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Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture Hosts Real-Life "Great Debaters" on Jan. 19

Event Celebrates Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Inauguration Day

On the 100th anniversary of the first debates between Historically Black Colleges and Universities, The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) will host six college debate teams from across the country to discuss the priorities of the new Obama administration. In celebration of the anniversary, as well as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and the historic inauguration of America's first African American President, **The First Inaugural Debate Series**, will take place **Jan. 19, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.** in Baird Auditorium of the National Museum of Natural History, 10th St. and Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC.

The debate series features six teams comprised of some of the nation's top collegiate debaters including schools with close historical ties to the real-life "great debaters" depicted in the 2007 film of the same name starring Denzel Washington.

Teams participating in the debate include **Michigan State University**, Wake Forest University, University of Mary Washington and the University of Southern California, as well as two schools representing Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Fayetteville State University and Voorhees College. The debates are presented by NMAAHC in cooperation with the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities' Debate Consortium, **with support from the Presidential Inaugural Committee**. The debate consortium was formed to help African American colleges and universities develop the capacity to field high quality debate on crucial public policy issues.

The students will debate some of the most important issues confronting the new Obama administration, from energy and climate change to health care and the economy and foreign policy.

The series will feature three debates lasting approximately 75 minutes each held over the course of the day.

The first debate on energy and climate change has Michigan State going against Wake Forest University, two schools that represent the pinnacle of intercollegiate debate – both having won the National Debate Tournament (NDT) – America’s most historic and prestigious national debate championship – in the last three years.

The second debate features the University of Mary Washington and the University of Southern California arguing health care and the economy. USC was host to Wiley College in the “Great Debate” of 1935 (although the film substitutes Harvard for USC). The most famous member of the Wiley team – the distinguished civil rights leader James L. Farmer Jr. – concluded his long career as a professor of history at the University of Mary Washington.

The third debate on foreign policy features Fayetteville State University vs. Voorhees College, two HBCUs committed to making the virtues of a debate education central to their educational mission. On the 100th anniversary of the first intercollegiate debates between HBCUs it is fitting that these two institutions are leading the charge to revitalize debate among the nation’s HBCUs.

Debate schedule:

Debate #1: Energy and Climate Change, 9:30 – 11am: Michigan State vs. Wake Forest

Debate #2: Health Care and the Economy, 11:30am – 1pm: University of Mary Washington vs. University of Southern California

Debate #3: Foreign Policy, 2 – 3:30pm: Fayetteville State University vs. Voorhees College

In addition to the debate series, NMAAHC will host an open house for the exhibitions *Road to Freedom: Photographs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1956–1968* and *After 1968: Contemporary Artists and the Civil Rights Legacy*, on Jan. 19, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the S. Dillon Ripley Center, 1100 Jefferson Dr., SW, Washington, DC. Light refreshments will be served and NMAAHC Chief Curator Jacquelyn D. Serwer will lead a tour of the exhibitions at 1 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture was established in 2003 by an Act of Congress, making it the 19th Smithsonian Institution museum. It is the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, art, history and culture. The Smithsonian Board of Regents, the governing body of the Institution, voted in January 2006 to build the museum on a five-acre site on the National Mall. The Constitution Avenue site is adjacent to the Washington Monument and across the street from the Smithsonian’s National Museum

of American History. For more information about the museum, please visit nmaahc.si.edu or call Smithsonian information at (202) 633-1000, (202) 633-5285 (TTY).

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