

# OXFORD AMERICAN

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## ***No Tears Project Memphis* Unites Community through Music and Conversation**

*The multi-day residency triangulates the American Civil Rights Movement legacies of Memphis; Jackson, Mississippi; and Little Rock, Arkansas. Featured events will include concerts with the world premiere of new music by Memphis native Robert “Bobby LaVell” Garner, as well as conversations with civil rights heroes, Dwania Kyles, Elizabeth Eckford, and Reena Evers-Everette.*

May 11, 2023—CONWAY, AR—The Oxford American, Memphis Public Libraries, and the National Park Service are excited to announce *No Tears Project Memphis*, a series of civil rights and arts education residency events taking place in **Memphis, Tennessee June 10 - 14, 2023**. The events are an expansion of the *No Tears Project* programs that Oxford American has produced since 2017 in partnership with pianist/composer **Christopher Parker** and vocalist **Kelley Hurt**, a native Memphian. Originally inspired by a musical composition written by Parker and Hurt to honor the Little Rock Nine, *No Tears Project* has evolved into a touring outreach program that uses conversation and concerts to engage communities in learning about civil rights.

The **free to the public** events will include a panel discussion, community concerts, and youth education programs that address Memphis’s past and present in the broader American civil rights story, and in relation to the experiences of people living in Jackson, Mississippi, and Little Rock, Arkansas. As a program created jointly between Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, and the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument, the Memphis programs will explore in particular the integration of public spaces, including the experiences of the Memphis 13, and the student protestors from LeMoyné and Owen Junior College that led sit-ins at Cossitt and Peabody Libraries in 1960. Featured guests during the events will include a variety of artists, activists and community leaders, including Memphis 13 member and Executive Director of the Memphis 13 Foundation **Dwania Kyles**; Little Rock Nine member **Elizabeth Eckford**; activist **Reena Evers-Everette**, daughter of Medgar and Myrlie Evers; and President of the National Civil Rights Museum, **Dr. Russell Wigginton**.

During the residency several free community concerts will be held at Memphis Public Library locations including the Cossitt Library and the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library (detailed below). Featuring a seven-piece band led by Parker and Hurt, the *No Tears Project* ensemble will perform pieces from the group’s existing civil rights-inspired repertoire, as well as the **world premiere** of new work by Memphis native jazz saxophonist **Robert “Bobby LaVell” Garner**, and a new arrangement of Memphis pianist Donald Brown’s song “Poem for Martin,” written by **Marc Franklin**. Ensemble members for these special concerts include multiple GRAMMY-winning drummer **Brian Blade**, in addition to Memphis natives and long-time residents, including **Rodney Jordan** (bass), **Robert “Bobby LaVell” Garner** (tenor saxophonist and son of Beale Street Walk of Fame musician Robert “Honeymoon” Garner), **Marc Franklin** (trumpet), and **Chad Fowler** (alto saxophone). Also joining the ensemble is author and poet **Treasure Shields Redmond**, and dancer **Ashley Tate**.

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The *No Tears Project Memphis* residency is made possible by a consortium of generous funders led by the **National Park Service's Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative, Jefferson National Parks Association, Memphis Library Foundation, Stella Boyle Smith Trust, and Liz Armstrong.**

Additional support is provided by the **National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis 13 Foundation, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument, Historic Clayborn Temple, and Memphis Jazz Workshop.**

**View a detailed listing of dates, times, and event locations below. For more information, visit [www.OxfordAmerican.org/NTP-MEMPHIS](http://www.OxfordAmerican.org/NTP-MEMPHIS).**

"It's an honor to do this work with these people and organizations in Memphis in the footsteps of so many giants of the Civil Rights Movement," said Ryan Harris, *No Tears Project* Director and consultant to Oxford American. "We sincerely hope that the dialogue created through this music and these conversations can play a small role in forging a deeper understanding of each other with the goal of creating a better future."

"We are so excited to have the *No Tears Project* come to Memphis. Given our city's history in the Civil Rights Movement and the Cossitt Library's place in history when it comes to the desegregation of public libraries, it is fitting that it will be the location for this event," said Memphis Public Libraries Director Keenon McCloy.

"It's no surprise that the Evers household was constantly filled with music: from Miss Myrlie teaching piano lessons to neighborhood children, to Medgar joyfully dancing to the Twist with the kids," said Keena Nichelle Graham, Superintendent of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument. "Now, music from the *No Tears Project* will heal those hearts that were broken by the deaths of great leaders such as Medgar Evers and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and by the deaths of unknown or little known, but no less loved warriors of justice."

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referenced Motown music as 'emotional integration,'" said Robin White, Superintendent of Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site. "I concur, music is a significant part of humanity. It has the capacity to merit profound intangible concepts. *No Tears Project* incites universal harmony consistently merging at the intersections of hope, faith, love and evolution."

## **EDUCATION CONCERT**

**Saturday, June 10, 2023 @ 12:00 pm CST**

**Cossitt Library**

**Free to the public**

**Seating is limited - [register here](#)**

A 60-minute education concert for youth and families featuring *No Tears Project* ensemble members. The artists will play short selections of music interspersed with dialogue that highlights key moments and people from Memphis, Little Rock, and Jackson involved with the civil rights movement.

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## **COMMUNITY CONCERT**

Saturday, June 10, 2023 @ 7:30 pm CST

Cossitt Library

Free to the public

Seating is limited - [register here](#)

A 90-minute concert from the *No Tears Project* ensemble led by **Christopher Parker** (piano) and **Kelley Hurt** (voice). The band will perform the world premiere of new works written by and in collaboration with Memphis artists, including saxophonist **Robert “Bobby LaVell” Garner**. A new arrangement of Memphis pianist **Donald Brown**’s song “Poem for Martin,” written by **Marc Franklin**, as well as selections previously written by **Oliver Lake**, Parker, and Hurt, in honor of the Little Rock Nine will also be performed with poetry accompaniment by **Treasure Shields Redmond**, and dance by **Ashley Tate**.

## **COMMUNITY CONCERT**

Sunday, June 11, 2023 @ 2:00 pm CST

Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library

Free to the public

Seating is limited - [register here](#)

A reprise performance of the same 90-minute program from Saturday June 10, designed to serve additional Memphis community members.

## **MUSIC WORKSHOP**

Monday, June 12, 2023 @ 11:00 am CST

Memphis Jazz Workshop

*Program open to Memphis Jazz Workshop Students only*

A music workshop with No Tears Project ensemble members in-classroom at Memphis Jazz Workshop. This event is limited to students at Memphis Jazz Workshop.

## **RECOGNITION BEFORE RECONCILIATION**

Tuesday, June 13, 2023 @ 6:00 pm CST

Cossitt Library

Free to the public

Seating is limited - [register here](#)

A panel discussion featuring civil rights heroes and activists including Memphis 13 member and daughter of Rev. Samuel Billy Kyles **Dwania Kyles**; Little Rock Nine member **Elizabeth Eckford**; and activist **Reena Evers-Everette**, daughter of Medgar and Myrlie Evers. **Dr. Russell Wigginton**, President of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis will moderate the discussion. Superintendent Robin White of Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site will provide opening remarks and context for the discussion.

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## ***STORY TIME WITH ELIZABETH ECKFORD***

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 @ 10:30 am CST

Cossitt Library

Free to the public

*Seating is limited and available on a first come first served basis*

Capping the residency in a 60-minute program for youth and families, Little Rock Nine member and heroine **Elizabeth Eckford** will share personal experiences and read from her book, *The Worst First Day: Bullied While Desegregating Central High*. Eckford, who as a 15-year-old in 1957 faced an incensed mob of segregationists and soldiers alone, will inspire the next generation with her words and story.

### ***PRESENTED BY***



### ***MADE POSSIBLE BY***

*Lower Mississippi  
Delta Initiative*



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*Liz Armstrong*

### ***ADDITIONAL PARTNERS***



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## ABOUT THE PRESENTERS

The **Oxford American** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts organization and national magazine dedicated to exploring the complexity and vitality of the American South through excellent writing, music, and visual art. Billed as “A Magazine of the South,” it has won four National Magazine Awards and other high honors since it began publication in 1992. The *Oxford American* is published in partnership with the University of Central Arkansas.

**Memphis Public Libraries (MPL)** create inviting and engaging public spaces that offer programs and resources for all Memphians, and bring people of different life circumstances together in meaningful ways. MPL promote literacy for all, provide economic and workforce development, and create opportunities for the city’s most important asset—its youth.

Medgar and Myrlie Evers were partners in the civil rights struggle. The assassination of Medgar Evers in the carport of their home on June 12, 1963, was the first murder of a nationally significant leader of the American Civil Rights Movement, and it became a catalyst for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Everses exemplify civil rights organizing that combined grassroots strategies with efforts of national organizations to change laws and policies related to voting rights, public education, and public accommodations, to redress criminal injustice, and to contest the systemic nature of racial discrimination. The **Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument** preserves and interprets their legacy and work.

In September 1957, Little Rock Central High School became a symbol for change and a catalyst for transformation in the civil rights movement as the first fundamental test to the United States’ resolve to enforce African American civil rights in the face of massive southern defiance following *Brown v. Board of Education*. Today, **Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site** interprets the heroic story of the Little Rock Nine, the struggle to maintain segregation, and the surging tide of the civil rights movement. Visit and learn how the sacrifice of nine African American teenagers more than a half century ago has provided opportunities and opened doors to those seeking equality—and education—around the world.

The **No Tears Project** uses music and conversation to educate and engage communities with stories about civil rights. As an arts outreach program, the *No Tears Project* strives to create recognition as a precursor to reconciliation. Since 2017, Oxford American has presented multi-day *No Tears Project* residencies with like-minded partners in Little Rock and Fayetteville, Arkansas; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 2023, No Tears Project residencies will occur in St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee.