

THE WALLACE CENTER FOR ARTS AND RECONCILIATION

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HARPERSVILLE, ALABAMA

(Located within the Birmingham-Hoover, Alabama Metro Area)

Resurrecting Dignity

The Wallace Center for Arts and Reconciliation (WCAR) is seeking a dedicated and visionary Executive Director. WCAR is a non-profit organization that promotes racial reconciliation, healing, and repair through the arts, intentional dialogue, and a commitment to inclusive history. Established in 2018, WCAR has converted an Alabama plantation – a glaring remnant of America’s racist origins – into a sacred gathering space for engaging the hard history of the US, and an unlikely symbol of hope.



Wallace Descendant Homecoming brings family together in 2023.

WCAR was co-founded by Black and white descendants of the Wallace place – Harpersville, AL Mayor Theoangelo Perkins and artist Nell Gottlieb – joining a growing vanguard of leaders and organizations engaged in the transformative work of racial reconciliation through historical examinations of Southern architecture, material culture, and symbol. WCAR’s intentional leadership aims to reckon with the past through architectural reinterpretations, site-specific sculptures, and art that exhumes the lived experiences of the African Americans who were enslaved – and later lived and worked – on the Wallace plantation.

The Wallace plantation – like most in the US – inherited a deeply complex genealogy that weaves together generations of Black and white descendants whose lives, legacies, and futures – for better and for worse – have been materially shaped by chattel slavery. By centering the Wallace descendants – both Black and white – WCAR offers a replicable model

of change for engaging racial reconciliation and repair that births new language and narratives within spaces terminally associated with “whiteness¹.”

Uncharted Territory

“Our histories are intertwined. My history is your history. We lived on the same land and worked on the same land.” - Mayor Theoangelo Perkins, Descendant and WCAR co-founder



Designing for Dignity: Convening Conversations on the Art of Racial Healing. Birmingham Poet Laureate Salaam Green consecrates WCAR land and space with ceremony and invocation of the ancestors.

WCAR programming is anchored by descendant gatherings titled, “Wallace Homecoming.” The first Homecoming in 2018 drew approximately 40 – mostly local – descendants of the Wallace plantation on both sides. Facilitated dialogue included histories of the plantation, the town, and larger metropolitan area; the past, present, and future realities of Wallace’s Black descendants; and opportunities for collaboration to enact justice, repair, and reconciliation. The first official initiative was to reopen the Black portion of the Wallace Cemetery which had been closed by the white Wallace family several years earlier.

WCAR believes in the transformative power of art as a dialogical medium to catalyze change. In addition to the annual Wallace Homecoming, WCAR provides creative opportunities for the public to engage and immerse themselves in its mission. *Migratuse Ataraxia* – a dance performance that centers the humanity of enslaved Africans in antebellum homes – was created by Mellon Foundation recipients, Wideman-Davis Dance, and performed in the interior of the Wallace house. Additional programming includes site-specific art installations and lectures, Juneteenth and other heritage celebrations, school tours, and lunch and learn informational sessions. Birmingham Poet Laureate Salaam Green currently serves as the WCAR 2023-2024 Artist-in-Residence.



Artist Elizabeth M. Webb, creator of With Love, For Grief, a site specific sculpture that resides on WCAR grounds.

¹ *Whiteness* and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups are compared. Whiteness is also at the core of understanding of race in America. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout America’s history have created a culture where nonwhite persons are seen as inferior or abnormal. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>



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Migratuse Ataraxia – created and performed by Wideman-Davis Dance - is a dance performance that centers the humanity of enslaved Africans in antebellum homes.

WCAR is in good relationship with local historians, genealogists, and cultural custodians in the towns of Harpersville, Vincent, and the Cresswell Community. WCAR is also in partnership with regional civic institutions and nonprofits in Montevallo, Birmingham, and Montgomery, AL to raise awareness, join heritage efforts, and influence tourism. Embedding more deeply within the local community, regional areas, and larger ecosystem of reconciliation and repair is a priority of the center – and the incoming Executive Director.

In addition to the house, an antebellum root cellar, and two site-specific sculptures, the grounds feature a recently completed Artist Residency and Visitor Center that houses the administrative offices, public restrooms, and a separate wing for traveling artists/artists in residence. Total property assets are valued at approximately \$1.5M.

WCAR has a current operating budget of \$775,000. Funding is a mix of foundation, government, individual, and corporate giving. Recent funders include the Alabama Historical Commission, the Community Foundation for Greater Birmingham, and the Daniel Foundation of Alabama. Continuing the funding momentum is a central priority of the incoming Executive Director.

In addition to the Executive Director, there is a full-time Program and Facilities Manager. Part time consultants support ongoing fundraising and communication efforts. Currently, WCAR utilizes a volunteer CFO who also serves on the board. The salary range for the incoming Executive Director is \$125,000-150,000.



Student poets from Vincent Middle School read their personal poems based on the history of the Wallace House.

Courageous Leadership

WCAR was co-founded by Nell Gottlieb and Harpersville Mayor Theoangelo Perkins. Gottlieb is a descendant of the enslavers of the Wallace plantation; Perkins is a descendant of sharecroppers who moved to Wallace land shortly after emancipation.

Gottlieb – who currently serves as executive director – inherited the Wallace house in 2018. As a young child, she spent summers on the property and grew up hearing stories about the “Lost Cause.” Time and distance provided the space needed for Gottlieb to confront her miseducation. When she came with family to the house in 2018, Mayor Perkins met them at the Wallace cemetery; together, they began to discuss the community’s needs and how might the house – a symbol of racial terror – become a unifying space embraced by the community, particularly the descendants of those enslaved on the plantation.



WCAR co-founders Nell Gottlieb (left) and Mayor Theoangelo Perkins (right)

“Mayor Perkins said we needed to meet with Black descendants to learn what needs to be done to repair the harm our family had inflicted through closing the Black cemetery.” - Nell Gottlieb



Doris McLeod Williams from Detroit finding the grave of her ancestors.

Together, they began to cement a process and plan to repair deep breaches of humanity. They sought out descendants on both sides. The original board was established with descendants of the place, both Black and white, and has since expanded to include the broader community.

The first significant action – after gathering the descendant community for Wallace Homecoming – was for the White descendants to make a deep apology for closing the cemetery to the Black community, to add Black descendants to the Wallace Cemetery Trust Board, and to open it fully for visitation and burial.

WCAR is seeking an Executive Director at a critical moment in US history.

As state education departments ban inclusive histories from the learning curricula in obvious efforts to rewrite history, WCAR challenges the encroachment of revisionist history efforts by revealing more comprehensive narratives of indigenous displacement and chattel slavery. Alongside local genealogists, regional civic partners, and national arts, culture, and justice institutions, WCAR enacts a multi-fold mission:

- To center the narratives of those enslaved on the Wallace plantation and their descendants;
- To mount dialogue and action that addresses the repair needed for families whose descendant’s intellectual, emotional, and physical labor were exploited to advance white wealth;
- To establish a replicable site-specific placemaking method to address reparative action in Harpersville and throughout the country;
- To initiate a communal gathering space for events, dialogue, healing, and reconciliation utilized by both Black and white Harpersville residents;
- To reframe the narrative of the “gallant South” - immortalized in films like *Gone With the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation* – and tell an inclusive history of our country’s origins.



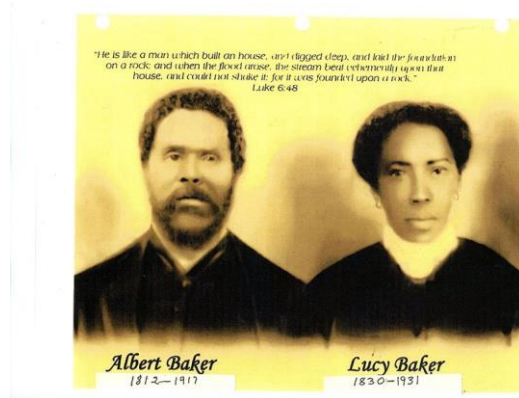
Confronting A Painful Reality



Built in 1841 by enslaved craftspeople, the Wallace House was one of the largest plantations in Harpersville, Shelby County, AL. Almost 100 enslaved persons lived and labored here, clearing land to harvest food and economic crops of tobacco and cotton. One of five major plantations in Harpersville, Wallace House enslavers established kinship networks – mostly through marriage – throughout Shelby County, AL. These kinship networks led to consolidations of power and wealth. From 1841 through 2018, the Wallace House remained in the possession of the white descendant family, at which time

it was deeded to the Wallace Center. For the enslaved, Alabama Slave Codes prohibited them from marrying or fraternizing outside of the plantations where they were forced to work. But like the white Wallaces, the Black Wallaces – who shared the name of their oppressors – forged similar kinship networks that grew stronger post-emancipation.

Most of the Black Wallace descendants are from three people: Lucy Wallace Baker, Anderson Wallace, and Henderson Wallace. The community of Harpersville has done an admirable job preserving the legacy and lineage of its Black descendants of enslavement. The Peter Datcher Enslaved Persons Database – named after Albert and Lucy Wallace Baker’s great grandson, Albert “Peter” Baker Datcher, Jr., a prolific local genealogist – is maintained by Shelby County and is a digitized resource for historians. Much of the WCAR interpretive history included in the house is a direct result of Datcher’s research.



A visit to Harpersville is not complete without a visit to Datcher’s History House – a museum located inside the house his great grandfather, Albert, built and that Peter himself grew up in. Datcher’s History House is a vast – yet intimate – look of the resiliency and success of one family who endured the indignity of enslavement and still, through intimate kinship networks, established an enviable legacy. Harpersville’s Baker’s Grove Baptist church – established by and named after Albert Baker – served as a school for Black students post emancipation and is still active. The farmland Albert purchased post enslavement has remained in the family’s ownership and has grown. The Datcher farm is the largest Black-owned row crop farm in surrounding counties for 125 miles in any direction.

Executive Priorities

The executive priorities for the incoming Executive Director are to advance WCAR in community, partnerships, resources, and impact. The incoming Executive Director will be a:

STRONG ADMINISTRATOR

WCAR has been led since 2018 by Nell Gottlieb, who has grown the organization from idea to reality. To continue its growth, the incoming Executive Director will be expected to enhance these beginnings with expert nonprofit management skills. This includes establishing standard operating procedures and identifying opportunities for growth and partnerships. Previous experience managing people and budgets is a must.

RESPECTED THOUGHT LEADER AND ADVOCATE

WCAR must be on the leading edge of evolving definitions of repair and reconciliation and how to alchemize these into dynamic courses of action. It will be critical that the new Executive Director engage this work in community – descendant, local, and justice communities. WCAR must be engaged in national discussions on reconciliation and repair to remain authentically engaging and relevant.

INTERPRETATION

Interpreting the house, land, and structures from the lens of the Black descendants is central to the WCAR mission. This includes establishing vital and relevant interpretive elements throughout the property that go beyond the written history.

ADEPT AT BUILDING COMMUNITY

Building trust – particularly amongst the Black descendants – is central to fulfilling the WCAR mission. A leader with experience in community organization and outreach is a critical hinge. The incoming Executive Director must remain firmly rooted in the dual tasks of engaging the descendant communities – locally and throughout the diaspora – and expanding to incorporate connective programming that attracts a regional and national audience.

SKILLED FUNDRAISER

WCAR relies on a funding stream from a cross section of partners including foundations, individual giving, government, and corporations. Growing its existing funding partner list and enhancing resources is important to the ongoing work of the center and an imperative of the incoming Executive Director.

Location



Harpersville is part of the Birmingham-Hoover, Alabama Metro Area located 30 miles from Birmingham; 75 miles from Montgomery; and approximately two hours from Atlanta, GA. The town is located near the beautiful Coosa River and offers the conveniences of suburban life and the tranquility of pastoral living. The Old Baker Farm and Morgan Creek Vineyards and Winery are popular destinations. Festivals like Harpersville Day are central to the community. [Alicia's Coffee](#)

located just outside of Harpersville, in Vincent, is a popular community gathering spot. Lakes, walking tracks, playgrounds, and pavilions are popular with families. Budweiser of Central Alabama is a major employer along with the Morris Shea Bridge Company. The town of Harpersville is a member of the South Shelby Chamber of Commerce; there are six chambers of commerce within Shelby County.

Contact

[Anise Search](#) is leading this executive search. For more information, or to suggest a candidate, contact lead consultant, Ayanna Grady-Hunt at Ayanna@AniseSearch.com.