



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT

Tony Franquiz, 202-374-5393, Cathedral@westendstrategy.com

National Cathedral Taps Renowned Artist Kerry James Marshall and Celebrated Poet Elizabeth Alexander for Racial Justice-Themed Stained-Glass Windows and Stone Poetry Inscription to Replace Former Confederate Iconography

New Stained-Glass Windows and Accompanying Stone Poetry Inscription Commissioned by the Cathedral as it Works to Tell a Fuller and More Accurate Story of American History and Culture

WASHINGTON – The [Washington National Cathedral](https://www.washingtonnationalcathedral.org/) today announced that it will replace its former stained-glass windows featuring Confederate iconography, removed [in 2017](#), with racial-justice themed windows created by world-renowned artist Kerry James Marshall, described by The New Yorker as “a virtuoso of landscape, portraiture, still-life, history painting, and other genres of the Western canon.” The Cathedral’s commission represents Marshall’s first time working with stained-glass as a medium, and the windows are expected to be his first permanent public exhibition anywhere in the country.

In addition, celebrated poet, author, and scholar Dr. Elizabeth Alexander has agreed to pen a new poem that will be inscribed in stone tablets alongside Marshall’s window installation, overlaying the previous stone tablets which venerated the lives of Confederate soldiers. Completion of both Marshall’s new windows and the stone tablets featuring Dr. Alexander’s new poem is expected in 2023, at which time they will be permanently installed at the Cathedral.

The Cathedral removed windows featuring Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson—which were located along the southern face of its nave, or its main worship space—in September 2017, following the white nationalist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia. In the summer of 2020, amid the historic movement for racial justice following the police killing of George Floyd, the Cathedral began collaborating with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) to plan the public exhibition of the Robert E. Lee window.

“For nearly 70 years, these windows and their Confederate imagery told an incomplete story; they celebrated two generals, but they did nothing to address the reality and painful legacy of America’s original sin of slavery and racism. They represented a false narrative of what America once was and left out the painful truth of our history,” said [The Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith](#), dean of **Washington National Cathedral**. “We’re excited to share a new and more complete story, to tell the truth about our past and to lift up who we aspire to be as a nation.”

Hollerith continues, “We are thrilled that Kerry James Marshall has agreed to lend his immense talents and creative vision to this important project. He is one of the greatest artists of our time, and we are honored to add his artistic legacy to the iconography of this Cathedral. To complement Mr. Marshall’s work, we welcome the words of Dr. Elizabeth Alexander, one of America’s great poets and a native Washingtonian, whose incredible ability to capture the pain of yesterday and the promise of tomorrow will be felt in our house of prayer through her inscribed words.”



Marshall—the artist and professor whose paintings depicting Black life in America have been sold, viewed, and showcased across the world for decades—will design the stained-glass windows that will replace the Lee/Jackson windows. His new windows will reflect the Cathedral’s stated desire for new windows that “capture both darkness and light, both the pain of yesterday and the promise of tomorrow, as well as the quiet and exemplary dignity of the African American struggle for justice and equality and the indelible and progressive impact it has had on American society.” Marshall has taught painting at the University of Illinois at Chicago and has been named to TIME’s annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world.

“This project is not just a job—I don’t need the work—or only a piece of art. It’s kind of a calling, and a real honor to be asked,” said artist **Kerry James Marshall**. “The themes that the Cathedral committee articulated set a great challenge for me as an artist and as a Black American man. The goal is to make truly meaningful additions to an already rich and magnificent institution, to make the changes they have embraced truly worth the effort.”

As a decorated poet, educator, memoirist, scholar, cultural advocate, Washington DC native, and president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Dr. Alexander dedicated decades of her life and work to the pursuit of creating and telling more truthful representations of our collective history—a theme she will explore in her commissioned poem for the Cathedral. She has held distinguished professorships at Smith College, Columbia University, and Yale University, where she taught for 15 years and chaired the African American Studies Department. In 2009, Dr. Alexander composed and delivered “Praise Song for the Day” for the inauguration of President Barack Obama, and is author or co-author of fourteen books, including Pulitzer finalists *American Sublime* and *The Light of the World*.

“I grew up in Washington DC and spent time throughout my childhood in the hallowed Cathedral. I am incredibly honored to be a part of the National Cathedral’s effort to ensure that those who worship within its sanctuary know that it is truly a space for all people, and that the stories relayed through its sacred walls, windows and other iconography represent the truth of our nation,” said **Dr. Elizabeth Alexander**. “I’m delighted to work in close collaboration with my dear friend of over thirty years Kerry James Marshall on this inspiring project for the Cathedral as we consecrate its sacred space with our artistic work.”

As artists adept at capturing the lived experience of Black Americans, Marshall and Alexander will add a new and important chapter to the Cathedral’s history of art and architecture, and reflect the Cathedral’s aspirations to be a sacred gathering place where all Americans can see themselves reflected in its expanding art and iconography.

Support for the windows replacement project and related public programming to highlight the Foundation’s and the Cathedral’s ongoing commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is provided by the Ford Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (as part of the Foundation’s [Monuments Project](#)).

The Hearthland Foundation, founded by Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg, is also providing funding to the project, with support directed to the poetry-inscribed tablets.



The Lee/Jackson windows were originally donated to the Cathedral by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and installed in 1953. The initial call for their removal came from then-Cathedral Dean Gary Hall in 2015, following the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC. In 2016, the Cathedral [formed a task force](#) to study options for the windows' future, which ultimately produced a [report](#) recommending further action. In 2017, after Charlottesville, the windows were deconsecrated and removed, and the space has been filled by a temporary placeholder since then. Once completed, the new racial justice windows will be installed, and they will remain a permanent part of the Cathedral's world-renowned sacred iconography.

The former window that depicts Confederate General Robert E. Lee will be displayed in Washington, DC, for a year-long exhibit at the NMAAHC from September 24, 2021 through August 21, 2022. The exhibition, "Make Good the Promises: Reconstruction and its Legacies," will feature more than 175 objects, 300 images and 14 interactive media programs in the museum's 4,300-square-foot Bank of America Special Exhibitions Gallery. When the exhibit closes, the Lee/Jackson windows will return to the Cathedral for conservation.

A special Windows Replacement Committee has been overseeing the future of the former Lee/Jackson windows, co-chaired by **Eric Motley**, the deputy director of the National Gallery of Art and **Chase Rynd**, former director of the National Building Museum. Additional members include **Dean Hollerith**; **Dr. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw**, Class of 1940 Bicentennial Term Associate Professor, Department of the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania; **the Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas**, Canon Theologian at Washington National Cathedral and Dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary; **the Rev. Canon Rosemarie Logan Duncan**, Canon for Worship at Washington National Cathedral; and **the Rev. Canon Leonard L. Hamlin Sr.**, Canon Missioner and Minister for Equality and Diversity at Washington National Cathedral; **Blake Coleman**, Class of 2021 graduate, National Cathedral School; **Gwendolyn King**, President, Podium Prose; and **the Rev. Dr. James P. Wind**, President, Alban Institute.

On Thursday, September 23 at 10:30 a.m., Washington National Cathedral will hold a press conference to publicly announce the windows' replacement and the donation of the Lee window to the NMAAHC. Featured speakers include Cathedral Dean Randy Hollerith, Kerry James Marshall, and Windows Replacement Committee Co-chair Chase Rynd. Media are welcome to attend this event; all those interested must RSVP to cathedral@westendstrategy.com. For all media inquiries related to the NMAAHC, please contact Fleur Paysour at 202-633-4761 or paysourf@si.edu.

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About Washington National Cathedral

Grounded in the reconciling love of Jesus Christ, Washington National Cathedral is a house of prayer for all people, conceived by our founders to serve as a great church for national purposes.