Background

- **The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community (Bridgeport, Connecticut)**

  Founded in 2009, The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community, Inc. owns the Mary & Eliza Freeman Houses (circa 1848) in Bridgeport, CT’s South End. The homes, under restoration (with support from the CT Department of Economic and Community Development, the National Park Service, HUD, the City of Bridgeport, the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation CT and donations) are listed on the National Register of Historic Places for significance to African Americans and women. Leveraging restoration of the Freeman Houses, the Center plans to create a national African American historic site consisting of a museum, education and digital research center, and housing. Our mission is to restore, preserve, and ensure the viability of the Freeman Houses; teach the history of Connecticut African Americans; revitalize the surrounding community; and facilitate the preservation and revitalization of other African American, and greater Bridgeport historic/preservation communities. Our work is driven by commitment to preserving African American historic places, empowering Black and Indigenous people by restoring their narratives, healing through history; and a commitment to Preservation-based Equitable Development. It is also driven by love of our culture, our story, our neighbors; and the belief that even the most marginalized deserve resources to narrate their own stories, in community, on land they deem hallowed ground. The Center is mission-driven and works to accomplish a sequence of strategic priorities. It is in the late “start-up” phase.

- **Little Liberia and the Freeman Houses**

  Little Liberia (known as Ethiope then Liberia in the 1800s), a seafaring community of free people of color, boasted a luxurious seaside resort hotel for wealthy Blacks (cited in a letter to Frederick Douglass), Bridgeport’s first free lending library, a school for colored children, businesses, fraternal organizations, and churches. Of about 36 structures that comprised Little Liberia, only the Freeman Houses survive on original foundations. Mary & Eliza Freeman (of African and Paugusset heritage) were accomplished business women. When Mary Freeman died, the only Bridgeporter of greater wealth was showman P.T. Barnum. The National Trust for Historic Preservation placed the Freeman Houses on its “11 Most Endangered Places” list in 2018. They are on the CT Freedom Trail and were designated one of the state’s first five Sites of Conscience. The architectural legacies of the Freeman sisters, Mary (1815-1883) and Eliza (1805-1862), enabled the memory of Little Liberia to survive into the 21st century. Important archaeological sites, these homes highlight legacies of freedom, entrepreneurship, and social innovation. Little Liberia was an Underground Railroad destination settlement and home to abolitionist leaders of Connecticut’s Colored Convention Movement.

**HISTORIC RESEARCH AND COLLABORATIVE SCHOLARSHIP SPECIALIST**

This position is supported by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. We are seeking a scholar knowledgeable of 19th-century African American history and culture with a resolute commitment to researching and revealing the story of life in antebellum Little Liberia. They must recognize local communities as important to the process of disseminating scholarly information, and bring scholarly contributions related to Little Liberia and Bridgeport first to the contemporary community, and then to a broader audience. The ideal candidate will have demonstrated expertise in African American cultural, intellectual, and social history; and will be knowledgeable about economics, freedom movements, and gender roles in 19th-century coastal settlements of free people of color throughout the Black Atlantic world. The successful candidate should be prepared to present summaries and interpretation of research findings, strengthen the interpretive and pedagogical aspects of programs, and explore the intersection of ethnic, cultural, and spatial identity in this 19th-century Indigenous and African American settlement.
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A unique, robust, and mandatory Professional Development Opportunity is embedded within the scope of this position. The Freeman Center will partner with Dr. Jamila Moore-Pewu (Assistant Professor of African Diasporic Digital and Public Humanities, University of Maryland, College Park) and the Digital Ethnic Futures Consortium (DEFCon) to provide professional development, project support, and mentorship specifically designed for and with the successful candidate, building on their background and proficiencies. DEFCon is a digital humanities research and teaching community for ethnic studies fields, supported by a $3 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This unique approach will provide skills needed for the Historic Research and Collaborative Scholarship Specialist to craft innovative research and pedagogical experiences focused on Bridgeport, Connecticut, incorporating the broad fields of digital humanities and digital studies. This cultivation and training will place the Specialist at the forefront of the next generation of Digital Humanities practitioners and give them skills needed to help accomplish these priorities over time, in phases:

1. **Conduct/coordinate the preliminary research and planning needed to ensure that initial public interpretive programs are in place when the site opens to the public in 2025:**
   - Provide research that informs the interior design of the Mary Freeman House, a duplex that will depict the life of Mary Freeman and her tenant, a minister.
   - Identify, research, and contextualize relevant archival documents, historic records, and archaeological artifacts and features.
   - Rely upon primary source documents, and archival partnerships to showcase documents, images, and artifacts relevant to Little Liberia’s population and its subsequent spatial identity.
   - Advise and consult on exhibitions, walking/garden tours, and interpretive signage and brochures.

2. **Write/co-author books and publications about Little Liberia, the Freeman Houses and related topics for publication by the Freeman Center, drawing on existing scholarship and new scholarship as it emerges. Overarching themes:**
   - Documentation of life, history and culture in Little Liberia
   - Indigenous & African American Identities in Little Liberia: Origins & Evolution
   - The Black Atlantic World
   - The History of African Americans in Bridgeport, Connecticut

3. **Generate new scholarship**
   - Design and execute research projects pertaining to the history of African Americans in Bridgeport.
   - Identify/obtain archival materials that will be publicly available for future educational purposes.
   - Contribute to a community-centered research praxis.
   - Lay the foundation for Digital Humanities collaboration.
   - Keep abreast of developments in digital research and applications to public humanities and fields outside the academy.

4. **Develop Institutional Partnerships and Outreach**
   - Build partnerships with other providers of African American history content including: nonprofits, colleges and universities, museums and historic sites, adult learning organizations, corporations and government agencies.
   - Extend the Freeman Center’s national and international reach by organizing and managing scholar conferences.
   - Plan and coordinate collaborative research projects with: 1) Researchers, archivists, and local historians already studying Little Liberia; 2) Museum curators and museum educators offering Little Liberia content; 3) Historical societies, libraries, and local colleges.
   - Participate in strategic planning of the Freeman Center and its Public History Institute: Design (collaborative research and study programs for public historians and history enthusiasts).
   - Facilitate research and community education about Little Liberia’s historical and archaeological resources.
   - Develop popular research projects designed to provide meaningful opportunities for collaboration between those who study Little Liberia and those who live, work, worship, and enjoy recreation there.
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Specific Duties & Responsibilities

- Play a key role in conducting archival research.
- Identify and pursue areas of archival research related to: Archaeology at the Freeman Houses, Little Liberia, Mary & Eliza Freeman, local foodways, Little Liberia genealogies, and the Golden Hill Paugussets - to broaden our understanding of Little Liberia’s relationships to the City of Bridgeport, the Atlantic community of free settlements of color, and the Colored Convention Movement.
- Make thorough and thoughtful recommendations.
- Prepare written reports of research findings and status.
- Provide research support to other Freeman staff and direct research assistants.
- Present lectures describing research findings at community/public programs, as well as civic and professional conferences.
- Present summaries of research findings in creative ways to a variety of audiences
- Provide interpretation and contextualization of historic records.
- Be prepared to use research findings to advise and consult on exhibitions.
- Suggest historical and research-related content for the website, providing relevant documentation, contextualization, and recommendations.
- Collaborate and build rapport with archivists, curators, historical societies, local historians, and university history departments
- Raise awareness of Little Liberia’s significance to archeology and history among scholars and the public.
- Assist with grant writing, fundraising events, membership cultivation, and solicitations as needed.

Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- MA in United States or American Studies (or other relevant fields), a proven record of scholarly research, a strong profile in Public Humanities/History, and historical topics of the African diaspora.
- At least 3 – 5 years of relevant work experience.
- Exceptional analytical, organizational and decision-making skills with a high attention to detail.
- Articulate communicator and active listener with excellent written and presentation skills.
- Ability to effectively represent the Center in all venues.
- Experience organizing workshops and events.
- Collaboration across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.
- Demonstrated adaptability and flexibility, particularly as it applies to time management skills and ability to meet multiple deadlines in an evolving environment.
- Excellent interpersonal skills to collaborate and work effectively within and across organizational and community boundaries, across varied demographics.
- Demonstrated ability to support public and community programming.
- Demonstrated experience managing or advising interns, volunteers, undergraduate or graduate students.

Freeman Center staff have overlapping skill sets. They work collaboratively in project teams of varying configurations, with a designated project lead, to carry out the organization’s work and achieve desired outcomes. All staff are expected to have grant-writing experience and to provide research for grants as needed. Staff must be creative, inquisitive, flexible and observant. We seek original thinkers who enjoy brainstorming and problem-solving with colleagues. Staff must be “hands-on” when needed and give public presentations and workshops from time to time. They should readily offer expert advice and informed opinions while contributing to a collegial atmosphere. Above all, they are experts in their fields. They are leaders and mentors.

Preferred Qualifications (not required):

- Experience preparing exhibitions (online and in person)
- Travel throughout the African diaspora.
- Fluency in a language in addition to English.
HISTORIC RESEARCH AND COLLABORATIVE SCHOLARSHIP SPECIALIST

Salary: $65,000 - $75,000, based on experience, plus healthcare, 401(k)
This position is fully funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation for the first three years.
Exempt Status: Exempt
Hours: Full Time, 40 hours a week, with some weekend and evening work required
Job Location: Bridgeport, Connecticut
Start Date: Fall 2023
To Apply: Cover letters and resumes and/or CVs can be emailed to maisa@freemancenterbpt.org, or mailed to
The Freeman Center; 1019 Main Street, Suite 210, Bridgeport, CT 06604

- The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community has mandated COVID-19 and influenza vaccines, as applicable.
- Driver’s license strongly recommended.
- Background check prior to hiring.
- We are committed to an inclusive workplace and actively seek to employ a diverse group of people who embody our organizational values. We welcome and encourage individuals of all backgrounds to apply and are proud to be an equal opportunity employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to age, ancestry, color, disability, ethnicity, familial status, gender identity and/or expression, genetic information, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other protected status.