



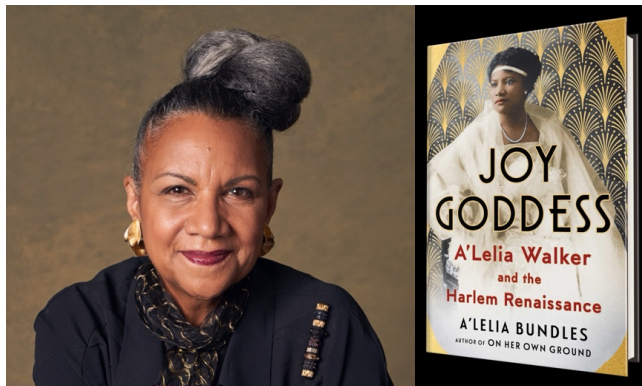
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## Biographers International Organization partners with Troy University to sponsor national conference on Black biography

December 18, 2024 – The joys and challenges of producing biographies of Black subjects will be the focus of a major national conference March 21-22, 2025, to be held in Montgomery, Alabama, and presented by Biographers International Organization (BIO) in collaboration with Troy University.

The conference, *Telling the Stories of Black Lives through Biography*, is believed to be the first of its kind since the 1980s. Through talks, panel discussions, and opportunities to tour Montgomery’s major civil rights memorials, the conference is intended to appeal to writers and readers of biography and history along with teachers and students from throughout the Southeast region.

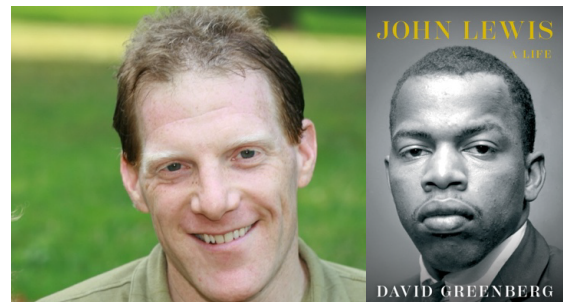


The conference keynote speaker will be A'Leia Bundles, author of *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*, a *New York Times* Notable Book about her entrepreneurial great-great-grandmother and the nonfiction inspiration for *Self Made*, the fictional Netflix/Warner Bros. series starring Octavia Spencer. Her latest book, *Joy Goddess: A'Leia Walker and the Harlem Renaissance*, the first major biography of her

great-grandmother, will be published on June 10, 2025, by Scribner.

She is the founder of the Madam Walker Family Archives and serves on several nonprofit boards including the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard’s Radcliffe Institute, the March On Festival, Biographers International Organization (BIO) and Columbia Global Reports. A former network television news executive and Emmy Award winning producer at ABC News and NBC News, she is a former chair of the National Archives Foundation and a former vice chair of Columbia University’s board of trustees.

David Greenberg will also be a featured speaker at the conference. He is a professor of history and of journalism and media studies at Rutgers University. His latest book, *John Lewis: A Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2024), has been called “panoramic and richly insightful” (Brent Staples, *The New York Times*) and a biography that “captures Lewis’s life, achievements, and times with heart-stopping



precision” (*Booklist*). A Guggenheim Foundation, NEH, Cullman Center and Leon Levy Center for Biography fellow, Greenberg is the author or editor of several books on American history and politics including *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image* (2003) and *Republic of Spin: An Inside History of the American Presidency* (2016). Formerly acting editor of *The New Republic* and columnist for *Slate*, he now writes regularly for *Politico*, *Liberties*, and many other scholarly and popular publications. He holds a PhD in history from Columbia University and a BA from Yale University.

**The conference, to be held at Troy University’s Montgomery campus**, is the brainchild of author and longtime BIO board member Ray Anthony Shepard, author most recently of the award-winning *A Long Time Coming: A Lyrical Biography of Race in America from Ona Judge to Barack Obama*. “In March 21–22, 2025,” Shepard says, “as the nation begins to commemorate its founding, a cadre of biographers and biography enthusiasts will gather in Montgomery, Alabama, to consider this critical question: How can we honestly celebrate the 250th anniversary of the American Republic without reckoning with the role of the slave system and its impact on America today? Montgomery is a symbolic forge of Black lives inside America—where the heat of slavery flamed, and the hammer of civil rights toughened the resolve of a 21st-century America.”

***Telling Stories of Black Lives through Biography*** is open to students, teachers, writers and readers of biography and Black history. Panels will cover issues such as researching and writing about lesser-known figures, the general challenges of writing Black biography, how writing about women's lives is revolutionizing biography, and the craft of biography. Panelists will include noted writers and scholars Rachel Swarns, Kevin McGruder, Hannah Durkin, Tanisha Ford, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, BIO board members Eric K. Washington, Tamara Payne, and Carla Kaplan, and others.

Although BIO's national conferences have occurred over the years on the East Coast, the choice of Montgomery for a conference site was particularly appealing because of its growing importance in commemorating the Civil Rights movement. Conference attendees will be given the opportunity to tour the Legacy Museum and other important sites. The spring of 2025 also brings the 60th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Selma to Montgomery march and the beginning of the year-long commemoration of America’s 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

To find out more about the ***Telling Stories of Black Lives through Biography Conference***, please visit: <https://biographersinternational.org/montgomery-biography-conference/> For further information or interview requests, please contact Jennifer Richards at Over the River Public Relations: [media@biographersinternational.org](mailto:media@biographersinternational.org).

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#### **ABOUT BIO**

Biographers International Organization (BIO) was founded in 2009 to promote the art and craft of biography, cultivate a diverse community of biographers, encourage public interest in biography, and provide educational and fellowship opportunities that support the work of biographers worldwide. Activities include an annual conference, monthly and quarterly newsletters, a series of podcasts, online workshops, one-on-one coaching, fellowships for biographies in progress, and awards for outstanding achievement. For more information, visit: [www.biographersinternational.org/](http://www.biographersinternational.org/).