

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The Library Company of Philadelphia Receives \$500,000 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities
An Endowed Program in African American History Will Be a Force in the Discipline**

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—January 30, 2014—The Library Company of Philadelphia has been awarded a \$500,000 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to endow the Program in African American History.

Announced last month, the award is one of three Challenge Grants awarded to institutions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the year and requires a 3:1 match. The resulting \$2 million in funding will create an endowment to support fellowships, programs, acquisitions, publications, and administrative expenses for the Program in African American History (PAAH), and provide bridge funding to support these costs while the endowment is being raised. A permanently endowed program will increase scholarly attention to the experience of people from the African diaspora in early America and create a more complete understanding of the origins of our society.

The Library Company's Program in African American History is the only one in the nation dedicated to promoting the study and understanding of African American history, culture, and thought in pre-20th century America and the Atlantic World. The Program was created in 2007 with the support of the Albert M. Greenfield Foundation to formalize the Library Company's pioneering contributions to the promotion of the scholarly study of African American history before 1900 and to disseminate the scholarship produced to an engaged public. This endowment will make permanent PAAH's ability to engender new ways of understanding the history of African Americans, to contribute to diversity within the academy, and to create an engaged community of professional specialists and an educated general public. Says Program Director and University of Delaware Associate Professor Erica Armstrong Dunbar, "This funding will enable the Library Company to realize the legacy of founder Benjamin Franklin and achieve its full potential as an independent humanities institution—contributing to the creation of new knowledge and helping to break down social barriers to participation in this process."

PAAH was modeled on the Library Company's Program in Early American Economy and Society (PEAES), endowed with the help of a 2004 NEH Challenge Grant, for which a distinguished local scholar directs an integrated program of fellowships, conferences, public programs, exhibitions, publications, and acquisitions, creating an intellectual community and research synergies. PEAES has demonstrated the effectiveness of this model in stimulating scholarly attention in a particular field and providing a place for productive engagement.

The newer Program, built around one of the Library Company's great collection strengths and consistently generating an abundance of scholarship, has enormous potential to raise our visibility among new audiences and promote broader participation in scholarly research and in private support for scholarship.

[Library Company Program in African American History](#)

The Library Company houses the nation's most important collection of African American literature and history before 1900. Comprising more than 13,000 titles and 1,200 images from the mid-16th to the late-19th centuries, the African Americana holdings include books,

pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, and graphics documenting the Western discovery and exploitation of Africa; the rise of both slavery and antislavery movements in the new world; the development of racial thought and racism; descriptions of African American life, slave and free, throughout the Americas; slavery and race in fiction and drama; and the printed works of African American individuals and organizations.

With incomparable collections, a stellar reputation in the world of research libraries, a distinguished network of fellowship alumni and advisors, and institutional relationships with a diverse range of educational and cultural institutions, the Library Company is uniquely placed to advance understanding of the lives of people of African descent living in the Americas from the 17th through the 19th centuries and to open the process to a substantially more diverse and inclusive group of participants.

The Library Company of Philadelphia

The Library Company of Philadelphia is an independent research library specializing in American history and culture from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, the Library Company is America's oldest cultural institution and served as the Library of Congress from the Revolutionary War to 1800. The Library Company was the largest public library in America until the Civil War and includes the extensive personal libraries of such prominent early American bibliophiles such as James Logan. Open to the public free of charge, the Library Company houses an extensive collection of rare books, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera, prints, photographs, and works of art, and one of the national's largest holdings of early American imprints. Particular strengths of the collection include economic history, women's history, African American history, history of medicine, history of philanthropy, and visual culture. To find out more, please visit www.librarycompany.org.

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PAAH: <http://www.librarycompany.org/paah/>

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