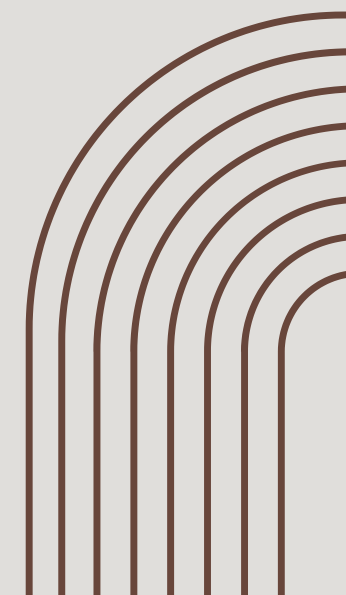




YORK

The Explorer



York and his contributions to the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is not a well known part of American history. When retelling the story of the expedition, historians rarely mention him or recognize him as an explorer who was instrumental in helping map areas of the western United States.

York's story begins as an enslaved African in Caroline County, Virginia in 1784. His slave owner was named John Clark. John Clark's son William Clark and York grew up and played together as children, but as adults, both of their lives would drastically change. York never had the legal right to a last name, so many called him York. As a teenager, John Clark gave York to his son William and made him a personal servant to William. When William Clark's father died in 1799, the twenty-seven-year-old York legally became William Clark's property along with the family plantation of Mulberry Hill, livestock, equipment, thousands of acres of land in Kentucky and eight slaves. Those slaves included not only York but his mother Rose, father Old York, brother Juda and sister Nancy.

From 1800-1802, William Clark and York traveled to the eastern states and Washington to visit President Jefferson. Clark became friends with the president's secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and the two served in the army together. President Jefferson wanted Lewis to prepare an expedition across the continent to the unmapped West and Lewis asked Clark to help him lead the crusade, which Clark accepted. Clark told York that he would be traveling with Lewis and Clark. York became very unhappy because he had recently fallen in love and married a young slave whom he would soon have to leave behind. As a slave York didn't have a choice in where he went or what he was required to do. Family separation was a normal yet equally traumatic part of a slaves existence.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition, also known as The Corps of Discovery, began on May 14, 1804, going by boat up the Missouri River. Both Clark and Lewis wrote detailed journal entries chronicling the journey and encounters with foreign places, animals and dangerous situations. They also wrote about York and his contributions. During the journey York lived and worked as a free person. He helped gather wild plants and vegetables, worked from sun up until sun down to ensure the safety of Clark and the other explorers and he provided valuable input on major decisions affecting the health and welfare of the expedition. In late October, the explorers decided to stop for the winter and build a small fort near the villages of two Native American tribes, the Mandan and the Hidatsa. The tribesmen had never seen anyone like York. They believed that the brown on his skin would wash away. York was named "big medicine," and the people of the tribe admired him.

DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Read the full article here here: <https://history.denverlibrary.org/news/york-american-hero>

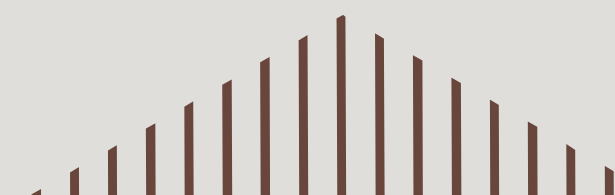




I am honored to be a recipient of the Creative Heights Grant from the Oregon Community Foundation. Over the next year I will work with a team of Black creatives to compose a folk opera that shares the story of York, who was the only Black man that participated in the Corps of Discovery Expedition with Lewis & Clark. This new work will allow us to explore and share the origin story, motivation, challenges, and triumphs of an enslaved man whose life experience was notable but whose voice is a mystery. Most of what we know about York is through the lens of people who believed that he was less than human. We aim to bring York to his rightful place in American history.

Read my bio here:

www.aaronnigelsmith.com





York the Explorer will be designed for performing arts center stages with 500 or more seats, and will combine music, visual art, and projection mapping to create an immersive experience. I will partner with Black poets, musicians, and visual artists from the Pacific Northwest over the next year to compose the work. The Patricia Reser Center for the Arts in Beaverton, Oregon will host the world premiere performance in the fall of 2025.

Artists



Aaron Nigel Smith
Composer/Vocalist



Renee Mitchell
Poet



Ashli St. Armant
Dramaturgy



Benjamin Hunter
Composer/Banjo/Fiddle



Sekou Souma
Djembe



Abioto Family
Visual Art/Poetry

Folk Opera



Music

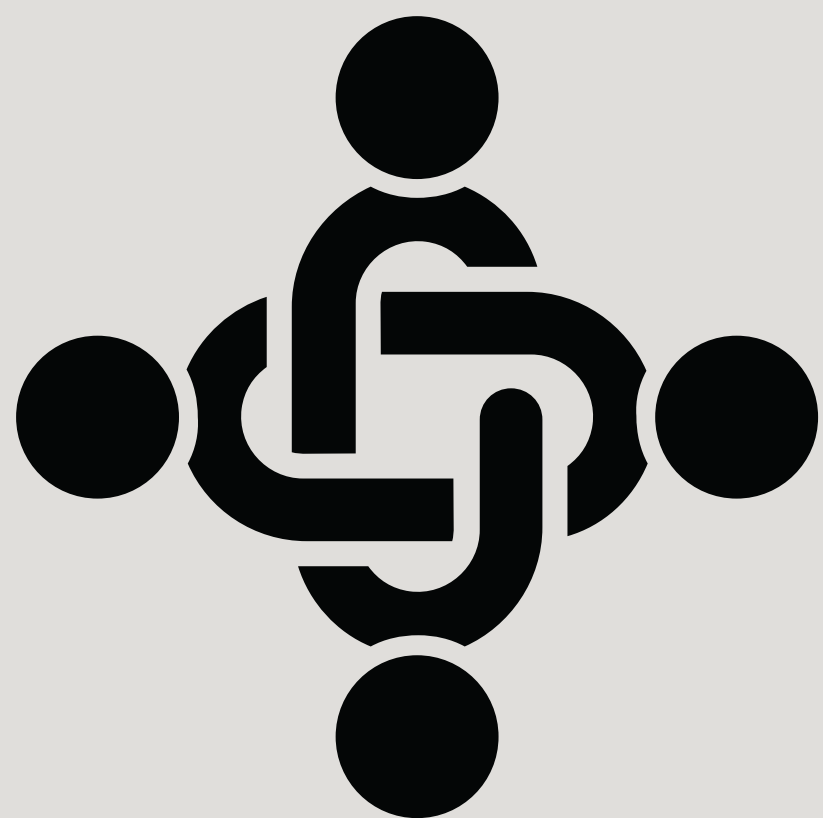
The opera will consist of songs for voice accompanied by piano, banjo, fiddle, and djembe.

Visual Art

Large visual art pieces that depict York's story will be created and hung throughout the performance space.

Projection Mapping

A projection mapping team will take scenic footage from the trail that York travelled, along with original artwork, to create an immersive performance experience.



PROJECT PARTNERS



Funder



Non-Profit



Performance Venue



Agent



Projection Mapping



Label

Timeline



September - December 2023:

- Research
- Interviews
- Artist meetings
- Bring on additional partners

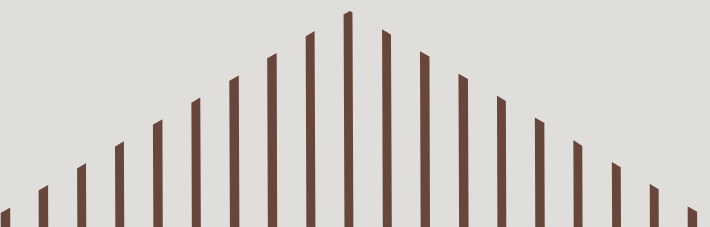
January - March 2024:

- Creative meetings
- Compose 2 Song Sketches
- Plan Creative Workshop
- APAP Showcase

April - June 2024:

- Compose 2 Song Sketches
- 2 Day Creative Workshop
- Set Design Sketches
- Draft of Video Mapping Plan

July - September 2024:

- Creative Meetings
 - Travel the trail/Capture video content
 - Compose 3 Song sketches
 - Next Set Design Sketches
 - Next =draft of Video Mapping Plan
- 

October - December 2024:

- Compose Final 2 Song Sketches
- Complete transitions/Recitative
- Final Set Design Sketches
- Final Draft of Video Mapping Plan

January - March 2025:

- Casting
- Showcase Rehearsals
- Showcase Performance/Focus Group
- Make Adjustments to the Work

April - June 2025:

- Musical Rehearsals Begin
- Event Promotions Begin
- PR Campaign Begins

July - September 2025:

- Performances
- Distribute Feedback Surveys
- Debrief with Partners
- Plan tour

The Opportunity

We would like to partner with West Coast performing arts center as co-commissioners of *York the Explorer*. The world premiere of the work will be at The Patricia Reser Center for the Arts in the fall of 2025. Following this performance I would like to bring the song cycle performance to venues in California and Washington state.

The Investment

\$30,000

The Benefits

- 1-3 Performances of *York the Explorer*
- Workshop &/or School Shows for local students
- Logo and mention on show website
- Mention on radio, television, print ads
- Dedicated social media promotions
- Logo and mention in printed programs
- Access to exclusive video and audio content
- Access to Learning Guides

