

For Immediate Release  
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**“We Still Here”**  
**A Walking Meditation from Harpers Ferry to Gettysburg**  
**on Black Americans’ Raised Voices and**  
**Perseverance for Justice and Freedom**

**Harpers Ferry, WV** – Philadelphia-based Walking Artist Ken Johnston plans to walk from Harpers Ferry to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania May 18-24, meditating on Black resistance and perseverance for justice and freedom. The theme of the walk is entitled “We Still Here,” and celebrates the strength and resilience of the Black communities of Harpers Ferry, Frederick, Catoctin Furnace, and Hagerstown, Maryland.

Johnston, who completed a walk last summer to Canada from the Eastern Shore of Maryland following the Underground Railroad, said he is excited to visit the area to learn about the important role these unsung communities played in facilitating corridors of freedom for self-liberator.

In choosing to walk, you “walk as if you are kissing the earth with your feet,” Johnston said quoting Thich Nhat Hanh. Johnston added, “When I walk, I try to feel the ‘sole of the souls’ untold stories of the past. I look for what is different, what is new and what is the same. The Black communities of Harpers Ferry, Frederick and Hagerstown have long struggled with segregation and racism, they also have a history of diversity, progress, and activism.”

Black resistance to slavery across the Shenandoah Valley and Western Maryland resembled forms of resistance practiced elsewhere by Blacks in communities along the Mason-Dixon line through the end of the Civil War.

The resistance was aided by free Black communities formed near the border separating free and slave states. Family relationships, church and community, iron forges, and knowledge of the lay of the land all helped Freedom Seekers extract opportunity from it.

This will be Johnston’s fourth walking journey across the Mason-Dixon line to Pennsylvania tracing the footsteps of ancestors (Black and White) who played a role in successful escapes. On this walk, he hopes to meet descendants of the area who can talk about their family’s history to the landscape.

## **Walking Background**

Not new to long distance walking, in 2018, Johnston successfully completed a 400-mile solo walking journey across the Deep South from Selma, Alabama to Memphis, Tennessee to commemorate MLK50th visiting the many places Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. either worked, pastored, or led peaceful protests. Internationally, Johnston has walked across Puerto Rico on the second anniversary of Hurricane Maria following the trajectory of the storm's devastating path, and the North of Ireland symbolically linking its short-lived Civil Rights movement with the U.S.

“My very first walk was across Massachusetts during the summer of 2017 when Confederate Civil War statues and monuments were being reevaluated around the country. As I walked across Massachusetts, I began reflecting on the monuments I was seeing on town commons dotting the state and despite the thousands upon thousands of brave African American men who served in the Civil War there were only one or two that represented us across the breadth of the state.”

## **Walking Itinerary**

Beginning at the former Storer College, once the seat of the Black community in Harpers Ferry, Johnston will walk to Frederick, MD on May 18th and 19th, then turn north to for the Maryland Iron Festival at Catocin Furnace on May 20. Afterwards he'll weave his way across the Blue Ridge Mountains to Hagerstown where I plan to arrive on May 21. From there he'll spend the next two to three days walking to Gettysburg.

## **Community Support**

Johnston is seeking to share his story about walking the Underground Railroad with interested groups. Community connections are also wanted to help with overnight lodging and meals along the way. If members of the community would like to join Ken on the walk, they are welcomed to jump right in for one mile, one block, or any distance they feel comfortable. A [GoFundMe](#) page has been set up to help support Ken's Walk to Freedom journeys.

Ken Johnston is a recipient of the 2021 Mural Arts Philadelphia Fellowship for Black Artists and the 2018 Amherst Irish Association's Margaret Maher Award.

For more information or to suggest an idea, contact Ken directly at [ourwalktofreedom@yahoo.com](mailto:ourwalktofreedom@yahoo.com) or visit his website at [www.ourwalktofreedom.com](http://www.ourwalktofreedom.com)