

Pulitzer Prize-Winning Historian Caps NCC's Annual Humanities Program

By NCC

BETHLEHEM, PA - Northampton Community College (NCC) welcomed Annette Gordon-Reed, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, author, and Carl M. Loeb University Professor at Harvard University, on April 14 to deliver the keynote lecture as part of its Annual Humanities Program. Gordon-Reed's lecture traced America's evolution over its 250-year history.

Her talk was a nod to this year's Annual Humanities Program theme, "We the People: Reflecting Back, Building Forward," honoring the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This year's theme also celebrated NCC's original designation by the National Endowment for the Humanities as a "We the People" institution, a distinction that placed the College among an elite group committed to strengthening the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture.

Gordon-Reed's lecture focused on the Declaration's famous preamble, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The words, penned by Thomas Jefferson, are at the heart of her research and her fascination with Jefferson.

That fascination began in the third grade when Gordon-Reed received a fictional children's biography of the country's third president told from the perspective of a slave boy. As a child, Gordon-Reed wondered why if "all men are created equal," as she learned in school, the slave boy in her book couldn't do the things young Jefferson could.

Gordon-Reed's childhood question would inform much of her scholarship and her career trajectory. "These words [the Declaration's preamble] are real," she told the audience. "These words have become what some call 'the American creed.' They are an expression of universal values by saying 'this is what it means to be an American.'"

Gordon-Reed began with Jefferson's contradictions, calling him "a progressive enmeshed in a regressive system." She believes, she said, that Jefferson meant what he wrote, yet over the course of his life, he owned nearly 600 enslaved people.

"I believe he knew slavery was wrong but thought, in the future, other Americans would take up the cause," she said. "He did not have the confidence that whites and Blacks could live together peacefully."

Saying that American identity is seen through the prism of the Declaration of Independence, Gordon-Reed traced how the document's preamble has been used throughout American history from Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address to the 14th and 19th amendments to the Constitution to the landmark decision Brown v. Board of Education ending segregation in public schools to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s I Have A Dream speech during the March on Washington to the election of Barack Obama as the country's 44th president.

If she has learned anything from history, she said, it is that progress takes work, and it is never linear. The country, she said, has arrived at its semiquincentennial at a "very interesting moment in American history." Despite the political division that has swept the nation, she remains optimistic.

"History goes along and we ask different questions of the times," she said. "The country was founded on principles written by, admittedly, a slaveholder, but also someone who believed in Enlightenment philosophy. We've made a great country together. The Founders may not have been able to imagine us now, but that's what they put in motion."

Following her lecture, Gordon-Reed fielded questions in a fireside chat led by Megan Nocek, assistant professor of psychology; liberal arts (English) major Connor Evans; psychology major Latita Hill; and social work major Quylana Moore.

A decorated author and historian, Gordon-Reed has won 16 book prizes, including the Pulitzer Prize in History in 2009 and the National Book Award in 2008, for *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. She is also a past recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the Frederick Douglass Book Prize, the George Washington Book Prize, and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. She most recently edited *Jefferson On Race: A Reader*, a collection of Jefferson's writings on the subject of race.

NORTHAMPTON
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**BLUE VALLEY
LANES**

SUNDAY SPECIAL

5PM-7PM

**UP TO 6 PEOPLE
PER LANE**



\$50

**TWO HOUR
LANE RENTAL**

**SHOE RENTAL IS
INCLUDED**



We're looking for BARTENDERS

Give Us a Call!

610-863-4621

**505 E Moorestown Rd, Wind Gap, PA,
United States, Pennsylvania**

**WE BUY \$CRAP METAL!
JUNK CARS TOO!!!**

J.F.R.

610-863-6071

- Copper
- Brass
- Aluminum
- Stainless
- Lead
- Cast Iron
- Motor Blocks
- Light Iron
- Prepared Steel
- Export Steel
- Container Service



www.jfrsalvage.com

M-F 7-4:30 • Sat 7-Noon

6500 Sullivan Trail

Wind Gap, PA 18091