

Torren L. Gatson

Middle Tennessee State University, Department of History
Peck Hall 271, 2nd Floor; Murfreesboro, TN 37132
Torren.gatson@mtsu.edu
torrengatson.org

Current Appointment

- 2025- Associate Director, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University
- 2025- Associate Professor, Department of History, Middle Tennessee State University
- 2023- Visiting Faculty, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Summer Institute

Education

- 2018 Doctor of Philosophy, Public History
Middle Tennessee State University
- 2013 Master of Arts, United States History, Public History Concentration
North Carolina Central University
- 2010 Bachelor of Liberal Arts, History
North Carolina Central University

Research Interests

19th and 20th Century African American history, historic preservation, material culture, the built environment (housing), Southern history, digital history, and historical equity.

Refereed Publications

Books

Gatson, Torren. *We Built This: The Legacies of Black Builders in the Old North State*. (Advanced contract, UNC Press)

Edited by Gatson, Torren, Tiffany Momon and William Stollo. *Fighting for Freedom: Black Crafts People and the Pursuit of Independence*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2025.

[Link to Book](#)

Book Chapters

Robbins Schug, G., Brown-Jeffy, S., Gatson, T., Hunter, A., & Sohler-Snoddy, A. "Racial equity, ethics, and sustainable futures in anatomical sciences." In S. E. Halcrow, S. Agarwal, C. de la Cova, R. Gowland, & G. Robbins Schug (Eds.), *Bioarchaeology, Activism, and Social Justice: Equitable and Sustainable Global Futures* (pp. TBD). Cham: Springer. (Forthcoming, December 2025).

Gatson, Torren and Tiffany Momon, “The Power of Black Hands: Honoring Black Craftspeople of the Southern Landscape,” in *Georgia in Our Times: Modern Design and Contemporary Lens: The 11th Henry D. Green Symposium of the Decorative Arts*, Edited by Dale L. Couch. Pg 14-29. Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2024.

[Link to Book](#)

Gatson, Torren. “Upbuilding an Inclusive Future: A Semester of Reciprocal Learning,” in *Teaching Public History*, edited by Evan Faulkenbury and Julia Brock. Pg 75-92. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023.

[Link to Book](#)

Gatson, Torren and Tiffany Momon. “Woven into the American Fabric: Black Craftspeople and the Clothing Trades in Pre-Civil War Charleston, South Carolina.” In *Fashioning America: Grit to Glamour*, edited by Michelle Tolini Finamore, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, October 2022.

[Link to Catalog](#)

Articles

Gatson, Torren and Louis Woods II. “To Tighten the Walls of the Negro Ghettos: The NAACP’s Fight Against Discriminatory Federal Housing Administration Mortgage Insurance Policies, 1937-1962.” *The Journal of North Carolina Association of Historians*, Vol 28, (September 2020).

[Link to article](#)

Gatson, Torren, and Tiffany Momon. “Labor or Artistry? Reconceptualizing Black Craftsmen: The Creation of the Black Craftsman Digital Archive.” *The Southern Quarterly*, (November 2021)

Edited series

Guest Editor. “Editors Introduction,” Enslavement and Its Legacies Series, *Winterthur Portfolio* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2025): 1-2. (Forthcoming, February 2026)

Guest Editor. “Introduction for the Special Edition on African American Material Culture.” *The Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts (The MESDA Journal)* VOL. 41, (Summer 2020).

[Link to journal preview](#)

Book Reviews

Gatson, Torren L. Review of *Confronting Jim Crow: Race, memory, and the University of Georgia in the Twentieth Century*, Robert Cohen. *North Carolina Historical Review* Vol. 102, Issue 2. (2025): 218-220.

Gatson, Torren L. Review of *Terror and Truth: Civil Rights Tourism and the Mississippi Movement*, Stephen A. King and Roger Davis Gatchet. *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 90, No. 3 (2024): 654-655.

[Link to review](#)

Commentary and Insights

Gatson, Torren. "Beyond the Fire: Reclaiming Black Craftsmanship from the Ruins of Nottoway." *UNC Press Blog*, 2025.

[Link to Post](#)

Reference Essays

Bynum, Thomas L, and Torren Gatson. "Mitchell, Juanita Jackson;" American National Biography Online, Oxford University Press (2017).

Bynum, Thomas L, and Torren Gatson. "Hurley, Ruby;" American National Biography Online, Oxford University Press (2017).

Public History Publications & Productions

Curated Exhibitions

Fighting for freedom: Black Craftspeople and the Pursuit of Independence, (March 2025- December 2025). Nationally traveling show

[Link to exhibition](#)

Applied Research in Practice (NEH Funded)

Exhibiting the African American Narrative in Virginia City, Montana, An Interpretive Plan

African American Heritage Tour of Alder Gulch and Madison County

Works in Progress

Combating the Politics of Housing Discrimination in a Southern City: Race, Place, and Preservation in Nashville, Tennessee Since 1920. (In Progress)

Gatson, Torren and Sarah Calise. "We are, "True Blue," Too: Civil Rights and Civil Unrest on the Campus of Middle Tennessee State University 1930-1990. (Accepted/ with revisions, *Material Culture Review*)

Professional Reviews

"Black Craftspeople Digital Archive," *Reviews in Digital Humanities* • Vol. 3, No. 5. reviewed by Julian C. Chambliss, Michigan State University (2022)

[Link to review](#)

"Black Craftspeople Digital Archive Q&A Part 1 & ,2" *History@Work*, published by The National Council on Public History (2021)

[Link to Part 1](#)

[Link to Part 2](#)

Previous Academic Appointments

2024-2025 Woods-Cauthen Distinguished Professor of History (Africana Studies, UNCG)

2024-2025 Co-Director of Public History & Graduate Program, Museum Studies, UNCG

2023-2024 Director of Public History (Interim) & Graduate Program, Museum Studies, UNCG

2020- 2022 Adjunct Professor, Wake Forest University (summer)

2019-2025 Assistant Professor of Public History, UNC Greensboro
2019-2025 Affiliate Faculty, African American & Africana Studies, UNC Greensboro
2018- 2019 Visiting Assistant Professor, History, University of North Carolina Greensboro
2017-2018 Lecturer, Department of History, Middle Tennessee State University

Refereed Journal/Press Professional Participation

University of Pennsylvania Press, peer-reviewer
Routledge Press, peer -reviewer
University of Mississippi Press, peer-reviewer
University of North Carolina Press, peer-reviewer
Winterthur Portfolio A Journal of American Material Culture, peer-reviewer
The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Guest Editor Vol. 44 Summer 2020

Public History Refereed Participation

Grant Reviewer, National Endowment for the Humanities
Exhibition reviewer, Preservation North Carolina
Exhibition reviewer, Greensboro History Museum
ReVeal Digital (affiliate of ITHAKA), consultant on “Understanding Hate In America” project
House Party...R.S.V.P. exhibition at Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (Spring 2022)

Professional Appointments

2024- Present Warren Antiques Forum Advisory Committee, Museum of Fine Arts Houston
2023- Present Old Salem Museum and Gardens Board of Trustee, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Education and Interpretation
2023- Present *Winterthur Portfolio* Editorial Board, Member
2023- National Council on Public History Program Committee (annual meeting), Member
2021- Present Co-curator, Exhibition, Daughters of the American Revolution Museum
2020- Present Decorative Arts Trust Board of Governors, Governor
2020- Present Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Advisory Board, Member
2019- Present Digital Library of American Slavery, Board Member
2019- Present Historic Magnolia House Foundation Board, General Member
2019- Present Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Summer Faculty

Professional Service

2025-2026- Professional Mentor, Emerging Professional Networks. World Heritage USA (International Council of Monuments and Sites)

Featured Appearances

Fall 2025 “Curious Objects” podcast, The Magazine Antiques, hosted by Ben Miller
Fall 2024 U.S. Civil Rights Trail, Season 6 episode 2 “The A&T 4 Sit Down”
Spring 2023 “Humanities for Good” podcast, interview with Dr. Anne Parsons
Fall 2021 Classical American Homes Preservation Trust mini-video on “Ayr Mount”
Fall 2020 NC Public Radio- WUNC (station) “The State of Things” (segment)
Fall 2020 ‘YES! And Café’ Podcast, UNCG, episode 12
Fall 2020 UNCG Research Magazine (Winter Issue)
Fall 2020 “Curious Objects” podcast, The Magazine Antiques, hosted by Ben Miller

Spring 2019 “The Slave Deeds of Guilford County,” Guilford County Register of Deeds

Teaching Portfolio

Middle Tennessee State University

Graduate Courses

Essentials in Museum Management

Seminar In Museum Management: Contemporary Issues in Museum Space

State and Local History

Wake Forest University

Special Topics in African American History

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Undergraduate Courses

Topics in American History: The Quest for African American Citizenship

Introduction to Public History

Topics in Public History: Oral History

Topic in African American History: Politics of Urban Spaces

Graduate Courses

African American Material Culture

American Material Culture

Museum and Historic Site Interpretation

The Practice of Public History

Digital History

Community History Practicum

Readings in Southern Memory

Public History Capstone I

Public History Capstone II

Fellowships and Distinctions

2020 Gladys Strawn Bullin Award (Leadership and Service), Nominated

2019 UNCG New Faculty Research Grant (\$10,000)

2018 Minority Dissertation Fellow, Department of History, MTSU

2017 Frank L. Horton Fellowship, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

2017 Public History Fellow In Residence, Spelman College (Archive)

Sponsored Research

Decorative Arts Trust, Prize for Excellence & Innovation. Project: “Black Crafts People Digital Archive Object Database.” Participants: Torren Gatson (UNCG), Tiffany Momon (Sewanee).
Funded amount: \$100,000.00 (November 2023)

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Project: African American Heritage Interpretive Plan for Virginia City and Madison County Montana. Participants: Torren Gatson (historical consultant), Montana Historical Commission, Preserve Montana. (June 2022)

Community Engaged P2 Grant, UNC Greensboro. Project: “Crafting a Community-Engaged Approach: Creating Pathways for African Americans in Public History.” Participants: Torren

Gatson (UNCG), Anne Parsons (UNCG), Omar Ali (UNCG), Charles Denton Johnson (NCCU), Adrienne Nirde (NCAAHC), Angela Thorpe (NCAAHC).
Funded Amount: \$16,000. (January 2021-2023)

New Faculty Research Grant, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
Funded Amount: \$10,000. (January 2020 - June 2021).

Office of Research and Engagement UNC Greensboro. Project: "Transforming the Humanities at a Minority Serving Institution: Funding for Inter-disciplinary Faculty Student Collaborative Groups 2019." Participants: Chase, J. M. (Co-Investigator), Barr, M. (Co-Principal), Gatson, T. L. (Co-Investigator), Pitts, H. B. (Co-Investigator),
Funded Amount: \$9,190.00. (April 2019 - March 2020).

People Not Property Project (UNCG Library). Project: "Slave Names Matter: Digital Archives and Public History in Support of Community Genealogy." Gatson, T. L. (Co-Investigator).
Funded Amount: \$3,000.00. (June 2019 – December 2019).

Scholarly Digital Initiatives

Black Craftspeople Digital Archive, Co-Director and Director of Special projects and Publications. Blackcratfepeople.org

This project operates at the intersection of history and digital humanities by developing a digital archive and ArcGIS map that illuminate the achievements of Black craftspeople from the eighteenth century onward. Through the integration of spatial analysis and curated primary sources, this interactive resource offers a nuanced and humanizing portrayal of African American experiences across the American landscape.

Directed Student Research

Current Students:

Robert Skelton PhD student, UNC Greensboro (committee member)

Lisa Aft, PhD student, UNC Greensboro (committee member)

Felton Foushee, PhD Student, UNC Greensboro (committee member)

Completed:

Dissertation Committee member, Stephanie Haire (Graduate, Doctoral). "Snapshots of Character: Horace Brazleton and the Development of African American Community Identity in Jim Crow Chattanooga." (Finished 2024)

Dissertation Committee Member, Victoria Hensley (Graduate, Doctoral). "State of Emergency": Nashville and the Battle Against Displacement from Urban Renewal and Gentrification, 1950-2017. (Finished 2021)

Master's Thesis Committee Member, Monica Davis (Graduate, Masters). "Revealing Culture and Tracing Change: A Study on Shotgun Homes in East Wilson Historic District, 1988-2018." (Finished 2021)

Directed Student Exhibitions and Projects

- 2023 “If Those Hands Could Talk” podcast, Black Craftspeople Digital Archive
2021 *Sacrifice and Service: Grimsley’s Legacy of Honor* (Grimsley High school)
2020 *More than Just a Home* (Historic Magnolia House)
2019 *Unveiling the Roots of the Penn-Diggs/Pass-Richmond Family* (Historic Magnolia House)

Professional Institutes

MESDA Summer Institute, University of Virginia

Intensive program combining material culture coursework with field research (Summers 2015–2017)

- 2017: “Black Iron from the Backcountry: Enslaved Ironworkers of a Piedmont North Carolina Plantation”
- 2016: “Dr. Who? Apothe-What?: The Birth of Modern Pharmacy through an 18th-Century Apothecary Chest”
- 2015: “In the Shadow of Freedom: Culture and Autonomy through Charleston Slave Badges”

Oral History Projects

- 2019 *Unsung Heroes of the Civil Rights Movement*
http://libresearch.uncg.edu/unsung_heroes/

National Register Nominations

- 2019 *Historic Black Colleges and Universities in Alabama. National Register Multiple Property Nomination and Surveys of Eight Campuses.* Alabama Historical Commission, 2019. Principal Investigator: Tiffany Momon, research team: Carroll Van West, Torren Gatson, Savannah Grandey, Kelli Gibson, Victoria Hensley.

Historic Preservation in Practice

Projects completed at the Center for Historic Preservation:

- 2017 Exhibition design and installation for the Shiloh Rosenwald School Natasulga, AL
2016 Developing an exhibit and panel text for the McLemore House, Franklin, Tennessee
2016 Driving tour entitled “Historic Orange Mound: Past, Present, and Future”
2015 Heritage development plan for Orange Mound, Memphis, Tennessee
2014 African American driving tour of Maury County, Tennessee
2014 Meadow Green Farm, Sumner County, Tennessee Site Documentation
2014 McMinnville Town/Spring Quarry Site Heritage Development Plan

Public History Experience

- 2017 Gallery Assistant, The National Center for Civil and Human Rights
2015 Supervisor of Circulation, James L. Walker Library
2014 Digital Historian, Jekyll Island Oral History Project
2013 Joseph Wilson Memorial Fellow in Public History, Museum of the Confederacy

Presentations

Keynote Lecture

- Fall 2025 “The Art of Making: Embodied Skills, Material Agencies and the Body Minds of Creation,” 2025-2026 Thing Tank Research Forum, The Center for Material Culture Studies, The University of Delaware.
- Fall 2025 “Reframing the Narrative: Black Material Culture and Its Foundational Role in American History,” North Carolina Central University’s annual Distinguished E.E. Thorpe Lecture, delivered at Stagville Historic Site, Durham, NC.
- Fall 2023 “I Made This”: Black Artists and Artisans, Hosted by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation held at the Dewitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, Keynote address “Dispelling One Myth with Two Truths: The Presence and Significance of Black Material Culture in the Building of America.”
- Spring 2023 National Council on Public History keynote address: In the Making: Turning an Idea into a Movement!
- Summer 2022 11th Annual Green Symposium hosted by The Georgia Museum of Art, keynote address "The Power of Black Hands: Honoring Black Craftspeople of the Southern Landscape.”
- Fall 2020 Harvest Lecture Series, keynote address: “Mobility in America’s First Planned City: Understanding Salve Badges and Enslaved Autonomy on the Southern Landscape. (Event held at Davenport Museum & Historic Savannah Foundation, Savannah Georgia)

Invited Lectures

- Spring 2026 The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The MET), Untold Stories: Black Craftspeople in 18th and 19th Century America, moderated by the Michael Garvey Professor of History and Radcliffe Alumnae Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Tiya Miles. Manhattan, New York.
- Spring 2026 Humanities Tennessee, Then, Now, Next: Crafters, Growers, & Revolutionary Ideals, Hosted at the East Tennessee Historical Society.
- Spring 2026 The Historic Annapolis Foundation, Lecture Series, “To Feel the Happiness of Liberty”: Celebrating “Making” and the 250 Years of African American Material Culture.
- Fall 2025 Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), An Evening with the Curators: Fighting for Freedom Black Craftspeople and the Pursuit of Independence, Hosted at Wilton House Museum, Richmond, VA.

- Spring 2025 Northwestern University, “Black craftspeople, a Conversation of Freedom by Design,” Invited by Joshua Crutchfield (professor of record).
- Fall 2024 North Carolina History Center on the Civil War, Emancipation & Reconstruction, Teachers Institute Workshop, “Understanding the Causation of the American Civil War through Primary Sources.”
- Spring 2024 John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute, Forum for Scholars and Publics at Duke University, “Recollections Workshop: Practice, Critique, and Coalition through the Memorial Museums,” Invited Discussant.
- Spring 2024 Diversity in Librarianship lecture Series: “Ubiquitous in Design: Planning, Building, and Launching the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive”, Columbia University (Held at Columbia’s Butler Library).
- Fall 2023 Panel Discussant for “Monumental Progress, the Locating Slavery’s Legacies database” (Hosted by the Sewanee: The University of the South). Provided comments from my professional review of the website.
- Spring 2023 Colonial Williamsburg 75th Annual Antiques Forum- Past, Present, Future. “Fighting for Freedom: Black Craftspeople & the Pursuit of Independence.” Tiffany Momon and Torren Gatson, co-directors of the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive and William Strollo, DAR Museum.
- Fall 2022 “Scale in Vast Early America” graduate seminar at the University of Delaware (Winterthur Program). Invited by Jennifer Van Horn (professor of record)
- Spring 2022 Bayou Bend Museum & Gardens, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, “Contextualizing Enslaved Ironworkers through a Piedmont Plantation.”
- Fall 2021 North Carolina Humanities, “Guide the Way: Traveling the Historic South and The Poetry of Today,” discussant alongside Tyree Daye author of the book, *Cardinal* and teaching assistant professor at UNC Chapel Hill.
- Summer 2020 Old Salem Museum and Gardens, “Salem Presents: In The Shadow of Freedom: The Slave Badge in 18th and 19th Charleston, South Carolina,” Invited Lecture (Through crowdcast.io)
- Spring 2017 Colonial Williamsburg 69th Annual Antiques Forum-American Craftsman: Influence and Innovation (Held in Williamsburg, Virginia). Presentation on “Dr. Who? Apothe -What?: The Birth of the Modern Pharmacy through the Lens of an 18th Century Apothecary Chest.”

Panel Discussant

- Spring 2026 The American Democracy Project & PBS Nashville, “Reflections on Ken Burns The American Revolution Documentary, Tucker Theatre, MTSU Campus
- Spring 2024 National Council on Public History (NCPH), “Teaching and Publishing in Public History. 2024 Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Spring 2023 National Council on Public History (NCPH), “Building Your [Dot] Org: Doing Digital Public History with Black Craftspeople Digital Archive, Nashville Queer History, and Nashville Sites. 2023 Annual Meeting in Atlanta, GA.
- Spring 2022 Organization of American Historians (OAH), “Public History and the Politics of Conversation: Unsung Heroes Project, in Pedagogy and Practice.” Annual meeting held in Boston, MA. Full panel title, “Voices of Freedom: Oral History and the Black Freedom Struggle.”
- Summer 2021 Omohundro Institute 26th Annual Conference, sponsored by the College of William & Mary, “Material World/Virtual Worlds: The Physical and the Digital in Vast Early America,” presentation, “Revealing the Invisible Black Landscape: Spatially Mapping African American Skilled Craftsmen in Charleston, South Carolina through the Black Craftsman Digital Archive” (Co-presented with Dr. Tiffany Momon Sewanee: University of the South).
- Spring 2021 Digital Lagniappe: Conference in Digital Humanities, “Black Digital Humanities” Hosted at the University of Southern Mississippi, panelist.
- Fall 2020 Glen Foerd Historic Site (Pennsylvania), “It’s Our Time: Creation of the Black Craftspeople Digital Archive.” (Virtual event)
- Fall 2020 Association of African American Museums & Emerging Museum Professionals Washington, D.C. chapter: Rethinking GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, & Museums): Exploring Digital Impact and Activism, panelist.
- Fall 2020 Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Tuesday Talk!: The Black Craftspeople Digital Archive. (Virtual event)
- Fall 2020 UNCG Minerva Scholars graduate lecture series, The Yellow Sentinels: A Retrospective on Desegregation and Black Lives Matter Invited panelist.
- Summer 2020 Race and Racism in American History Forum Part II, Panelist (Virtual event at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, livestreamed)
- Summer 2020 MESDA Journal Live! A virtual discussion with contributing authors featured in the *MESDA Journal* (Vol 41).
- Spring 2020 African American Historical Commission “Oasis Spaces Green Book Project” Panelist (event held at The International Civil Rights Museum, Greensboro, NC)

- Fall 2019 High Point University, “A Turbulent Ride, African Americans and Housing, 1865-1965.” Guest Lecture for Professor Paul Ringel.
- Fall 2019 Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) National Meeting “People Not Property: Reading the History of North Carolina Slave Deeds” (Held at The University of Maryland, College Park)
- Fall 2019 Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) “Conceptualizing Black Movement in Charleston, South Carolina: Slave Badges and their Impact on the Formation of Culture” (Held: Charleston, South Carolina)
- Spring 2019 National Council on Public History annual meeting (NCPH), “Early Career Public History Academics: Questions, Issues, Resources,” (working group). 2019 Annual Meeting in Hartford, CT.
- Spring 2019 6th Annual Novem Mason Symposium for Engaged Community Design, “Wanersville, Memory, and Community Heritage Design.” (Held at UNCG)
- Spring 2019 9th Annual Lemon Project Symposium, The College of William and Mary: “Objects and Places: Telling the Truth and its Consequences.” panelist
- Summer 2018 Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Guest Lecture, “Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil: A Conversation on African American Life and Interpretation; throughout Historic Sites and Plantations in the Low Country.
- Spring 2018 Southern Labor Association Conference: “Dirty Work”. Presentation, “The Dirty Work of Black Iron from the Backcountry: Investigating slaves at Vesuvius Iron Plantation” (held at the University of Georgia).

Planning Experience

2023 National Council on Public History (NCPH) Annual Meeting
Atlanta, GA Annual Meeting
Program sub-committee

2022 Preservation North Carolina Black Builders Symposium
Wilmington, NC
Planning Committee

2019 UNCG Conference of African American & African Diasporic Cultures & Experiences
Greensboro, NC
Panel selection sub-committee

2018 Slave Dwelling Conference (5th annual)
Murfreesboro, TN
Programs sub-committee

Professional Affiliations

National Council on Public History
Organization of American Historians
American Historical Association
The Decorative Arts Trust
Association for the Study of African American Life and History
North Carolina Association of Historians
Phi Alpha Theta
Pi Gamma Mu

Certifications

2017 FEMA Active Shooter Training

Technical Proficiencies and Software Expertise

PastPerfect software (museum)
Adobe Photoshop (exhibit design)
Sierra (library resource management)
Wix.com (website design)
Marketplace software (financial budgeting)
Banner software (student access)
WordPress (website design)
ArcGIS
Draw.io
Sketchup
Adobe InDesign
Timeline JS
Canva.com
emaze.com
Over 1,000 hours of work in a library and museum repository

Languages

Spanish: Reading