established in 1993, *Getting Word* is a decades-long initiative to collect and share the stories of Monticello’s enslaved community and their descendants. This transformational, multi-year donation from the Mellon Foundation represents an unprecedented investment in the project.

“The Mellon Foundation’s confidence in our boundless efforts to research, share, and rightfully acknowledge the history of Monticello’s enslaved community recognizes the Thomas Jefferson Foundation as a model in this important work,” said Gardiner Hallock, Interim President of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. “We are deeply appreciative of Mellon’s support, which will propel the *Getting Word* project forward and build upon the remarkable contributions of former and current staff as well as the hundreds of descendants of Monticello’s enslaved families who have generously shared their families’ oral histories with us over the past 30 years.”

Support from the Mellon Foundation’s “Monuments Project” program will launch the second generation of *Getting Word* with the capacity for national impact and international awareness, creating a model for other sites seeking to engage descendant communities in meaningful ways. The grant allows the Thomas Jefferson Foundation to hire program staff, robustly engage with project advisors, reach out to descendant communities nationwide, invite the public to bring history forward into national and global dialogues, and create a digital archive of documentary references to enslaved people. Ultimately, this support will enable *Getting Word* staff to conduct more than 275 oral histories with

descendants of Monticello's enslaved families over the next four years, doubling the number of oral histories collected over the last 30 years of the project.

"We are inspired by the Mellon Foundation's grant to *Getting Word*," said Andrew M. Davenport, Public Historian and Director of *Getting Word*. "This is an unprecedented opportunity to build upon the project's mission to collect and preserve family histories from the eras of slavery and abolition to the present. Through archival research and collaboration with descendants, *Getting Word* historians have reconnected families riven apart by slavery and its aftermath. The project, as an archive and as a community, has helped to recontextualize Monticello as a Black heritage site of reflection, remembrance, and reunion. The *Getting Word* archive and the community are inextricably interwoven, and Mellon's support will propel the project into its next generation."

The Monuments Project is an unparalleled \$250 million commitment by the Mellon Foundation to transform the nation's commemorative landscape by supporting public projects that more completely and accurately represent the multiplicity and complexity of American stories. Launched in 2020, the Monuments Project builds on the Mellon Foundation's efforts to express, elevate, and preserve the stories of those who have often been denied historical recognition, and explores how we might foster a more complete telling of who we are as a nation.

As a result of Mellon's generosity, Monticello will hire additional *Getting Word* staff to support this important work. The organization currently seeks a Public Historian (<https://monticello.applicantpro.com/jobs/2778005.html>) to join the project, with more positions posted in the near future. Please visit monticello.org/jobs for the latest information.

About The Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation was incorporated in 1923 to preserve Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Today, the foundation seeks to bring history forward into national and global dialogues by engaging audiences with Jefferson's world and ideas and inviting them to experience the power of place at Monticello and on its website. Monticello is recognized as a National Historic Landmark, a United Nations World Heritage Site and a Site of Conscience. As a private, nonprofit organization, the foundation does not receive ongoing government support to fund its twofold mission of preservation and education. For information, visit [monticello.org](https://www.monticello.org/) (<https://www.monticello.org/>).

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at mellon.org (<https://mellon.org/>).

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