



## For Immediate Release

Press Contact: [Shawn Badgley](#), (401) 331-8575 x134

### **National Park Service Awards Grant to RIHS, Partners for Civil Rights Project**

*RI Black Heritage Society, RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission to Join on New Undertaking*

(PROVIDENCE, R.I.) – The **National Park Service** (NPS) announced on Thursday, Jan. 12, a \$49,557.76 grant to the **Rhode Island Historical Society**, working in partnership with the **Rhode Island Black Heritage Society** (RIBHS) and **Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission** (RIHPHC), for the purposes of a multi-phase project focusing on African Americans' struggle for Civil Rights in Rhode Island during the 20th century.

The award is part of a “competitive grant program ... funding 39 projects in 20 states worth \$7,750,000, including surveys, documentation, interpretation, education, oral histories, planning, and bricks and mortar preservation,” [the NPS said](#).

“I commend the Rhode Island Historical Society and their partners for collaborating with the National Park Service to help preserve our shared history and help future generations learn from the past. Rhode Islanders made important contributions in the march toward equality and the fight for Civil Rights. These federal funds will help tell the story of how citizens across the state came together to advance the Civil Rights Movement,” said U.S. Senator **Jack Reed**, a senior member of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversees federal funding for the National Park Service. “Again, congratulations to the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission for winning this grant, and thank you to the National Park Service for recognizing the importance of this project.”

The RIHS, RIBHS, and RIHPHC aim to identify new primary source materials, establish a comprehensive study of the state’s 20th-century Civil Rights history, compile a survey report and recommendations for National Register listing, and assemble educational materials that impart the findings to both a formal educational audience and the general public, according to the proposal they submitted in October.

“This generous grant from the NPS gives our three statewide institutions an opportunity to join forces and tell a Rhode Island story that has never been fully told,” RIHS Executive Director **C. Morgan Grefe** said. “We look forward to getting started and working side by side with our colleagues at the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society and Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission.”

**The Rhode Island project will include three phases:**

- **Research and Documentation:** A catalogue of existing oral histories; an historical essay on the state’s 20th-century Civil Rights history; a bibliography of existing secondary sources and manuscript collections; and a list of addresses associated with people in the movement and sites of meetings, demonstrations, resistance, lawsuits, and other Civil Rights-related topics.
- **Site Surveys:** A statewide survey of historic sites associated with the 20th-century Civil Rights Movement, following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Identification. An architectural historian, working primarily with the RIHPHC, will survey sites identified during research and documentation, prepare survey sheets, and draft a narrative report that includes a context statement, analysis of the group of sites, and recommendations for National Register eligibility.
- **Interpretation and Education:** A development program that will include unit plans to dovetail with Rhode Island’s 1696 Curriculum Task Force’s work and teacher workshops to share this material, with the goal of a statewide curriculum; meanwhile, the RIBHS, in collaboration with the RIHS, will develop two exhibits and host opening lectures for each.

“We are honored to be a part of this partnership to bring to light the sites, stories, and people that shaped the history of Civil Rights in the Ocean State,” RIBHS Executive Director **Theresa Guzman “Soni” Stokes** said. “A history that evolved from the 18th-century fight for personal freedom to the 20th-century fight for full civil liberties.”

RIHPHC Executive Director **Edward F. Sanderson** agreed, saying in a statement:

“The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is grateful to the National Park Service for this opportunity to research, document, and interpret historic sites associated with the African American struggle for Civil Rights in the 20th century. The project will reveal the legacy of Rhode Island’s Civil Rights history in houses and churches where Civil Rights leaders met, at stores and businesses where there were protests, and at institutions that were transformed by the movement. We look forward to working with the Rhode Island Historical Society and Rhode Island Black Heritage Society on this important project.”

Project updates will be posted at [RIHS.org](http://RIHS.org).

**About the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission**

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is the state agency for historical preservation and heritage programs. The Commission operates a statewide historical preservation program that identifies and protects historic buildings, districts, structures, and archaeological sites. The Commission also develops and carries out programs to document and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Rhode Island’s people.

**About the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society**

As one of the oldest African Heritage organizations in the country, the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society has recorded, retained, and interpreted historical facts and preserved the documents and artifacts of African American and African descendants’ history and accomplishments in Rhode Island. Its primary mission is the preservation of African Diaspora descendants’ historical artifacts – books, art, papers and images, as well as facilitating the interpretation efforts by those seeking to enlighten others about black heritage.

**About the Rhode Island Historical Society**

Founded in 1822, the RIHS is the fourth-oldest historical society in the United States and is Rhode Island’s largest and oldest historical organization, as well as its only Smithsonian Affiliate. In Providence, the RIHS owns and operates the John Brown House Museum, a designated National Historic Landmark, built in 1788; the Aldrich House, built in 1822 and used for administration and public programs; and the Mary Elizabeth Robinson Research Center, where archival, book and image collections are housed. In Woonsocket, the RIHS manages the Museum of Work and Culture, a community museum examining the industrial history of northern Rhode Island and of the workers and settlers, especially French-Canadians, who made it one of the state’s most distinctive areas.

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