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 If awareness is heightened by the struggles of African Americans – the struggling class in general – if we are illuminating what is happening by the turmoil then maybe that is the positive we can take away from it.  
 Philip Freelon, March 2, 2017



**About the Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum**

The Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum at the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is dedicated to the enrichment of visual culture on campus and in the community. The Brown Gallery supports the Stone Center’s commitment to the critical examination of all dimensions of African-American and African diaspora cultures through formal exhibition of works of art, artifacts and material culture.

**History and Overview of the Stone Center**

The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History is part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a Center within the Academic Affairs Division under the Provost’s Office, we play a central role in supporting the academic mission of the University. We have a commitment to broaden the range of intellectual discourse about African Americans and to encourage a better understanding of the peoples of Africa and the African diaspora and their perspectives on important social and cultural issues.



The Sonja Haynes Stone Center For Black Culture and History  
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This Exhibit is Supported by the Generous Contributions of  
 The Friends of the Robert and Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum  
 The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



**MEDITATIONS**  
*on* **THE IDEA of**  
**SACRED SPACE**  
*The Life and Enduring Work of Phil Freelon*  
**Jan. 28 – Apr. 24, 2020**  
 The Robert & Sallie Brown Gallery and Museum





During an illustrious career right up to his passing on July 9, 2019, Phillip Freelon defied the odds while becoming one of the most celebrated architects in the United States.

He was an accomplished designer and architect as well as a humanist who was deeply invested in exploring and magnifying the connections between peoples' lives and the structures and institutions that translate their hopes and aspirations in material terms.

Freelon's interdisciplinary approach to understanding and reinterpreting the uses and possibilities for the built environment was a central element of his belief that the human condition could be elevated and inspired by structures above and beyond their 'practical utility' or use value. Although one might be tempted to see his approach as 'visionary', it may be more appropriate to see it as

deeply humanistic where concern for the sensibilities of both the cultural and practical exist alongside each other not in opposition, but rather as complimentary and mutually responsive to the needs of the community. For example, one can see this synergy in the two curving walls of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia, where Freelon was inspired by the arms linked together during the historic marches for civil rights. The symbolism is powerful and, at the same time, practically realized in an artistically appealing and unobtrusive manner. In one interview he noted:

"It's important to figure out what are the drivers, the aspirations, the visions of your constituents...We put a lot of effort into listening, listening aggressively, understanding what it is at the root of those institutions. We do a lot of research so we can show what we've done on our own so you're not marching off in design without having those kinds of engagements that really inform the design solutions."

Phil Freelon became an influential voice in the profession and a mentor and inspiration to architects of color, as well as the profession as a whole. When he settled in Durham, he also planted deep and sturdy roots that were apparent when he invested his time and energy in transforming the architectural landscape in cities across the state. I want to emphasize the term "invested" when talking about his service to North Carolina. His interest in doing work that was a true manifestation of his sense of social responsibility and 'belonging' to this state and to the people who inspired him is apparent and, at the same time, inspiring.

Freelon's national reputation also advanced at the same time with a number of groundbreaking projects including: the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco, The Reginald Lewis Museum in Baltimore, The Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, and Emancipation Park in Houston, Texas where his design featured an element highlighting historic Juneteenth Celebrations in Texas.

These exemplary works along with other local and statewide accomplishments distinguish the career of Philip Freelon. He is a true North Carolinian who saw himself as a contributor to something that would be recognized as being greater than himself but indicative of what the individual could offer in advancement of his community. This exhibition is a simple gesture that acknowledges the grace that was so visible in Phil Freelon's demeanor, and the sturdy walls he built to protect his, and our, legacy.



The Sonja Haynes Stone Center For Black Culture and History



Mississippi Civil Rights Museum



Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture

## The Stone Center: Not Just a Building

from Lewis H. Myers

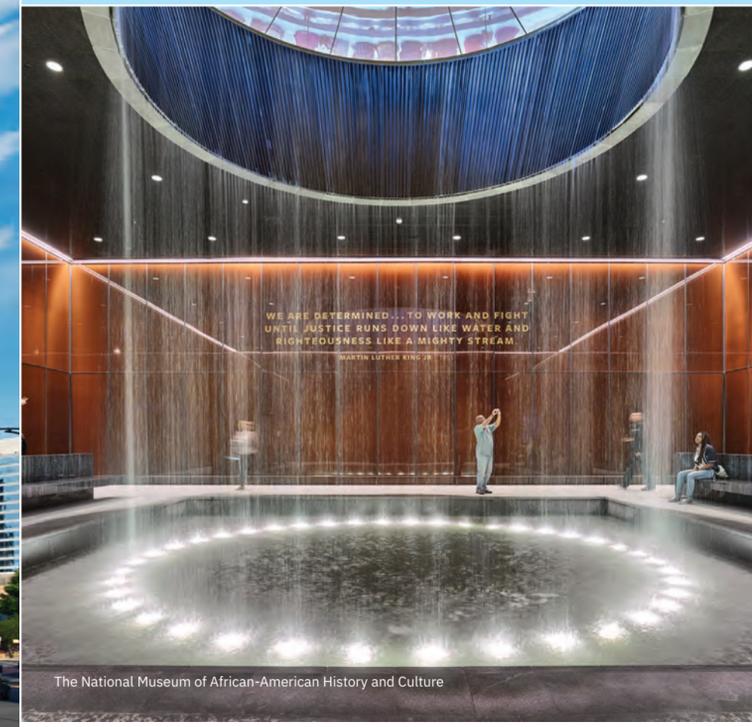
I joined the The Freelon Group in 1979 and had the pleasure of working with Phil for 19 years as Director Business Development and a Principal in the firm. What attracted me most was Phil's philosophy about his practice — "That every person should experience beautiful and inspiring architecture not only when visiting famous buildings, but also in their everyday lives." This was a central theme of his work. Phil took pride and satisfaction in creating spaces for everyday people.

The work was never about Phil. His buildings engage with the community, because he starts the design process with the community. Each project was a singular response to his client's goals and mission. When the project is announced for qualifications, the project team had already begun the research of the particulars of the project — mission/goals/objectives, site, budget, etc. The team's knowledge of the project is where the foundation for a meaningful engagement begins. Phil was the best I've ever seen at client engagement.

He was passionate and compassionate about this project type. He listened. He was patient. He cared. He worked tirelessly. He expected excellence and he modeled it. He was selfless. His ego never got in the way. It was never about him. He knew his job was to bring the clients' visions to reality.

He realized that the building was not just a vessel to house exhibits, collections, books, and classrooms. Therefore the building reflects the program for which it was designed. When you approach the Center you realize that this building is not the usual university facility. You become engaged, before you enter the facility and see the tailored designed building that three dimensionally expresses the history of African Americans with the Diaspora. It has a welcoming interior and yet the design sets a serious tone and enhances the various interactions the Center affords.

The Stone Center was The Freelon Group's first major cultural center. The building resonated with clients and was an instrumental in our being awarded other significant projects that became part of our award winning portfolio of Museum/Cultural projects.



The National Museum of African-American History and Culture



The National Museum of African-American History and Culture