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INTERNATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS CENTER & MUSEUM APPOINTS CURATOR

Bamidele Demerson looks forward to mining historical gems in Greensboro's backyard

GREENSBORO, N.C., (Nov. 4, 2009) — The International Civil Rights Center & Museum (Museum) announced today that it has named Bamidele Demerson as curator and program director. Demerson will be responsible for overseeing the Museum's exhibits, artifacts and educational programming. The Museum, located in downtown Greensboro, N.C., will open Feb. 1, 2010, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Greensboro sit-ins.

"Bamidele has an extensive leadership background in African-American museums," said Melvin "Skip" Alston, chairman of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum. "We received interest from candidates across the country, and Bamidele's proven record for creating relevant and thought-provoking experiences for museum visitors stood out in our selection process. We are delighted to have him on board."

Demerson comes to Greensboro after serving as the executive director of the Harrison Museum of African American Culture in Roanoke, Va., where he planned exhibits and educational programs focused particularly on the history and creative experiences of people in that city. Prior to that, Demerson was curator of education and director of exhibitions and research during a 10-year tenure with the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Mich.

As an anthropologist, Demerson believes he has something unique to offer the Museum and Greensboro. "The international aspect of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum caught my attention in a special way, because African Americans have had a profound impact on the quest for freedom, which has benefitted everyone," said Demerson. "On many levels, Greensboro has always been a part of my consciousness whether reviewing a period photograph or document, creating a new exhibit or examining an historical object. I'm intrigued by the cultural dynamics behind social change, and my anthropological lens is always on."

Demerson brings more than 35 years of administration, instruction, research, collections' management and exhibition development to the Museum. In his visits to museums across the globe, Demerson has observed the practices of other acclaimed institutions and honed his knowledge of exhibit installation, as well as artifact collection and preservation.

"Museums are houses of memory and should help us not only to understand social change, but also make it," said Demerson. "From a curator and educational programming perspective, we have to be careful that visitors appreciate that we are not telling an exclusively African-American story. The narrative here in Greensboro, for example, is about a quest for freedom, and that is a human story."

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Demerson believes one of the fundamental purposes of a museum is to provide service to the community through educational programming, exhibits and archival workshops. He actively worked with principals, superintendents and teachers in Virginia and Michigan to provide meaningful educational experiences for youth.

“One of my favorite things to do is create treasure hunts for kids,” said Demerson. “I purposely don’t call them scavenger hunts because we don’t scavenge for history; history is filled with treasures. This Museum should be an active resource for teachers, youth and the community. It may take a whole village to raise a child, but it takes an entire community to support a museum.”

Demerson’s undergraduate and graduate studies at his alma mater, The University of Michigan, included a concentration in cultural anthropology, as well as a focus on African-American and African studies. While the Louvre in Paris, the Vatican in Rome, and the Ghana National Museum in Accra, Africa, are some of Demerson’s favorite museums, it’s the smaller museums and historic houses he frequents that resonate with him as an anthropologist. His extensive fieldwork also includes expeditions in Nigeria, Ghana, Brazil and the Southern United States.

“A museum should mine its own backyard,” said Demerson. “We have a responsibility to both teach and work in the community; there are gems here in Greensboro that must be recognized as part of a national narrative.”

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum will open Feb. 1, 2010, and function as an archival center, collecting museum and teaching facility devoted to the international struggle for civil and human rights. For more information about the International Civil Rights Center & Museum’s grand opening schedule of events, visit www.sitinmovement.org/savethedate.

About the International Civil Rights Center & Museum

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum will function as an archival center, collecting museum and teaching facility devoted to the international struggle for civil and human rights focusing on the nonviolent protests of the Greensboro sit-ins. The 43,000 square-foot museum is located in the former F.W. Woolworth retail store where four courageous students from North Carolina A&T University began their protest at the whites-only lunch counter.

The Museum complex features educational exhibits, a gallery, auditorium, archival center, and a proposed Joint Center for the Study of Civil and Human Rights.

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum was founded by Melvin “Skip” Alston and Earl Jones in 1993 under the auspices of the Sit-in Movement Inc.

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