



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Historians to Illuminate African-Heritage Advancement in Gilded Age Rhode Island**

NEWPORT, R.I. – It’s a little-known part of Newport’s multifaceted history: During the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, people in the substantial African-heritage community here helped to lay the foundations for abolition, emancipation and the civil rights movement.

Rhode Island Black Heritage Society scholars Theresa “Soni” Guzmán Stokes and Keith Stokes will trace this story from the Free African Union Society founded in 1780 to the formation of Colored Women Clubs during the Gilded Age. The work done by these political and social alliances rounds out the picture of Newport as a slavery port that became a summer resort for America’s wealthy elites.

“Am I Not a Man and a Woman: The Rise of African Heritage Political Identity in Gilded Age Rhode Island” will be presented Thursday, May 16, at 6 p.m. at Rosecliff and via Zoom video. The Stokes’ title plays upon the captions on two historic images that were used by the British Anti-Slavery Society: “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?” and “Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?”

The lecture is the second of three being presented this spring by The Preservation Society of Newport County in collaboration with the RIBHS, a partnership that also produced the current exhibition at Rosecliff, “Gilded Age Newport in Color.”

“Working with the RIBHS helps both organizations to reach new audiences with a story that really needs to be told,” said Trudy Coxe, CEO of the Preservation Society. “Newport was a place of opportunity for African-heritage men and women in past centuries. They were entrepreneurs, skilled artisans and professionals who were active in the community and in social and political causes that still resonate today.”

Theresa and Keith Stokes will draw from the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society’s collections of historical documents, manuscripts, photographs and personal narratives of the era.

More information and registration are available at [www.newportmansions.org/events/the-rise-of-african-heritage-political-identity-in-gilded-age-rhode-island](http://www.newportmansions.org/events/the-rise-of-african-heritage-political-identity-in-gilded-age-rhode-island).

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The Spring Lecture Series at Rosecliff will conclude on June 6 with "Eclectic and Independent: Black Self-Advocacy Strategies, 1870 to 1930" by Dr. Myra Armstead, the Lyford Paterson Edwards and Helen Gray Edwards Professor of Historical Studies at Bard College.

**About The Preservation Society of Newport County**

*The Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island, is a nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. It is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the area's historic architecture, landscapes, decorative arts and social history. Its 11 historic properties – seven of them National Historic Landmarks – span more than 250 years of American architectural and social development. For more information, please visit [www.NewportMansions.org](http://www.NewportMansions.org).*

**About the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society**

*The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, formed in 1975, is one of America's oldest African heritage and historical organizations and a founding member of the Association of African American Museums. Constituted for the purposes of collecting, preserving, and interpreting materials relating to the history of the African Heritage people of Rhode Island and beyond. For more information, please visit [www.riblackheritage.org](http://www.riblackheritage.org).*

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