

# LIFT EVERY VOICE



Source: *Lift Every Voice*

This 60-minute documentary will begin by examining the history and mythology of York, an enslaved Black man from the Lewis and Clark Expedition whose humanity and life-saving contributions were written into the margins of history. When York and the rest of the Corps returned from the Expedition, Thomas Jefferson awarded them for their contribution. York received nothing and became William Clark's slave again.

Now, over 200 years later, one artist will work with his community to produce a folk opera to educate many on York's continued legacy at the Patria Reser Center for the Arts near Portland, Oregon on October 2025. **With poetic and observational scenes**, we will follow Aaron Nigel Smith and his team by filming behind-the-scenes footage of their production - from workshops, rehearsals and the premiere.



Source: *Lift Every Voice*

The participants include **Aaron Nigel Smith, Dr. Renee Mitchell, Benjamin Hunter, Ron Craig, Ashli St. Armant, Cedric Berry, Studio Abioto, Coco Fox, the rest of the cast and production crew, and other community partners.** We will ask the participants to convey the hurdles and breakthroughs in creating the performance. We'll use observational filming to record their daily lives as they use art to heal and re-examine the discriminatory representations of York and the prejudicial history of Portland as it applies to their own lives. While exploring the participants day-to-day, we will use abstract editing to envision York's past and its connection to the present-day creative team and community.



Source: *Lift Every Voice*

By using **archival images and texts** creatively to explore York's representation as a Black man in the 1800s, we'll edit **sound design and original music** and re-create scenes that represent significant moments in York's life. The **re-created visuals will include outdoor scenes and actors with no dialogue.** We'll use the **participants' voiceovers from interviews to re-tell the story.** Participants will also read poetry, William Clark's journals, and historical commentary to include in the re-creation of scenes that call back to the past.

By the end, we'll show footage from the musical, in addition to events that will take place during the York Festival. This festival is being co-led by Aaron and other community groups. By filming other York-related events throughout the city for that week, we will showcase the community's involvement and reaction to the York Festival and the Folk Opera. Afterwards, most of the participants will be asked to reflect on the production, the performance, the festival and their commitment to telling this hallmark story on race, erasure, and visibility.

---

## Budget

\$287,000

*(including pre-production, production, post-production, impact strategy, distribution and festivals)*