



News Release

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National African American Leader Joins Effort

Smithsonian National Director and Statewide Leaders Form Allensworth Centennial Committee

Committee Planning Major Centennial Celebration this October

The founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, Lonnie G. Bunch III, will be attending and speaking at the Allensworth State Historic Park Centennial Celebration. Bunch is considered one of the nation's leading figures in the Cultural-Historical community and his acceptance lends national importance to this celebration. Bunch joins a long list of State leaders who have pledged support for a major 100th Anniversary celebration for the town of Allensworth.

"We are delighted that Lonnie Bunch will be joining us at the centennial," said Ruth Coleman, director of California State Parks. "His presence demonstrates that our celebration in October has both national and statewide significance and it will highlight the importance of this historic place."

To celebrate the Allensworth Centennial, State Parks, the Legislative Black Caucus and the California State Parks Foundation, have scheduled a grand celebration at Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park on October 11 and 12, 2008. During the 100th Anniversary celebration, the town will be filled with educational programming, special events and tours, live music and entertainment and great food. Allensworth State Historic Park is located in Tulare County, a short distance west of Highway 99, between Visalia and Bakersfield.

"Lonnie Bunch is a peerless pioneer in preserving and archiving African Americans' roles and contributions to American history. We couldn't ask for a more esteemed scholar to put this African American town in its proper historical perspective," said Mark Ridley-Thomas, chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus, which is co-sponsoring the event.

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“It is only appropriate that we commemorate the 100th anniversary of Allensworth with the full participation of those scholars, activists and leaders who recognize the historical significance of Allensworth and its founders’ vision for California,” said Ridley-Thomas. “This Centennial celebration promises to be memorable for generations to come.”

Lonnie Bunch has been a special friend and supporter of Allensworth since his first visit in 1983, as the Founding Curator of the California Afro-American Museum in Los Angeles. He tells of being “kindly schooled” about the community by Alice C. Royal, who authored the book, *Allensworth, The Freedom Colony*. Royal was born in Allensworth in 1923, the granddaughter of James and Alice Hackett, one of the founding families of the community. When Royal wrote the book, Bunch wrote the Foreword, a part of which is in the next paragraph.

“I find the story of Allensworth one that is instructive, historically significant, highly inspirational, and important for all of us to remember,” says Lonnie G. Bunch. “At a time when most Black Americans struggled to overcome bigotry, poverty and the limitations created by segregation, Colonel Allensworth and the other pioneering settlers of this community refused to accept a life of despair, discrimination and limited opportunities. Because of this, Allensworth became a beacon of possibility whose influence and fame transcended the borders of California. This is a story the nation should be proud of.”

To inspire greater participation and to lend the strongest leadership possible for highlighting this centennial, California State Parks and the Legislative Black Caucus created an Honorary Centennial committee. The distinguished members (biographies at www.parks.ca.gov/allensworth) of the committee are:

Honorary Co-Chair Members of the Committee

Mark Ridley-Thomas, State Senator and Chair, Legislative Black Caucus
Ruth Coleman, Director, California State Parks

Honorary Members of the Committee (alphabetical order)

Susan Anderson, Curator of the touring Allensworth exhibit
Karen Bass, Speaker, California State Assembly
Ken Bentley, Vice President, Nestle USA
Charles E. Blake, Presiding Bishop, Church of God in Christ
Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senator from California
Hardy Brown, President, California Black Media
Willie L. Brown, Jr., Former San Francisco Mayor / Assembly Speaker
Lonnie G. Bunch III, Smithsonian
Wilmer Amina Carter, Member, California State Assembly
Connie Conway, Tulare County Supervisor
Mike Davis, Member, California State Assembly
Dianne Feinstein, U. S. Senator from California
Dean Florez, Member, California State Senate

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John Garamendi, Lt. Governor, State of California
Elizabeth Goldstein, President, California State Parks Foundation
Alice Huffman, President of Calif. NAACP and State Parks and Rec. Commissioner
Charmaine Jefferson, Executive Director of California African American Museum
Bobby McDonald, Buffalo Soldier – Exec. Director, Black Chamber of Commerce
Dr. Horace Mitchell, President of California State University, Bakersfield
Rick Moss, Director, African American Museum and Library, Oakland
Nicole Parra, Member California State Assembly
Curren Price, Member California State Assembly
Charles B. Reed, Chancellor, California State University system
Tavis Smiley, Radio and Television talk show host
Aubry L. Stone, President and CEO, California Black Chamber of Commerce
Sandré Swanson, Member, California State Assembly
Acquanetta Warren, State Park and Recreation Commissioner
Dr. Cornel West, Professor, Princeton University
Mark G. Yudof, President, University of California
Allan Zaremborg, California Chamber of Commerce

The town of Allensworth, located in Tulare County, was a visionary settlement established in 1908. Colonel Allen Allensworth and a group of pioneering African Americans turned dreams into reality one hundred years ago with the founding of Allensworth, the only town in California founded, financed and governed by African Americans. It was the dream and inspiration of a small group of people looking for a better life, a place to live in a self-sufficient environment free from discrimination, a place where they could be in charge of their own destinies.

About the Allensworth Restoration

Since 1985, California State Parks has spent over \$9.4 million for reconstruction, restoration, furnishings and infrastructure at the historic park. Extensive road, utility and other infrastructure improvements have been made. More than 22 different structures have been reconstructed or restored, to include the historic Baptist church, the Hackett house, Hackett barn, Ashby house and barn, Johnson Bakery/residence, the Carter Livery Stable and the historic hotel. Today, a walk through this town is an experience in turning back the clock, because one sees much of this restored community as it appeared in the early 1900s.

About the National Museum of African American History and Culture

The National Museum of African American History and Culture was created in 2003 by an Act of Congress, established as part of the Smithsonian Institution. 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 Constitution Avenue adjacent to the Washington Monument and across the street from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. The new museum, the Smithsonian's 19th, will be the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation

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of African American Life, art, history and culture. It is expected to be open in 2015. Lonnie Bunch III is the Founding Director of this museum.

Additional information on the Allensworth Centennial celebration can be accessed through the State Parks' website at <http://www.parks.ca.gov/allensworth>.

Other contacts:

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The California Black Media Association (CBM) has signed on to celebrate and document the Allensworth centennial event. CBM is a statewide Black-owned print media consortium that reaches California's 2.5 million African-Americans every week. These outlets are located in 18 of the 58 counties where over 92% of all Black voters are active in state and local politics.