



Beck Cultural Exchange Center

African American History & Culture

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Public Invited to Black History Month Presentation at the Bijou Theatre ***The Heat of a Red Summer, Knoxville Race Riots of 1919 – 100 Years Later***

(Knoxville, TN) – The public is invited to the Bijou Theatre, 803 South Gay Street, on **Monday February 25 6:30pm** for a special arts and cultural presentation as a tribute to the newly re-released book by Robert Booker, *The Heat of a Red Summer, Race Mixing, Race Rioting in 1919 Knoxville*, originally published in 2001. It is a story rich in human drama, crackling suspense and provocative social insights, that is chillingly relevant today. This presentation illustrates the racial hatred expressed one hundred years ago in Knoxville and reveals the cure for today. The program is jointly sponsored by the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, the Knox County Public Library, and the Bijou Theatre.

In the summer of 1919, Great War veterans returned home. Tempers flared as African Americans and white veterans vied for scarce jobs in cities across America. Known as the Red Summer, racial conflict erupted and many lives were lost. In Knoxville, the death toll remains a mystery. One man, Maurice Mays, stood at the center of the Knoxville Riots in which the National Guard was summoned. One of the darkest periods in Knoxville history, the Red Summer still has much to teach us. What is the answer to racial hatred? What is the cure?

The special presentation will feature music by the Knoxville Opera Gospel Choir, celebrating ten years of concert performances under the direction of Jeanie Turner Melton. The program's selections will include jazz, rhythm and soul and negro spirituals. This unique presentation will also include ballet performances by the Austin East Magnet High School performing arts department under the direction of Malaika Guthrie, West African drum and dance and introducing drama department student Kellen Brabson as Maurice Mays. Award-winning author Cory Hodge will present an original poetic piece written by Dell Ray Adams. From Morristown West High School, Chris Cox and Dalton Miksa, will present "The Cure," an award-winning theatrical performance where the performers travel through a variety of time periods ranging from slavery up to modern day conflict to answer the question, can racism be cured? The newly re-released book will be available for sale and Booker will be on hand to autograph.

On August 30, 1919, twenty-seven-year-old Bertie Lindsey, a white woman, is shot and killed allegedly by a negro intruder in her home. Ora Smyth identified Maurice Mays, as the black man that killed her cousin and the race relations climate in Knoxville took a bloody turn. On March 15, 1922 in Nashville, Tennessee, Maurice Franklin Mays, age thirty-five, was executed for the murder.

According to Beck President René Kesler, "*The summer of 1919 is critically important. The NAACP was formed in Knoxville in early August of that year with James G. Beck, the center's namesake as the first Secretary; the race riots occurred at the end of that month, and just a few*

weeks later women will go to the poles and vote for the first time in Knoxville, including African American Women. History must never be left alone, we must wrestle with it until all are set free and until this world is a better place to live.”

The event at the Bijou Theatre is free and open to the public.

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ABOUT BECK

Beck is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1975 as a result of Knoxville's Urban Renewal projects. The Urban Renewal projects began in 1959 under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949. The projects relocated and displaced many black families and businesses. Much of the heritage of the black community was erased from the map. Except for one or two structures in the city and the historic buildings at Knoxville College, edifices that once stood as monuments to the struggles of early leaders no longer exist. Absent of the establishment of Beck, these places and the people may never have existed.

Beck is the only organization in the region dedicated to local and regional African American history and culture. Beck is the storehouse of African American history and culture and is designated by the state as a primary repository of black history and culture in East Tennessee.

BECK VISION

To be the desired place that people go to learn, discover and experience the rich legacy of African Americans inside a vibrant Cultural Corridor.

BECK MISSION

To be the place where African American history and culture are preserved, nurtured, taught, & continued.

JAMES AND ETHEL BECK

Beck is named in honor of James Garfield (1881-1969) and Ethel Benson (1897-1970) Beck. James and Ethel were two of the most glamorous and influential members of the black community in Knoxville during the period of the 1920s-1960s and were the last people to live in the Beck mansion.