

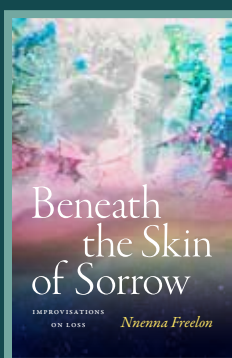
MILESTONES

THE SONJA HAYNES STONE CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE AND HISTORY



NNENNA FREELON 7-TIME GRAMMY- NOMINATED ARTIST PERFORMS AND DISCUSSES HER MEMOIR

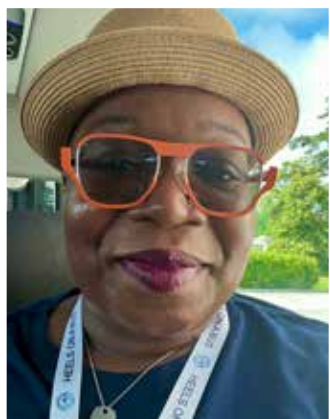
November 6 | 6:30PM
Stone Center Auditorium



Join us for a memorable evening with Nnenna Freelon, 7-time GRAMMY-nominated jazz vocalist, as she shares insights from her upcoming memoir, *Beneath the Skin of Sorrow: Improvisations on Loss*. This event will also feature a special performance.

▲ cont on page 2

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Stone Center Family,

As we turn the page to a new academic year, I'm inspired by the enduring legacy of Black life and the clarity it offers for building a better world. The world continues to challenge us, but our legacy—as thinkers, artists, organizers, and builders—reminds us that the power of community and collective vision is a force unmatched.

In every corner of the Stone Center's work—research, teaching, public programming—we are reminded that meaningful change takes vision, courage, and community.

This year, we're doubling down on our mission to advance Black life and thought in ways that reflect the richness of our past and the urgency of our present. Whether you've joined us in person, engaged from afar, or championed our work in quiet and generous ways, know that you are part of this dynamic and evolving story.

In all things, we step forward with a bold imagination, grounded in history and energized by possibility. I hope you'll join us as partners as we transform our programs, transform the experiences of everyone who enters our historic space, and transform the broader learning

environment of which we are a part.

With your support, we will expand our reach, deepen our impact, and ensure that the Stone Center remains a dynamic home for engaged scholarship, cultural expression, and generative collaboration.

Let's make this year one of deep impact, shared joy, and continued transformation.

In shared purpose,

Dr. Rhonda F. Williams

NNENNA FREELON, 7-TIME GRAMMY- NOMINATED ARTIST AND AUTHOR DISCUSSES HER MEMOIR

November 6 | 6:30PM |
Stone Center Auditorium

▼ cont from front page

Dr. Maya Angelou once said of **Nnenna Freelon**, “The instrument that Ms. Freelon displays includes the audible...and the palpable, mighty wealth of soul.” That wealth of soul flows through Freelon’s debut book which is a heartfelt collection of stories, poems, and songs born from unimaginable loss and powerful renewal. In just six months, she lost her beloved husband, renowned architect Phil Freelon, her sister Debbie, and the family’s loyal dog, Basie. Grief could have silenced her, yet she chose the improvisational tools she learned as a jazz musician to help navigate her losses.

“I had to find my voice again,” Freelon says. “This time, it came through the lens of grief—but also through deep love, memory, and the desire to sojourn creatively with loss.”

Freelon has spent her nearly 40-year career moving audiences around the world. She’s also a producer, arranger, arts education advocate, and the award-winning host of the podcast *Great Grief with Nnenna Freelon*. This chapter of her life is about granting permission to be in a relationship with her broken heart. And it’s rooted in a desire to connect through shared humanity.

Improvisation, a cornerstone of jazz music, became not just a musical idea, but a life practice. Freelon leaned into uncertainty, made space for sorrow, and used creativity as a tool for survival. *Beneath the Skin of Sorrow* is the book she wishes she had during the earliest days of grief. It’s also a love letter—to Phil, to her sister and to anyone learning to live with loss.

As Dr. Angelou also wrote, “the durable beauty of her (Nnenna’s) voice makes the listener remember having heard such transparent talent.” That voice now shines not just in music—but in prose, poetry, and truth.

Beneath the Skin of Sorrow will be released on October 21, 2025.

PULITZER PRIZE-WINNER, SALAMISHAH TILLET TO DELIVER THE 2025 STONE MEMORIAL LECTURE

November 11
6:30PM
Stone Center
Auditorium

Salamishah Tillet is the Distinguished Professor of Africana Studies and Creative Writing at Rutgers University, Newark, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning contributing critic-at-large at *The New York Times*. She is the author of *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* and *In Search of the Color Purple: The Story of an American Masterpiece*, and currently completing the book, *All The Rage: Nina Simone and The World She Made*.

In 2025, Tillet received the Emerson Collective Fellowship for leaders taking on a hyperlocal project to help their community come together and solve complex problems, and The Gordan Parks Foundation’s Genevieve Young Fellowship in Writing.

Her writing has also appeared in *Aperture*, *The Atlantic*, *Elle*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *The Nation*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *Time* and work has been supported by the Carnegie Foundation, the Lindback Foundation, the Whiting Foundation, the Schomburg Center for Scholars-in-Residence, the Institute for Citizens and Scholars, and the Mellon Foundation.



She received her Bachelor of Arts in English and African American Studies and graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania. She has a Master of Art in Teaching in English from Brown University, and a Master of Art in English, and her Ph.D. is in American Studies from Harvard University. She holds an honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts from Moore College of Art and Design.

In 2003, she and her sister, Scheherazade Tillet, founded *A Long Walk Home*, an arts organization that empowers young people to end violence against girls and women.

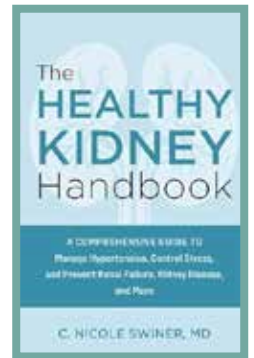


BOOK TALK BY DR. NICOLE SWINER, PHYSICIAN AND INTERNATIONAL BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

September 8 | 3:30PM | Stone Center Library

C. Nicole Swiner, MD also known as the public figure, “DocSwiner”, presents her latest book, *A Healthy Kidney: A Comprehensive Guide to Manage Hypertension, Control Stress, and Prevent Renal Failure, Kidney Disease, and More.*

This book offers a practical and informative way to manage kidney wellness and tangible steps to maintaining healthy kidney function. In an ever-changing world of how we approach health, nutrition, and an increase in weight loss methods, Dr. Swiner aims to inform readers on everyday practices they can do for preventive kidney wellness and to increase awareness of evidence-based research. It presents an opportunity for an engaging perspective and a self-reflection moment to understanding one’s own personal routine for healthier kidneys.



As an international best-selling author, Dr. Swiner seeks to continue the pathway of providing readers a greater sense of self-awareness when it comes to making informed decisions about their personal health. In addition to her publications, she is the Founder of Serenity Hydration & Wellness, PLLC where she is able to serve clients in North Carolina and South Carolina. She also serves as a Black Girl Vitamins Medical Advisor and is a trusted medical professional featured in mainstream media.



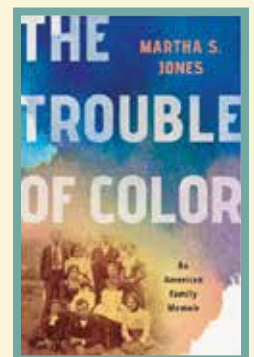
BOOK TALK BY MARTHA JONES, HISTORIAN AND AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

September 18 | 5:30PM | Hitchcock Room

Martha S. Jones is a historian, legal scholar, and award-winning author whose work explores the politics, culture, and poetics of Black America.

Her writing blends rigorous research with personal storytelling, most recently in *The Trouble of Color: An American Family Memoir* (2025), which recounts her personal journey with race and color through the story of her ancestors’ generations.

At Johns Hopkins University, she teaches for the department of history and the SNF Agora Institute and directs the Hard Histories Project, which examines the university’s ties to slavery and racism. A dynamic public intellectual, Jones continues to challenge and inspire through her scholarship, teaching, and cultural engagement.



FALL 2025 EXHIBITION: *THE BOOK OF MARK* BY ARTIST MARK ANTHONY BROWN JR., CURATED BY MING JOI

September 25 | 6:30PM | Brown Gallery

About the Exhibition:

God forgives; man may not. *The Book of Mark* traverses identity, semiotics, religion, and spirituality. Contending with morality, Mark Anthony Brown Jr. employs photography, drawing, printmaking, and installation to further infer markers of manhood, syncretize modes of divination and grapple with the ball and chain games of social progress. A Midwesterner rooted in the American South, Brown considers how our landscape connects one to spirit and ancestry. All of the elements are present—the artist looks in all directions, through space and time, employing urban nkisis, cosmographic drawings, bricolage, and altar work to transmute contested histories and subjugated knowledge. The solo exhibition, *The Book of Mark*, curated by Ming Joi at the Stone Center presents a unique collection of contemplative works, expanding Brown's photo-based practice multidimensionally into sculpture and time-based media.

About the Artist:

Mark Anthony Brown Jr. is a journeyman. An itinerant approach to living has influenced how he has chosen to navigate the current social landscape and indelibly his art practice. He currently lives and works between Cincinnati, Durham, Atlanta and now, Ithaca, New York. His practice is research driven and interdisciplinary; with a photographic sensibility at its foundation, it spans sculpture, drawing and printmaking with interests in

vernacular aesthetic practices and sensibilities, critical engagements with the vernacular landscape and the manifestation of Afrikan cultural retentions in the diaspora.

Mark received a Bachelor of Science Technology from Bowling Green State University and a Master of Fine Art in Studio Art from UNC-Chapel Hill, where he was a fellow in Museum Practice at The Ackland Art Museum. His work has been exhibited variously, including at the Cincinnati Art Museum and The Contemporary Art Museum in Raleigh, NC. Mark has received fellowships and awards including the Emerging Lens Fellowship from ArtWORKS Projects in Chicago and The Nexus Grant from Atlanta Contemporary. He was a 2024 resident at Shandaken: Storm King and 2025 resident at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. In conjunction with his art practice, Mark is also an archivist and an educator, currently serving as a Visiting Lecturer at Cornell University as a Strauch Early Career Fellow in Art.

About the Curator:

Ming Joi Washington was born prematurely and remains ahead of her time. She is a poet, curator, and critic engaged with Black cultural traditions. A proud Chicago native, she honed her foundations at Spelman College as a member of the AUC Art Collective. While there, she received the Art History Scholarship multiple times and gained valuable experience interning with institutions such as the Lubeznik Center for the Arts, the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Resnicow & Associates, and The Getty Foundation.

In 2024, Ming Joi served as the Curator-in-Residence at Artpace San Antonio. She is now a Lichtenstein Fellow between the Pérez Art Museum Miami and Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, continuing her journey at the crossroads of art, literature, and community. As a writer, Ming Joi explores Black feminist futures and traditions, weaving poetics, performance, and visual art through an interdisciplinary practice. Her work has appeared in *Callaloo*, *The JSU Researcher*, *Burnaway*, *Scalawag*, and *Pigment Intl.* magazines. She has been featured in museum exhibitions and staged internationally.



2025 DIASPORA FESTIVAL OF BLACK AND INDEPENDENT FILM

Since 2004, the Stone Center's annual Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film has been showcasing films from all corners of the African diaspora. Diaspora Film Festival screenings are marked by lively post-screening Q&A, in-depth commentary, critique, and contextualization with filmmakers, scholars and attendees.

Over the years, the festival has forged lasting partnerships and collaboration with various campus and community co-sponsors. These include the African Studies Center, the African, African-American and Diaspora Studies Department, the Women and Gender Studies Department, The History Department, the Center for the Study of the American South (CSAS), the Alliance (Carolina Latinx, American Indian, and Asian-American Centers), Ngozi Design Collective, the Hayti Heritage Center, the Rogers-Eubanks Community Center, Palace International and Providence 1898, among others.

The 2025 edition of the Diaspora Film Festival will feature 20 films of all genres selected from just shy of a hundred submissions from around the world. **A special screening in November, in collaboration with the American Indian Center, features LUMBEE LAND, a short film exploring drug culture's impact on a Native American community.**

Screenings in the 2025 edition of the festival are as follows:

- Lunchtime Screenings, 12:05 -1:15PM, September 23rd and October 14th.
- Evening Screenings, 6:30PM: September 30th; October 9th, 21st and 30th

All screenings are free and open to the public. Unless otherwise stated, all screenings will take place on site in the Stone Center's Hitchcock Multipurpose Room (150 South Rd, Chapel Hill, Room 111).

The final screening schedule and lineup, as well as film synopses, will be released and posted to our website:

<https://stonecenter.unc.edu>

Subscribe to our Stepping Stones e-newsletter on our homepage!

“

I was recently promoted to Associate Professor of African American Studies with tenure at Princeton University. This achievement would not have been possible without the support and guidance that I first received as an undergraduate student through MURAP. I participated in MURAP in the summer of 2002, and my faculty advisor was Dr. Reginald Hildebrand, Associate Professor of History at UNC Chapel Hill. I completed my first independent research project during MURAP and also presented at my first academic conference through the program...I worked for MURAP for several years as the Alumni Coordinator, and I came back to speak at the MURAP academic conference after I received my PhD. I learned so much during my MURAP summer, and I am grateful that the program continues to support undergraduate students who intend to pursue careers in academia!

”

—Reena N. Goldthree

Associate Professor, Department of African American Studies, Princeton University

Author of “Democracy's Foot Soldiers: World War I and the Politics of Empire in the Greater Caribbean” (Princeton University Press, November 2025)

2025 MOORE UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (MURAP)



The Moore Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (MURAP) trains exceptionally talented students from Carolina and beyond to enter graduate school, and eventually, the professoriate. Through this residential summer program, students spend 10 weeks producing original research with the support of a dedicated faculty mentor. In bringing these exceptional students to campus through MURAP, we support Carolina's research and educational missions, encouraging students to consider advanced degree programs at UNC-Chapel Hill through their summer mentorship, and by connecting students to faculty in departments in their area of interest.

This year too, MURAP brought a brilliant group of undergraduate students to campus! Representing nine universities from across the US, the students spent the summer

working with faculty mentors, attending research, writing, and professional development classes, and producing original research.

To kick off the 10-week program, MURAP hosted an opening conference—*Producing Knowledge: Possibilities for Change, Imagination, and Transformation*—on May 27–28th. The conference brought together faculty, doctoral students, and community members from Carolina, Duke University, North Carolina State University, Wake Forest, and Williams College, MA. The conference opened with the performance ‘Fight Like Hell: Stories of surviving reproductive injustice While incarcerated’, written, directed, and produced by Megan N. Foster, followed by an author spotlight panel with Dr. Tracie Canada

(Anthropology, Duke University) and Dr. Atiya Husain (Africana Studies and Sociology, Williams College), discussing their recently published books. The keynote, titled *Artificial Revolution*, was delivered by Dr. Armond Towns, Associate Professor of Africana Studies at Williams College.

Tuesday Seminars—where the entire MURAP community, including students, faculty, instructors, and staff came together for research presentations by faculty mentors and student fellows—were lively, with robust discussions, shared ideas, and project feedback. MURAP concluded with a poster symposium of student research and an awards celebration on July 24th.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR CELEBRATING SLATE

Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

SLATE (Student Learning to Advance Truth and Education) has been a bold, five-year, pan-university initiative. From its inception, SLATE set out to deepen academic engagement across the university, and it has truly delivered:

- Recruited 74 faculty members for its teaching component
- Reached 4,267 students in over 150 university courses
- Awarded 54 undergraduate research fellowships
- Engaged 26 faculty mentors for summer research
- Connected students and faculty across 10 schools, including Arts & Sciences, Education, Public Health, Journalism, Business, Nursing, Social Work, Nutrition, Government, and Medicine.

This impressive impact was made possible through seed funding from the university and the leadership of Dr. Anna Agbe-Davies and Dr. Renée Alexander-Craft. Although the initial funding has ended, I remain hopeful that with renewed investment, SLATE—or something like it—will rise again. To our faculty partners, student scholars, and campus collaborators—thank you. SLATE's success belongs to all of you!

Dr. Rhon

▲ Pictured: The MURAP 2025 Conference sparked engaging discussions that encouraged critical thinking and exchange.

2025 STUDENT LEARNING TO ADVANCE TRUTH AND EDUCATION PROGRAM (SLATE)

Students and faculty researchers participating in SLATE (Student Learning to Advance Truth and Education) are bringing the five-year-old program to an inspiring conclusion. This summer's cohort included sixteen undergraduates from departments as varied as Anthropology and Public Policy, English and Biology. They were mentored by eight faculty fellows, some of whom brought the student fellows into their own research projects. Other students had the opportunity to continue or launch their own research projects.

Mentoring teams met throughout the summer to drive the projects forward. The group came together as a cohort three times over the course of the summer to discuss their projects' progress, receive critical feedback, and reflect on appropriate theories and methods to deepen and advance their research, which reflects SLATE's focus on power, difference, and belonging. Student fellows also participated in a series of workshops on research methods and modes of scholarly communication. The culminating event was a fall virtual Symposium on August 26th and 27th. There, students presented the results of their summer research projects. The summer research component of SLATE was directed by Professor of Communication, Renée Alexander Craft. Each summer, she convened mentors to engage in skill building, community building, and create opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.

SLATE also included a teaching component in which faculty participants committed to include

readings in their syllabi that were shared across all SLATE courses. Faculty and their students then joined in cross-course conversations related to



the shared assignments, for example, attending lectures by artists and researchers whose work enhances our understanding of race in the past and in the present. Associate Professor of Anthropology, Anna Agbe-Davies was the director of SLATE's teaching component.

Using a pan-university model that engaged students and faculty across disciplines, SLATE has enriched the Carolina educational experience, empowering students as emerging scholars and equipping them to address pressing societal challenges. The responses of program participants amply demonstrated that research and teaching activities like those fostered by SLATE are essential for all members of the Carolina community. SLATE's opportunities were open to all and address the teaching, research, and learning aims of the University as a whole.

▲ Pictured above: SLATE end of year celebration in 2023.

Photo Credit: Ric Swiner

OUR DIRECTOR'S TOP FIVE READS

Looking for your next great read? Check out the Stone Center Director, Dr. Rhon's Top five picks — thought-provoking books that inspire, challenge, and celebrate Black culture and creativity.

1. *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler
2. *Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature* by Farah Jasmine Griffin
3. *Lessons from Plants* by Beronda Montgomery
4. *How to Say Babylon: A Memoir* by Safiya Sinclair

Available at the Stone Center Library

<https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb11715779>

Book

<https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb11716546>

eBook

<https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb11652179>

Audiobook

5. *Talking to the Dead - Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* by LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant



Visit the Stone Center Library which has over 10,000 volumes! ►



“

I believe that God often spares us from the visual horror of hurricanes, which is why so many of them make landfall at night. To see what they are truly capable of might release a terror from which we could never come back.

”

—Quote from Dr. Rhon's portion of a forthcoming essay, "Weathering The Storm" for a special edition of *Callaloo* (issue 43.3) that will come out in October 2025. The essay is co-authored with James Manigault-Bryant.

Check it out at <https://www.callalooliteraryjournal.com>

NEW STAFF



Neha Chhabra serves as the Public Communications Specialist at the Sonja Haynes Stone Center, bringing over a decade of global experience in strategic communications. Her background encompasses a broad spectrum of internal and external communications, with expertise in marketing, media relations, public relations, social media strategy, and event management.

She has held communications roles in both North Carolina and Singapore, working across diverse industries including Education, Energy, Healthcare, Fashion, Sports and Hospitality. Neha has contributed to the success of large corporations, mid-sized firms, small businesses, and internationally recognized public relations agencies.

She is known for developing and implementing strategic, innovative, results-driven campaigns that effectively engage target audiences, elevate brand visibility, strengthen corporate image, expand digital reach, and drive business growth.

Neha holds a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication from Oklahoma City University and a Master of Science in Communication from North Carolina State University.

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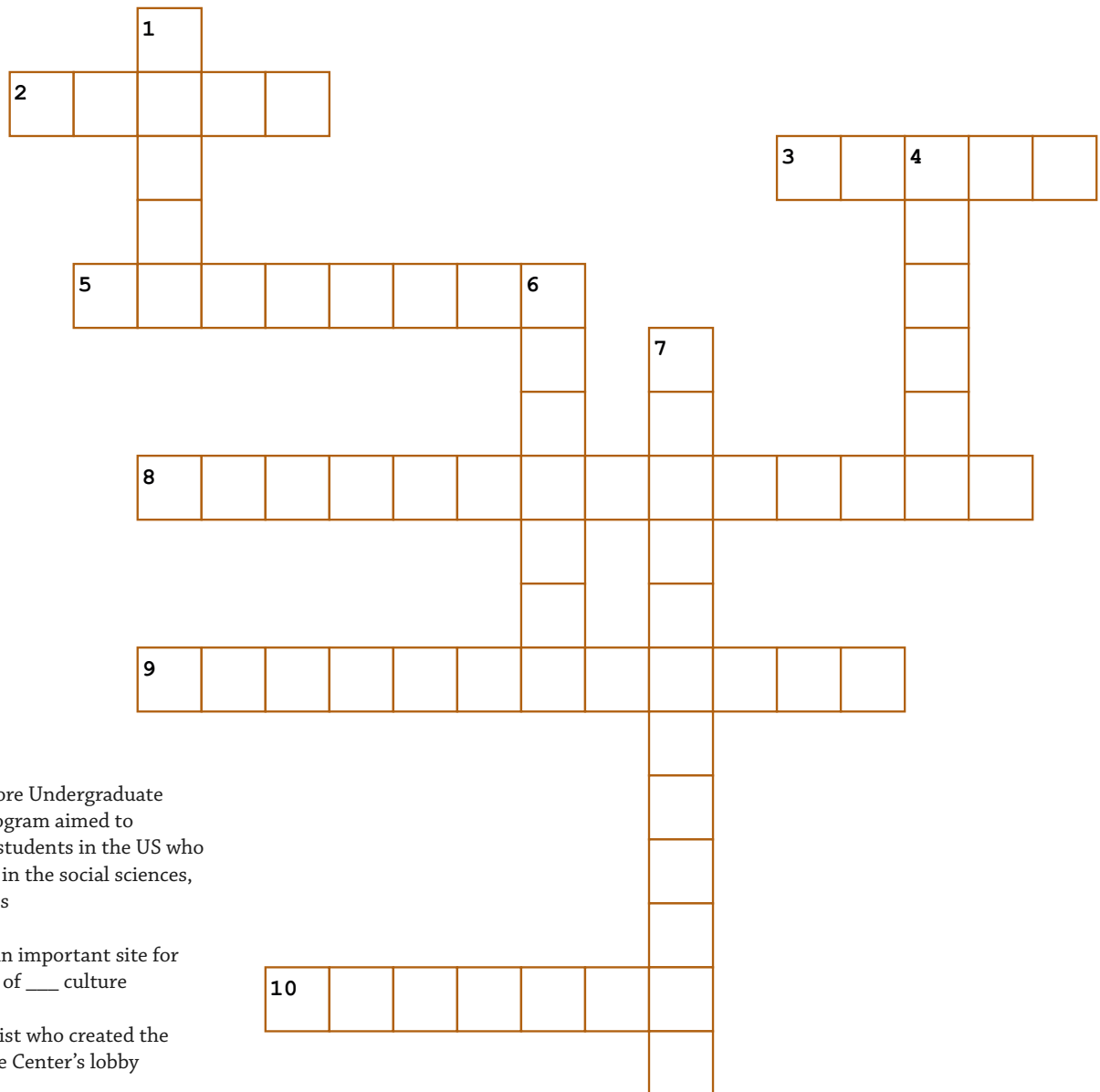
STONE CENTER CROSSWORD CHALLENGE

First five correct entries win exclusive Stone Center swag!

Email your answers and contact info to stonecenter@unc.edu by October 31, 2025.

Hint: Answers can be found on our newly revamped website — <https://stonecenter.unc.edu> and in the past *Milestones* Spring 2025 edition.

Look out for the answer key in our next *Milestones* Spring 2026 edition!



ACROSS

2. Acronym for the Moore Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program aimed to increase the number of students in the US who pursue doctoral degrees in the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts

3. The Stone Center is an important site for the critical examination of ____ culture

5. First name of the artist who created the mural of Dr. Stone in the Center's lobby

8. One of the Stone Center's longest-standing programs

9. The name of the official Podcast of the Stone Center

10. The Stone Center was designed by the award-winning architectural firm the ____ Group

DOWN

1. The name of the 1,520 square foot Gallery that is the primary venue for the exhibit of artwork at the Stone Center

4. The month in 2004 that the Stone Center opened

6. Dr. Stone was the ____ to the Black Student Movement from 1974 to 1980

7. The unique quality about the Stone Center is that it is a ____ site

SAVE THE DATE

September

- Book Talk by Dr. Nicole Swiner, Physician and International Best-selling Author
September 8 | 3:30PM | Stone Center Library
- Book Talk by Martha Jones, Historian and Award-winning Author (Co-sponsor w/ CSAS)
September 18 | 5:30PM | Hitchcock Room
- 2025 Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film Screening
September 23 | 12PM | Hitchcock Room
- Fall 2025 Exhibition: *The Book of Mark* by Artist Mark Anthony Brown Jr., Curated by Ming Joi
September 25 | 6:30PM | Brown Gallery
- 2025 Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film Screening
September 30 | 6:30PM | Hitchcock Room

October

- 2025 Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film Screening
October 14 | 12PM | Hitchcock Room
- 2025 Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film Screening
October 9, 21 & 30 | 6:30PM | Hitchcock Room

November

- An Evening with Nnenna Freelon, 7-time Grammy-nominated Jazz Artist and Author
November 6 | 6:30PM | Stone Center Auditorium
- 2025 Stone Memorial Lecture by Pulitzer Prize-winner, Salamishah Tillet
November 11 | 6:30PM | Stone Center Auditorium
- 2025 Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film Special Screening of LUMBEELAND
November 20 | 6:30PM | Hitchcock Room

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE STONE CENTER?

1. View our new Events Page: <https://stonecenter.unc.edu/upcoming-events>
2. Subscribe to our *Stepping Stones* e-newsletter on our homepage: www.stonecenter.unc.edu
3. Follow our social media platforms
4. Email us at stonecenter@unc.edu
5. Phone us at 919-962-9001





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 vimeo.com/StoneCenter

 @sonja-haynes-stone-center-unc-chapel-hill

**SUSTAINABILITY.
PERPETUITY.
SUPPORT.**



The Stone Center