2026

SILKROAD

SANCTUARY

THE POWER OF RESONANCE AND RITUAL

Silkroad Ensemble Featuring **Rhiannon Giddens**

IN CELEBRATION OF AMERICA250







ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

At once intimate and expansive, Sanctuary: The Power of Resonance and Ritual is not a retreat from the world in a time of unrest, but a response to it, offering music as a space of refuge, renewal, and connection.

SILKROAD

A Grammy Award-winning musical ensemble, Silkroad is a collective of artists representing dozens of nationalities, traditions and ideas, who use music and art to demonstrate how great beauty can emerge from great difference. The Ensemble strives to engage difference, sparking radical collaboration and music with a purpose, for a more hopeful and inclusive world.

SANCTUARY

Sanctuary: The Power of Resonance and Ritual explores humanity's enduring impulse to turn to music in moments of upheaval, grief, and transformation. Across cultures and throughout history, communal sound-making has served as a refuge and a way to process loss, forge connection, and restore balance in times of uncertainty. In Sanctuary, Silkroad invites audiences into this shared space, examining how ritual, trance, and resonance function not only as musical practices, but as deeply human responses to the challenges of living together in an unsettled world.

OUR ENSEMBLE



RHIANNON GIDDENS

Voice, Banjo, Fiddle. A two-time GRAMMY and Pulitzer Prize-winning artist, Rhiannon Giddens serves as the Artistic Director of Silkroad, steering the ensemble's mission to lift up overlooked voices in musical history, foster community, and build connection and joy between cultures.



SHAWN CONLEY

Bass, Composer. Shawn Conley has been a core member of the Ensemble for over a decade, bringing his love for musical diversity to the group's global sound. He regularly collaborates on Silkroad's genre-spanning projects, bridging classical precision with free improvisation.



SANDEEP DAS

Tabla, Composer. A premier Tabla virtuoso and Guggenheim Fellow, Sandeep Das is a foundational, long-standing member of the Ensemble. Through his performances and expertise, Sandeep's vision is a world where culture is a bridge, heritage is a compass, and every voice has a home.



HARUKA FUJII

Percussion. Multi-percussionist Haruka Fujii has won international acclaim for her interpretation of contemporary music. Performing as a member of the ensemble, she delivers premiere works from luminary living composers across major orchestras worldwide.



MAEVE GILCHRIST

Celtic Harp, Composer, Educator. Edinburgh born harpist and composer Maeve Gilchrist has taken the Celtic (lever) Harp to new levels of performance and visibility. As a member of the Silkroad ensemble, her original pieces beautifully straddle the worlds of folk and classical.



MAZZ SWIFT

Violinist, Vocalist, Composer, Educator. Juilliard-trained Mazz Swift brings their signature style of improvisation and song weaving to the Silkroad Ensemble, engaging with poignant social and musical themes to forge connections between audiences worldwide.



NIWEL TSUMBU

Guitar, Voice. Niwel Tsumbu is a guitarist and singer who grew up with the hip-swinging Soukous music from the Democratic Republic Of The Congo. Strongly influenced by guitarists such as Paco de Lucia, Luambo Makiadi, Baden Powell and Joe Pass, Niwel Tsumbu has amalgamated different styles and blurred the boundaries of African, Classical and Jazz music.



FRANCISCO TURRISI

Multi-Instrumentalist. Francesco Turrisi has been defined as a musical alchemist and a musical polyglot. He has released 5 critically acclaimed albums as a leader and 2 as co-leader, crossing boundaries in innovative ensembles that blend Irish & Mediterranean music, and southern Italian & Arabic traditions.



KAORU WATANABE

Japanese Flutes and Percussion. Kaoru Watanabe's work is rooted in traditional Japanese performing arts and infused with experimental and improvisational elements. Collaborating with the Silkroad Ensemble, he champions the essential qualities of Japanese flutes and percussion while celebrating heritage, immigration, and diaspora through music.



MAURO DURANTE

Percussion, Violin, Composer. Mauro Durante brings the fiery folk traditions of Southern Italian "pizzica" music to his collaborative work with the Silkroad Ensemble. His contributions infuse Silkroad's global projects with a contemporary edge rooted in deep ancestral rhythm.



MEHDI NASSOULI

Guembri. El Mehdi Nassouli learned from a family steeped in Gnawa culture. Following this, Mehdi Nassouli traverses Morocco during twenty years to complete his journey of initiation with several maâlems (masters of Gnawa tradition), from Taroudant to Marrakech through Essaouira and Safi, gaining a solid understanding of Gnawa music, the Daqqa, Houara, hmadcha or the Malhun.



ROWAN CORBETT

Bones, Bodhrán. Rowan Corbett brings a mixture of modern and traditional sounds, instruments, and sensibilities to his eclectic playing. Utilizing hand drums, bodhrán, and the bones, he brings a myriad of rhythmic and sonic palettes to Irish, English, & Scottish folk tunes & Early-American Ballads.



JAKE BLOUNT

Fiddle, Banjo. Jake Blount is an award-winning scholar and performer of Black folk music who fashions an "Afrofuturist folklore." His performances seamlessly merge centuries-old traditional songs with the trappings and techniques of modern Black genres.

Drawing from a vast range of global traditions, including Southern Italian tarantella, Moroccan Gnawa, Indian classical music, Japanese farmers' song, and American folk practices, the program highlights music's ability to create presence, grounding, and collective meaning.

Rather than presenting these traditions in isolation, Sanctuary: The Power of Resonance and Ritual weaves them into an ongoing dialogue, revealing unexpected connections across geography and history. The result is an evocative experience in which listeners are invited to participate as witnesses and partners in the act of listening itself.

Lonnie G. Bunch III is an acclaimed American historian, author, educator, museum curator and administrator, the 14th secretary of the Smithsonian Institution (2019–), and the first Black person to hold that office. Before heading the Smithsonian, he served as the founding director of the institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture. As the Smithsonian's secretary, he oversees 19 museums and nine research centers, as well as the National Zoo.

WELCOME LETTER

BY SMITHSONIAN SECRETARY LONNIE BUNCH



Ritual is a key to preserving memory and heritage, to passing traditions from generation to generation. The Smithsonian has always embraced the cultural, artistic, and historic rituals that honor and remember, ensuring that future generations understand the complexity of their past. One of the ways we explore those traditions is through a tradition of our own, the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

This Silkroad concert is just one event in our effort this year to take the Folklife Festival beyond the National Mall with Of the People: The Smithsonian Festival of Festivals. In collaboration with dozens of communities across the country, the Festival of Festivals is a vital component of our commemoration of the nation's 250th anniversary. The concert's location in Tulsa on Juneteenth, a confluence of two pointed moments in the country's ongoing struggle to live up to its ideals, speaks to music's power to celebrate, teach, heal, and remember.

When I had the great honor of bringing the National Museum of African American History and Culture to life, I knew the full story of Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood had to be told there. Doing so meant conveying not only the tragedy of a thriving Black community destroyed by protectors of an entrenched racist hierarchy, but also celebrating Greenwood's origins as an expression of African American self-determination that built a community of wealth and influence in the face of Jim Crow.

Greenwood's spirit lived in people like Buck Franklin, the father of historian John Hope Franklin. The Tulsa-based lawyer lost virtually everything during the violence visited on the community: his house, his law office, even his clothes. And yet, he remained, setting up a tent as a makeshift law office to help clients and to fight legal challenges to rebuilding Black businesses. I think one of the greatest triumphs of Greenwood is its legacy of hope arising from the ashes, its residents' descendants keeping alive these stories of bravery and endurance, a people bowed but unbroken.

The resilience of the Greenwood community and all who continue to hold America to a higher standard embody what our country is all about. This nation is a work in progress, to be sure. But millions are working to see the founders' notion of a more perfect union realized for future generations. Let this concert be a ritual that joyously sings out for freedom, equality, justice...and remembering.

Lonnie G. Bunch III
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution

Ben Hartley is the President and CEO of Silkroad, the global-reaching arts organization and Grammy Award-winning Ensemble. With decades of leadership experience across major cultural institutions—including the National Arts Club, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music—Ben has dedicated his career to championing the transformative power of arts and culture. As CEO, he drives SilkRoad's strategic vision, expanding its impact through groundbreaking musical collaborations, innovative educational programs, and social impact initiatives worldwide.

WELCOME LETTER

BY SILKROAD PRESIDENT & CEO BEN HARTLEY



Welcome to Silkroad's Juneteenth performance of Sanctuary: The Power of Resonance and Ritual. We are deeply honored to gather with you here in Tulsa on this day of remembrance, reflection, resilience, and celebration.

Juneteenth calls us to hold history honestly while imagining a more connected future. It is a day that reminds us of the enduring human pursuit of freedom, dignity, and belonging — values that live not only in civic life, but also in art, culture, and communal expression. Music has always accompanied moments of transformation. Across cultures and throughout history, people have turned to rhythm, song, ritual, and collective sound-making in times of upheaval and uncertainty — to mourn, to heal, to endure, and to reconnect with one another.

Sanctuary emerges from that impulse. This program explores how resonance and ritual can create spaces of refuge and renewal. Drawing from a rich tapestry of global traditions — including Southern Italian tarantella, Moroccan Gnawa, Indian classical music, Japanese folk practices, and American musical lineages — the artists of Silkroad invite us into an ongoing musical dialogue that transcends geography, language, and history.

At the heart of this work is collaboration rooted in deep listening, trust, and improvisation. Each artist brings their own cultural lineage and musical language into the ensemble, offering it both as personal testimony and communal invitation. Through spontaneous exchange and collective storytelling, the musicians create something larger than any individual tradition alone — a space where difference is honored and connection becomes possible.

As we gather here in Tulsa — a city whose history carries profound lessons about injustice, resilience, and cultural renewal — we hope this evening offers a way to move through the complexities of the world together. Music gives us the possibility of collective presence, reflection, and joy.

Thank you for joining us.

Ben Hartley
President & CEO of Silkroad



ALL SONGS ARE WORK SONGS

BY ALICE RANDALL



Songs and work go together. They propel work and they witness work. One of the most powerful songs I know rose from enslaved Africans working on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and dates back to sometime before 1834.

We raise de wheat,
Dey gib us de corn;
We bake de bread,
Dey gib us de crust;
We sif de meal,
Dey gib us de huss;
We peel de meat,
Dey gib us de skin;
And dat's de way Dey take us in;
We skim de pot,
Dey gib us the liquor,
And say dat's good enough for n.....

Frederick Douglass included this lyric in My Bondage and My Freedom, the second of his three autobiographies. Published in 1855, the narrative details Frederick's life in bondage and his escape to freedom in 1838. Though Douglass never knew the exact day or year of his birth he remembered clearly that he heard the song during the winter of 1834 in the days between Christmas and New Year.

The song caught by Douglass evolves over time. It becomes hard to recognize. But I believe I hear an echo of it in the Bob Wills classic, "Take Me Back to Tulsa," Little bee sucks the blossom, big bee gets the honey. Darkie raise the cotton, white man gets the money.

Another line in "Take Me Back to Tulsa" the iconic Country and Western dance hall tune, Let me off at Archer and I'll walk down to Greenwood. Archer and Greenwood are streets in the Black neighborhood of Tulsa that was destroyed in the Tulsa Massacre.

"Take Me Back to Tulsa" is a work song about building a just nation. With sound and syllable braided to the rhythms that propel humans to dance, it calls out inequality while calling in joy. Songs tied to the performance of rhythmic manual labor, laying railroad track, picking cotton are not the only work songs.

Some work songs help us do the work of being human, washing us in soundwaves that provide insight and delight during the bloodiest hours of the bloodiest nights-- from birthing rooms to battle grounds.

America's 250th birthday arrives, not in the spirit of hope, provoked by the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on July 4, 1776 . Rather it arrives in the spirit of a very different July, and a very different Pennsylvania place.

We are in a July 1, 1863, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania moment.

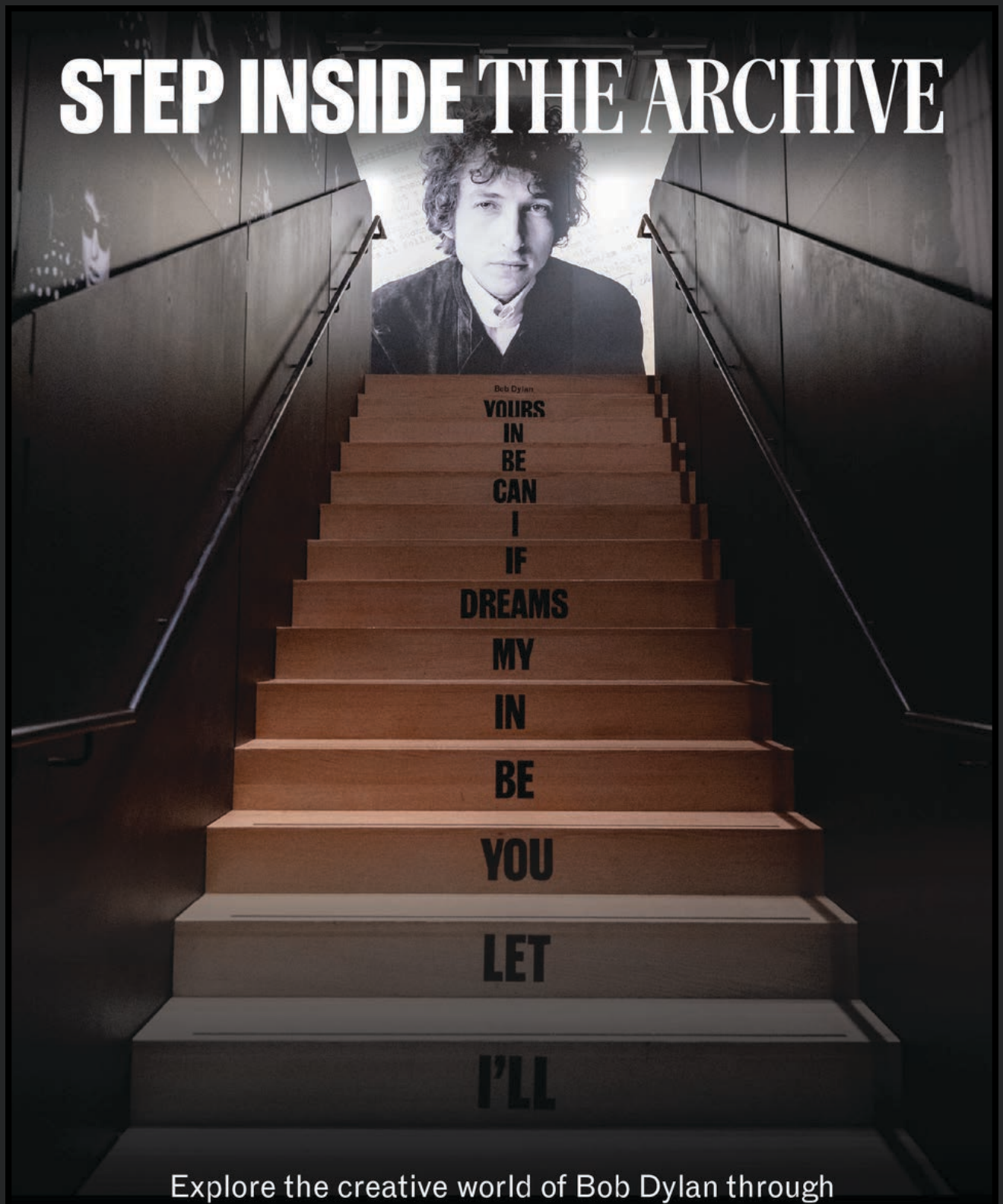
Juneteenth is all about "good news, at long last". The good news is, songs sustain. In times of division and peril we rise on wings of sound. In 1863 as the nation faced destruction and individuals faced death Julia Howe wrote and Union troops sang "trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored."

So much work to do. So many songs to sing.

Happy Juneteenth.

Alice Randall is a New York Times best-selling novelist, award-winning songwriter, educator, food activist, and now memoirist. A graduate of Harvard University, she holds an honorary doctorate from Fisk University, is on the faculty at Vanderbilt University, and credits Detroit's Ziggy Johnson School of the Theater with being the most influential educational institution in her life. She is widely recognized as being one of the most significant voices in 21st century African-American fiction, the only Black woman in history to write both a number one Country song and an ACM video of the year.

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THE SOUNDS OF TULSA: MORE THAN MUSIC

BY SCOTT ELLSWORTH

For more than one hundred years, from the end of the Civil War to the civil rights victories of the 1960s, most of the United States was ruled by legalized racial segregation. Legislation was passed that determined who could vote, where people could live, and what kind of life they could live, all based on race. The laws had another purpose as well, and that was to keep Black Americans at the very bottom of the social order.

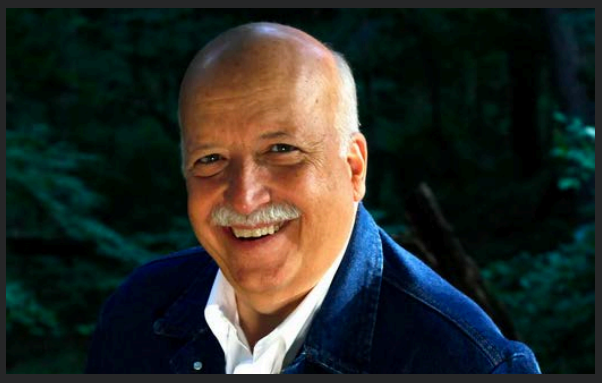
But in Tulsa, that part didn't work—at least at first.

For in the early decades of the 20th century, Black Tulsans built one of the most vibrant African American commercial districts in the nation, a bustling neighborhood known as Greenwood, that boasted two theaters, a dozen restaurants, two newspapers, a hospital, and scores of shops and grocery stores. Then, in 1921, a mob of thousands of white Tulsans burned Greenwood to the ground. Segregation, came their message, was here to stay.

Only they couldn't segregate the music.

Tulsa has always been a deeply musical town in a devoutly musical state. The list of Oklahoma born and bred musicians is staggering, ranging from jazz giants such as Charlie Christian, Jimmy Rushing, and Chet Baker, to country stars like Gene Autry, Wanda Jackson, Reba McEntire, Vince Gill, and Zach Bryan. Folk troubadour Woody Guthrie was from Okemah, Broadway legend Kristin Chenoweth grew up in Broken Arrow, songwriter Jimmy Webb is from Elk City. Okie musical greats are everywhere.

In Tulsa, however, the hallmark of local music has always been in mixing genres. Early Black musicians in Greenwood drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources, from Tchaikovsky to spirituals, while the arrival of radio carried the sounds of jazz, boogie woogie, and hillbilly music into neighborhoods across the city. It was here in Tulsa, in the 1930s, that Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, operating out of Cain's Ballroom, listened to 78 r.p.m. blues records and refashioned them into Western Swing, while at Booker T. Washington High School, students studied cantatas by Bach and Mozart.



The arrival of rock 'n' roll weakened segregation's grip even further. When Chuck Berry appeared at the Municipal Theater, a local white teenager named David Gates—later the founder of the musical group Bread—played in the backup band. One evening in the mid-1960s, a young Native American musician named Jesse Ed Davis stood mesmerized on the dancefloor of the Cimarron Ballroom, his eyes fixed on Robbie Robertson, the part-Mohawk lead guitarist for a band then called The Hawks. And when rock superstar Leon Russell opened the Church Studio in the early 1970s, one of the first records he produced was for The Gap Band, a soon-to-be hit-producing R&B group named for Black Tulsa's famous Greenwood, Archer, and Pine streets. Even the vaunted "Tulsa Sound," a mixture of blues, rock, and shuffle, has a proudly mixed past.

Music in Tulsa has always been more than entertainment. It's a calling and a convocation, a uniter and a bridge builder.

Few knew that better than George Monroe. A survivor of the 1921 Massacre, he went on to become a restaurateur, a Coca-Cola salesman, and a jazz drummer. In the late 1960s, during a period of rising racial tensions, Monroe founded a private club in Greenwood called the Pink House, then the only place in town where blacks and whites could drink and talk together.

The first thing he put in it was a juke box.

Born and raised in Tulsa, Scott Ellsworth is the award-winning and New York Times bestselling author of five books, including The Ground Breaking, which tells how the long-suppressed history of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre finally came to light. He still has his copy of Bob Dylan's Self Portrait album that he bought at Skaggs Drugs downtown in 1970.

THE CHEROKEE FREEDMEN QUEST FOR JUSTICE

BY MARILYN VANN



On war-torn soil in Indian Territory during Reconstruction, thousands of miles from their respective homelands, the heartbeats of three First Nations, the Cherokees, the Shawnees, and the Delawares, and three continents of flesh tones and cultures, Native Americans, African Americans and adopted or intermarried European Americans, were forced to coalesce and weave together a single nation to be known by only one name henceforth: the Cherokee Nation.

I, Marilyn Vann, am a Cherokee Nation tribal member with freedmen ancestry.

The 1866 treaty between the US government and Cherokee nation granted tribal membership to former slaves and free Blacks (generally mixed African-Indian Cherokees) who lived on the reservation prior to 1861 and their descendants. The treaty also granted Cherokee freedmen and their descendants the rights of native Cherokees, including the rights to hold office, equal property rights, and the right to use Federal courts and appeal to the US President if unjust tribal laws were passed against them.

Cherokee freedmen tribal members cautiously celebrate the United States 250th anniversary because the United States encouraged tribal slavery and anti-Blackness. Pre-Civil War treaties required the tribe to return runaway "Negro property" to slaveholders – which increased tribal anti-Blackness.

Furthermore, as intermarriage between white men and Cherokee Indian women increased between 1776 and 1861, tribal laws restricting the rights of blacks whether slave or free were passed – laws which blocked "Negros" from holding office, owning property, etc.

Although between 1866 and 1907 "colored citizens" of the tribe flourished – with many becoming educated, becoming businessmen and ranchers, this largely came to an end due to Federal government pressure on the tribe to drastically diminish tribal government and divide (allot) tribal lands owned in common by tribal members so that the surplus land could be cheaply sold to white settlers squatting on tribal lands and or coming into Oklahoma Territory.

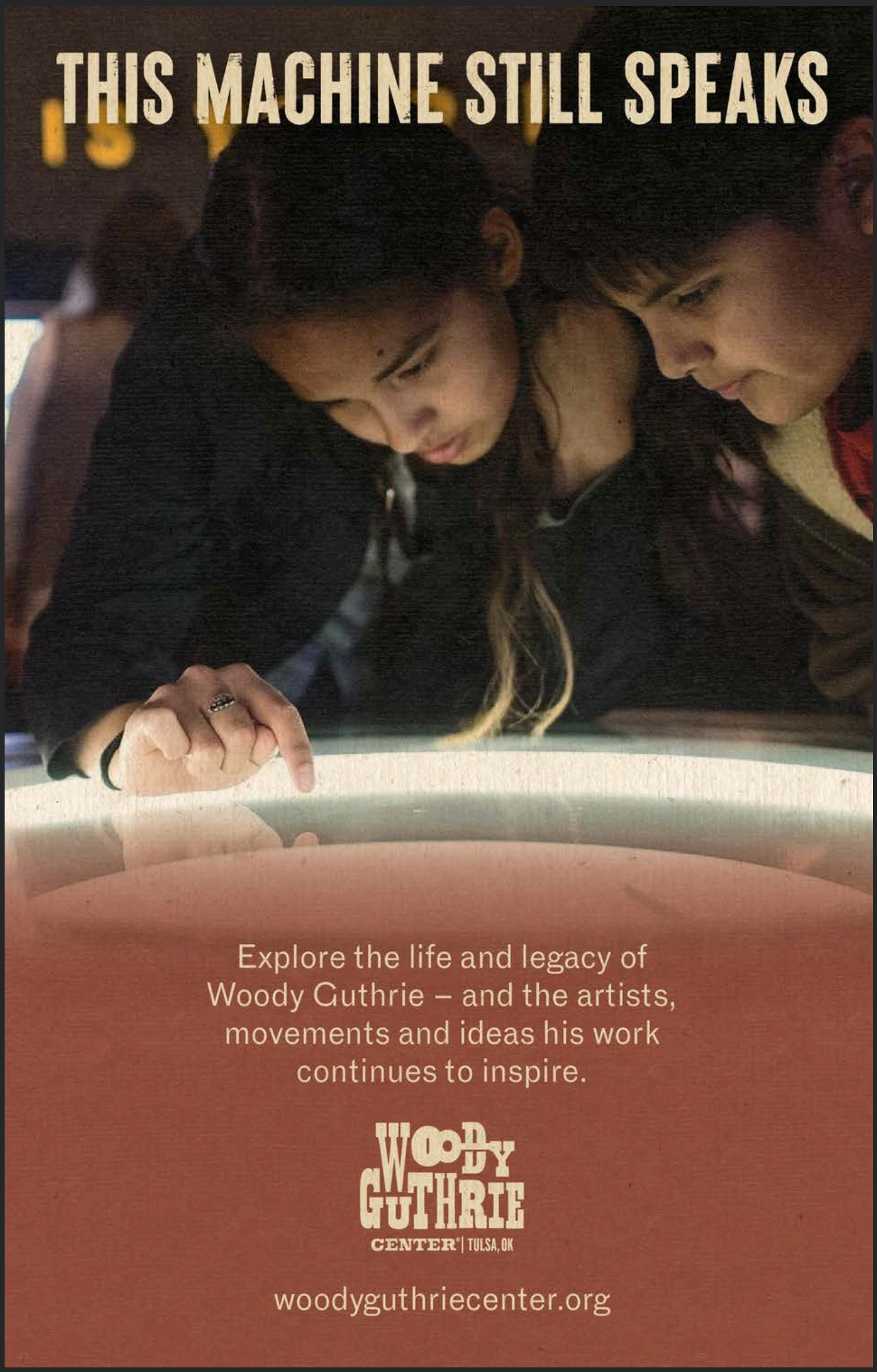
The US government allowed Oklahoma statehood in 1907 without requiring the state constitution to outlaw segregation laws, the first law passed in Oklahoma mandated segregation laws, discriminating against persons with any African ancestry. Oklahoma statehood brought increased discrimination, lynchings and race massacres, such as the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. There were no anti-Black massacres and almost no lynchings on tribal reservations prior to 1907. The Federal government, between 1907 and 1964, provided little protection to its citizens of African ancestry including tribal members, although the US government has trust responsibilities to tribes and tribal members.

Cherokee freedmen received US citizenship through a 1901 Congressional Act -- the same as other Cherokees. After the 1970 Principal Chiefs Act was passed and Cherokees could again elect principal chiefs the US government did not ensure that the tribe registered freedmen and treat freedmen descendants equally in accordance with 1866 treaty.

Only after years of Federal and tribal litigation, appeals for Congressional investigations and legislation, and organizing and unity between freedmen and freedmen supporters both tribal and non-tribal were Cherokee freedmen descendants able to exercise their 1866 treaty rights to again fully register in the tribe, vote, hold office, and receive services such as healthcare the same as other tribal members.

As Cherokee freedmen and descendants have helped build both the Cherokee nation and the United States thru military service, as educators, lawmakers, and thru community service we foresee that they will continue to serve both the United States and the tribe as loyal citizens.

Marilyn Vann is a community organizer and culture bearer who has been a key voice for the Black Cherokee community, which in a landmark 2021 ruling by the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court, were granted the legal right to tribal citizenship.


THIS MACHINE STILL SPEAKS
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movements and ideas his work
continues to inspire.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exciting program is presented in connection with "Of the People: The Smithsonian Festival of Festivals," a series of programs and exchanges marking the 250th anniversary of the United States and showcasing the nation's remarkable cultural landscape. These programs bring the spirit of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival—the institution's largest and longest-running event—to community festivals in several states and territories.

This project received funding from the Smithsonian's "Our Shared Future: 250," a Smithsonian-wide initiative supported by private philanthropy and created to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary and advance the Smithsonian vision for the next 250 years.

Support for Silkroad's America 250 programming is generously made possible by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, formerly Carnegie Corporation of New York, Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

A sincere thank you as well to our local partners and contributors in Tulsa, including Barron Ryan, Joy Harjo, Jeffrey Tanenhaus of Tulsa Tours, Visit Tulsa's FMAC Team, the Guthrie Green, the Gathering Place, Greenwood Rising, Tulsa Artist Fellowship, the Bob Dylan Center, the Woody Guthrie Center, the Greenwood Cultural Center, the Gilcrease Museum, the Philbrook Museum, and the Church Street Studio. Without you, none of this would have been so possible and so vibrant.

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WHAT'S NEW AT SILKROAD



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