

# Virginia Interscholastic Association Archives Receives Funding for Digitization

An important story in Virginia's history will be made accessible to the public thanks to a generous donation from activist athletes Billie Jean King and Ilana Kloss. In honor of renowned athletes Arthur Ashe and Doug Smith, their gift will fund the processing and digitization of the Virginia Interscholastic Association (VIA) archives held at Virginia State University.

"Ilana and I are happy to support this important preservation matter because the more you know about history, the more you know about yourself and the more you can shape the future," King said.

The VIA was an organization of African-American high schools created in 1954 through the efforts of African-American secondary school principals and administrators with operational funds from the Virginia General Assembly. The VIA provided enriching opportunities and activities to African-American high schools that were otherwise inaccessible due to racial, social, and economic barriers. The activities included athletics, arts, academic competitions and student associations during a time of segregation.

The students who benefited from the VIA include many who went on to receive national recognition in the fields of science, the arts, sports, journalism, politics, and more — including tennis champion Arthur Ashe and award-winning tennis journalist Doug Smith.

"We look forward to ensuring these important records are digitized," Kloss said. "It's truly a pleasure to be able to do something meaningful to support an organization that has honored both Arthur Ashe and Doug Smith."

Virginia State University President Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D. stressed the importance of the donation. "At VSU, our mantra is GREATER Happens Here. This is another example of that. We are honored to provide a home for these archives that offer a record of the rich history of Virginia's African American community. Many of our students stand on the shoulders of these Virginians who strived for and achieved GREATER. Now, these documents and photos will be available digitally to our students and the broader community to inspire them and serve as an example of what is achievable."

The non-profit organization Teaching for Change, which built and manages the VIA website, is receiving the donation and providing logistical oversight. Deborah Menkart, the organization's executive director, said "We are honored to receive this dedicated support for the processing and digitizing the Virginia Interscholastic Association archives. At a time when an increasing number of state laws are suppressing history instruction, it is heartening to be involved in an effort that is doing just the opposite. Young people today benefit from hearing the stories of

African American administrators, teachers, and students who literally ‘made a way out of no way.’”

Archival strategist Micha Broadnax will lead the effort to process and digitize the collection. She brings expertise in digital humanities, knowledge of African American history from this era, and engagement in the related Black Teacher Archive effort at Harvard University. Broadnax said, “I am overjoyed at the opportunity to lead this VIA Archive Project. There is much we can learn today from the brave and creative organizing by African American educators during the Jim Crow era. I also owe a personal debt to the VIA. My maternal grandparents met at Burley, one of the VIA high schools, in Charlottesville, Virginia.”

James Hollins, chair of the VIA Heritage Association said, “It is a blessing for all the VIA alumni to know that these records will be made accessible for generations to come.”

## Background

### Virginia Interscholastic Association

The Story of the Virginia Interscholastic Association ([viastory.org](http://viastory.org)) website provides an opportunity to learn about the rich heritage and legacy of African-American students and adults who participated in the Virginia Interscholastic Association from 1954-70 and its predecessor organization the Virginia Interscholastic Association League (VIAL). This site is a collaborative project of Virginia State University, the VIA Heritage Association (VIAHA), Teaching for Change, and other institutions. The website scholar advisors are Joshua Kondwani Wright, Associate Professor, Global Affairs, Trinity Washington University; Gretchen Givens Generett, Professor, Educational Foundations and Leadership, Duquesne University; Kristal Moore Clemons, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership, Virginia State University; Latorial Faison, Languages and Literature Instructor, Virginia State University. Kawachi Clemons, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Virginia State University (VSU), also collaborates on the VIA documentation and public presentations.

### Virginia State University

Virginia State University is a public, comprehensive 1890 Land Grant institution and historically Black college/university located in Southern Chesterfield County, Virginia. Virginia State University played an active role in the success of the VIA when it was active from 1954 – 1969 and continues that service by housing the VIA archives. VSU acted as the host institution and provided staff for operations for the VIA through the Field Service Division. They also served as the main location of athletic activities. In this role, Virginia State University also provided training and development for the directors and coaches who ran the extracurricular programs. The collaboration between the VIA, Virginia State University, as well as other Virginia African-American universities provided students with opportunities for higher education through enrollment and grant aid programs. Recently VSU was selected as one of six HBCUs across the country to take part in a research and design project focused on building an integrated framework for digital learning at HBCUs.

## **Teaching for Change**

Teaching for Change, a national non-profit organization approaching its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has the mission to provide teachers and parents with the tools to create schools where students learn to read, write, and change the world.

The organization's staff are experienced in public history documentation, having created and maintained the VIA Story website and created the George P. Phenix High School website. Teaching for Change also hosts and maintains the [HowardZinn.org](http://HowardZinn.org) website on behalf of the Howard Zinn Trust and has worked with Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University to index and digitize the Howard Zinn Collection. In addition, Teaching for Change co-coordinates the [Zinn Education Project](#) which provides lessons for teachers, daily people's history posts, and offers online courses with people's historians of note.

## **Archive Strategist**

Micha Broadnax is an archival strategist with experience in academic, corporate, community-based and personal libraries and archives. She is the project manager for the Black Teacher Archive, an initiative funded by the Mellon Foundation and awarded to Harvard Graduate School of Education to centralize publications by Black educators during Jim Crow. She is passionate about story keeping, documentation and knowledge retention in movement organizing and family histories. Micha earned a Bachelor of Arts from Brandeis University and a Master's degree in Library and Information Science with a concentration in archives management from Simmons University.