INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

A NC Black Rep Experience

JUL 27 — WINSTON-SALEM, NC — AUG 1

2026

THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

North Carolina Central University

Friday, July 31, 2:00pm
Friday, July 31, 8:00pm
Saturday, August 1, 2:00pm
Saturday, August 1, 8:00pm

WSSU – Dillard Auditorium

PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA • HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: NIA IMANI FRANKLIN • STEAL AWAY HOME OUR STORIES...WE ARE, BECAUSE WE WERE • REIMAGINED VOLUME III: YOUNG THANG • PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON • RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE • SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL • MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE • NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM • MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY • JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD • ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: NIA IMANI FRANKLIN • STEAL AWAY HOME • OUR STORIES...WE ARE, BECAUSE WE WERE • REIMAGINED VOLUME III: YOUNG THANG PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA • HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES

INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

A NC Black Rep Experience

Winston-Salem | The City of Winston-Salem salutes the 2026 International Black Theatre Festival.

THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

Written by **Zora Neale Hurston**
Adapted by **Laurence Holder**

The North Carolina Central University Theatre Program is dedicated to cultivating artist-scholars who use the power of performance to educate, inspire, and transform communities. Celebrating 75 years of excellence, NCCU Theatre combines rigorous academic training with dynamic production experiences that prepare students for careers in theatre, film, television, education, and related creative industries. Rooted in a rich tradition of storytelling, social engagement, and artistic innovation, the program embraces both classical and contemporary works while amplifying diverse voices and perspectives. NCCU Theatre is honored to participate in the International Black Theatre Festival with two productions, reflecting the program's enduring commitment to artistic excellence, cultural storytelling, and the next generation of theatre artists.

SETTING

Their Eyes Were Watching God is set in Central and South Florida during the early decades of the twentieth century, approximately 1900–1935. The story unfolds in several locations that shape Janie Crawford's remarkable journey of self-discovery, including rural West Florida, the all-Black town of Eatonville, and the rich agricultural lands known as "the Muck" in the Everglades.

CAST

Older Janie Crawford ..... Laila Ingram
Younger Janie Crawford ..... Kiara Haley
Tea Cake ..... Corinthius Giles
Logan Killicks/Townsperson ..... Malachi Moore
Joe “Jody” Starks ..... Davion Person
Nanny Crawford/Townsperson ..... Kelyse Raiyel
Pheoby Watson ..... Samya Howard
Sam Watson/ Townsperson ..... Jadin Talley
Mrs. Turner/ Townsperson ..... Jasmin Perez
Townsperson ..... Marlie Howie
Townsperson ..... Shaleese McClain
Townsperson ..... Janyla Charleswell
Townsperson ..... Paul Dargan
Townsperson ..... Amari Smith
Townsperson ..... Donteze Johnson-Cooper
Doctor ..... Jonathan Drezner

CREATIVE TEAM

Director ..... Dr. Asabi (Stephanie Howard)
Technical Direction ..... Arthur Reese
Arium Andrews ..... Stage Manager
Costume Design ..... Lydia Houston
Light Designers ..... Evan Redfearn, Linwood Morris
Set Design ..... This Robot Dreams
Sound Design ..... Dr. Asabi
Sound Design Contributor ..... Donteze Johnson-Cooper
Musical Direction ..... Samya Howard
Prop Design ..... Dr. Nadia Bodie-Smith

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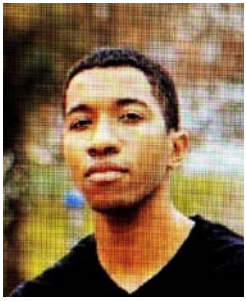
CAST

JANYLA CHARLESWELL (Townsperson), a St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands native and Fayetteville NC resident, is a dual Mass Communication Public Relations Concentration Major and Theatre Performing Arts Concentration Major. JaNyla has showcased her talent on various stages including earning the title of "Miss Old Gold and Black" (2024). She has served as Front of House Manager and Make-up designer for NCCU productions.



PAUL DARGAN (Townsperson), a Durham, NC native and NCCU Theatre graduate, is happy to take the stage once more. His recent work includes Police Captain and Prisoner #1 in NCCU's *The Producers* and Chevalier in *Conversations with Four Abolitionists at United Strings of Color and Cinderella* with Raleigh Little Theatre. He hopes everyone finds inspiration in the retelling of Jane Kristoff's story.

JONATHAN 'JD' _DREZNER (Doctor), a Durham native, has graced the stage since his sophomore year at C.E. Jordan High. He attended UNCG and since returning to Durham has been (gratefully) involved in three amazing productions with NCCU Theatre directors in the NCCU theatre program including *A Need Fulfilled*, *Trouble in Mind*, *Chicken & Biscuits,* and currently *Steal Away Home*.

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CAST

CORINTHIUS GILES (Tea Cake) from Goldsboro, NC, has studied Junior Theatre Performance Concentration at NCCU. He was last seen on NCCU's stage in *Chicken and Biscuits*. He has been acting since childhood and has a true passion for music, dance and acting. He believes he can truly make a difference through his artistic pursuits.

KIARA HALEY (Younger Janie), from Nelson, NC, is a Freshman Theatre Performance Concentration Major. Kiara is seen as a shadow ensemble member in *Steal Away Home*. Having extensive stage work in high school, she is excited about her artistic journey at NCCU.

SAMYA HOWARD (Pheoby Watson/Music Director), from Marion, SC, is a Senior Theatre Performance Concentration Major. She is seen in multiple roles as well as Shadow Projection Ensemble Captain for *Steal Away Home,* Ms. Sherman in *Fame the Musical* (2025), Women 1 in *Mad at Miles* (2025), multiple roles in *The Producers* (2024), Ensemble in *Midnight Theatre* (2024), and Brianna in *Chicken & Biscuits* (2023).

MARLIE HOWIE (Town Person), from Kannapolis, NC, is a Senior Theatre Performance Concentration Major. She was last seen in *Fame the Musical* (2025), as an Old Lady in *The Producers* (2024), Ms. Mead in *Murder Most Fouled Up* (2024) and received the Thespian Award from the International Thespian Society for Superior Performance in Group Acting (2023). She serves as the Stage Manager for *Steal Away Home* (2026).

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CAST

DONTEZE JOHNSON-COOPER (Townsperson), from Charleston, SC, is a Sophomore Theatre Performance Concentration Major. He was last seen as Prisoner in *The Producers* (2024). He also works diligently behind the stage serving as Set Designer for *Steal Away Home* (2026). He is a proud new member of the Alpha Alpha Phi Cast of Alpha Psi Omega Theatre Honors Society.

LAILA INGRAM (Older Janie Crawford), from Rockingham, NC, is a Junior Theatre Performance Concentration Major. She is inspired by her passion for acting and storytelling and looks forward to growing as a performer and honing her craft. She was last seen in *Steal Away Home* (2026).

SHALEESE MCCLAIN (Townsperson) is a Sophomore Theatre Performance Concentration Major. She is a Shadow Ensemble Member in *Steal Away Home* (2026) and played Hyena in *Midnight Theatre* (2024). Her previous roles at Hillside High School include Main Villager in *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (2022) and Mrs. Phelps in *Matilda* (2023). She is thrilled to be on the University Stage again with this amazing cast.

Forsyth.cc

International Black Theater Festival

Join Forsyth County in rolling out the purple carpet for the 2026 International Black Theater Festival.

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INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®
A NC Black Rep Experience

2026 Forsyth County Commissioners

Denise Price, Deputy County Manager
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CAST

MALACHI MOORE (Joe Killicks), from Cary, NC, is a Graduating Senior Theatre Performance Concentration Major. He has plays Pastor Prentice in *Steal Away Home*. Previous NCCU roles include Mr. Shienkopft in *Fame* (2025); Franz in *The Producers* (2024); and Dr. Shelton in *Drums of Sweetwater* (2023). He is a proud member of the Gamma Gamma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

DAVION PERSON (Joe "Jody" Starks), from Raleigh, NC, is a Sophomore Performance Concentration Major. He was seen in on NCCU stage as Schlomo Metzenbaum in *Fame the Musical* (2025) and Leo Bloom in *The Producers* (2024). He plays Amos in *Steal Away Home*. He wishes to thank his parents for their support.

JASMIN PEREZ (Mrs. Turner), from Youngsville, NC, is a Senior Pharmaceutical Science Major with a passion for theatre production. She has worked backstage as a Prop Mistress for *Skeleton Crew* (2024) with Justice Theatre Project, and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (2025). Jasmin is also seen in Mrs. Melissa in *Steal Away Home*. She wishes to thank her family and friends for their enduring support.

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Discover more at VisitWinstonSalem.com
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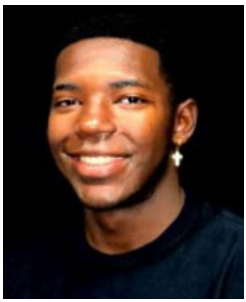
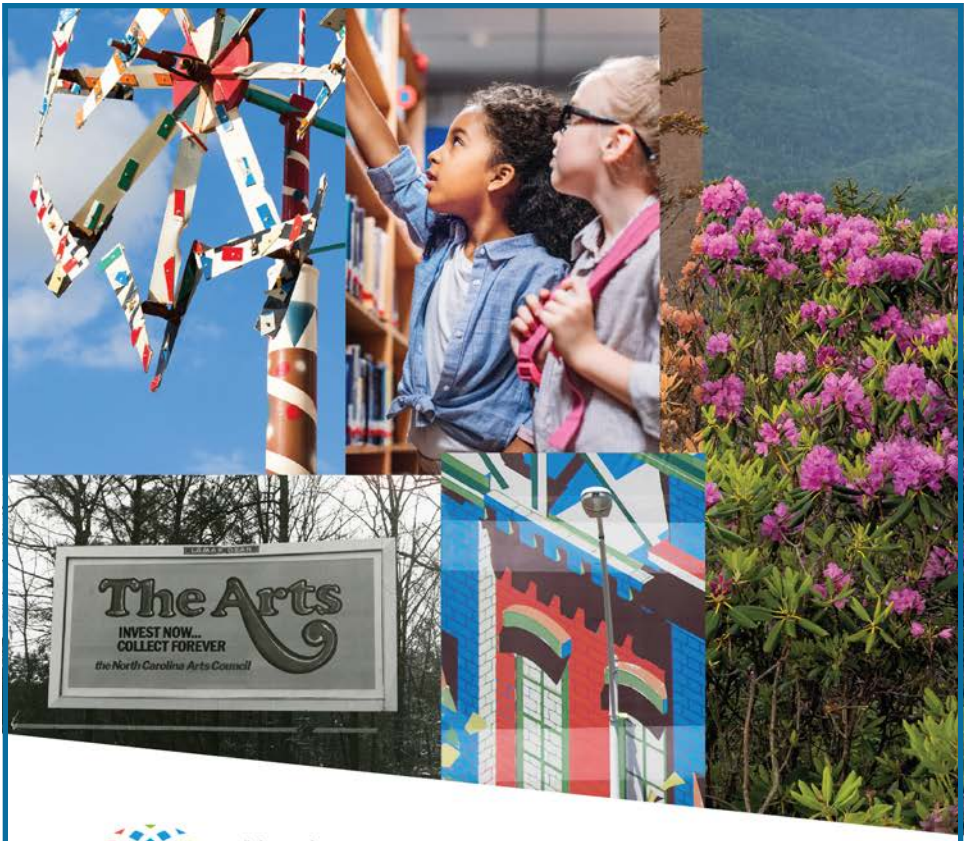
CAST

KELYSE RAIYEL (Nanny/Townsperson) from Durham, NC, is a recent Performance Concentration Major graduate. A few of her most memorable roles on NCCU 's stage are Woman 5 in *Mad at Miles*; La'Trice in *Chicken and Biscuits*; Ulla in *The Producers*. She thanks her family, her NCCU professors, Mr. Tabb and Ms. Agerston for all of the lessons they have shared.



JADIN LAMAR TALLEY (Sam Watson/ Townsperson), from Richmond, VA, is a transfer Junior Theatre Performance Concentration Major. He discovered his love of theatre in High School where he honed skills in dance and music. He was most recently seen as Goody in *Fame the Musical* (2025), Ridgely in *Murder Most Fouled Up* (2024), and Boo in *Livin' Fat* (2025). He is a proud member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.

AMARI SMITH (Townsperson), is a Sophomore Theatre Performance Concentration Major at NCCU. He plays Obadiah Carpenter in *Steal Away Home* (2026) and was Ensemble Member in *Home* (2025). He is grateful to continue learning and maturing as a performer. He thanks his family for their love and support.



North Carolina Arts Council

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The North Carolina Arts Council is a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

CREATIVE TEAM

DR. ASABI (S. HOWARD) (Director) is Professor and Chair of Theatre at North Carolina Central University and recipient of the Mabel P. Robinson Lifetime Achievement ACE Award. A director and playwright, her works include *God Spoke My Name: Maya Angelou*, *Reaching for God with Dirty Hands and Tainted Blood*, and *Distorted Beauty*. She has directed internationally in South Africa and Italy and is a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

ARTHUR REESE (Technical Director) is Technical Director at NCCU and a 2026 recipient of the Departmental Award for Excellence in Research. An MFA graduate of the University of Virginia, he has served IBTF for over 20 years and designed for Maya Angelou, Samuel L. Jackson, the Negro Ensemble Company, and many others. He is co-author of *The African Diaspora of Theatre*.

THIS ROBOT DREAMS (Set Designer) returns to NCCU after designing *Ain't Misbehavin'* (2022). Previous NCCU credits include *Dreamgirls*, *House of George*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, and *Hurt Village*. They earned an MFA in Scene Design from UNCG and are Technical Director at the Little Theatre of Winston-Salem.

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CREATIVE TEAM

LYDIA HOUSTON (Costume Designer) has more than 40 years of sewing and costuming experience. She has designed for the African American Dance Ensemble, Collage Dance Company, Suah African Dance Theatre, and others. A former wardrobe assistant for Cirque du Soleil's *Amaluna*, she owns ExtremelyLydia Sewing Company.

DR. NADIA BODIE-SMITH (Prop Designer) is Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at NCCU and recipient of departmental awards for Excellence in Teaching and Outstanding Service. A director, designer, and editor of the ENCORE Theatre Journal, her work includes *Dreamgirls*, *The Producers*, *Skeleton Crew*, and *Steal Away Home*.

EVAN REDFEARN (Lighting Designer) is a freshman Technical Design major at NCCU from Durham, NC. After serving as Shadow Projectionist for *Steal Away Home* (2026), he makes his lighting design debut. His previous technical theatre credits include *Little Shop of Horrors*, *SpongeBob the Musical*, and *Annie* at Hillside High School.

ARIUM ANDREWS (Stage Manager) is a Senior transfer theatre major from Fresno State University in Fresno, California. Though Arium is not new to the craft, this is her first stage managerial project with NCCU Theatre. Arium is very thankful to have this experience and sends thanks to God, family, and friends.

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ENT 211 AD

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In September 1928, one of the deadliest hurricanes in American history swept across South Florida, devastating the communities surrounding Lake Okeechobee and claiming thousands of lives—many of them Black migrant workers whose stories were largely forgotten. Zora Neale Hurston witnessed the aftermath firsthand, and that tragedy became the emotional and historical foundation for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Yet this story is about far more than a storm. The hurricane becomes Hurston's metaphor for the inevitable tempests of life—those moments that test our faith, reshape our identities, and remind us of our humanity.

Hurston suggests that there are two profound truths every person must ultimately learn. The first is that love is like the sea—beautiful, unpredictable, and impossible to control. It carries us to unimaginable joy and, at times, overwhelming sorrow. The second is that, eventually, everybody has to "go to God." In the face of life's greatest storms, there comes a moment when human strength, possessions, status, and even love itself can carry us no farther. We stand alone before our Creator. Through Janie Crawford, Hurston gives voice not only to her own journey as a Black woman searching for identity, purpose, and authentic love, but also to the universal longing of women to be

A remarkable scene to behold

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Enjoy the festival!

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6/26 • TDR-4488403617

loved—and to love—without surrendering the freedom of their souls. Janie's life is not defined by the men she marries, but by the woman she becomes through every season of joy, disappointment, loss, and renewal.

Perhaps no image captures Hurston's vision more beautifully than the horizon. Janie describes it as the greatest thing God ever made. To Hurston, the horizon represented infinite possibility—a reminder of God's boundless creation and the endless opportunities for growth, discovery, and hope. It was something she never stopped watching because, in its vastness, she glimpsed both the greatness of God and the limitless potential of the human spirit.

As you experience this production, I invite you to look beyond the romance and beyond the tragedy. Watch the horizon with Janie. Listen for the storms. And perhaps, like Hurston, discover that life's greatest journey is not simply finding someone to love, but finding the freedom to become fully who God created you to be.

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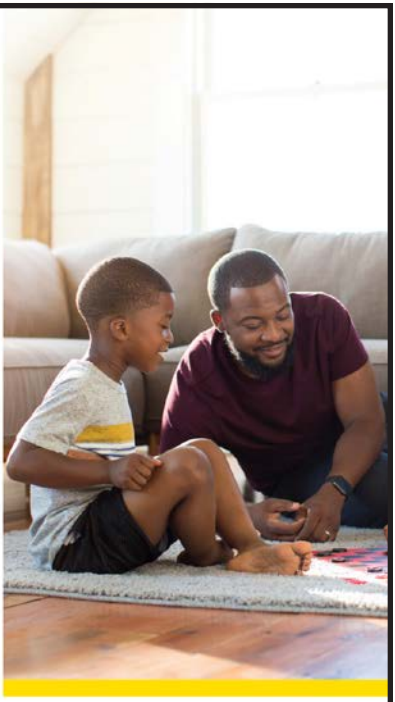

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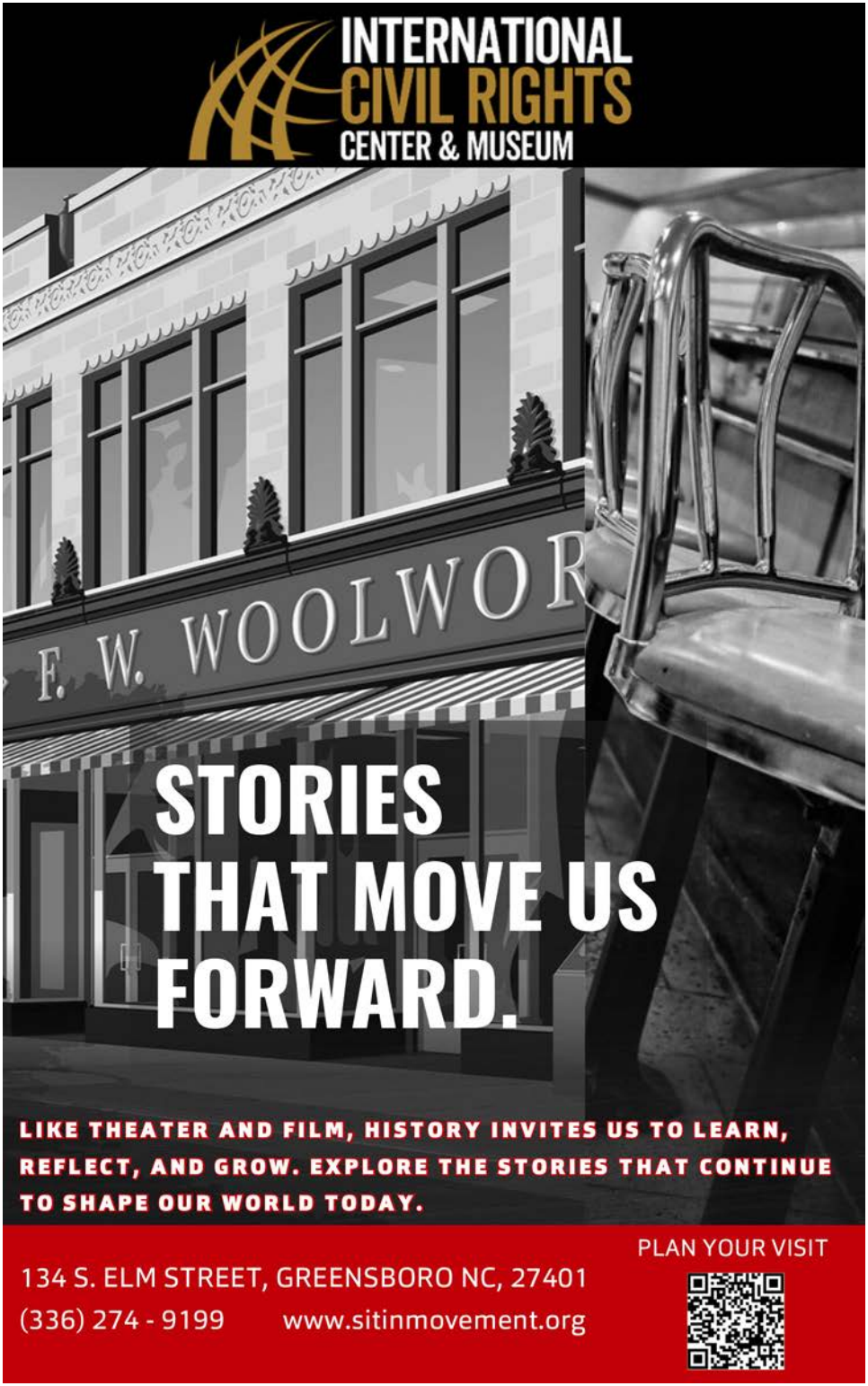
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Nico Amortegui, *Be a Wildflower*, 2025. © 2025 Nico Amortegui. Courtesy of the artist.

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The North Carolina Museum of Art, Winston-Salem (formerly SECCA) is pleased to announce a new exhibition and program space, now open in the heart of downtown Winston-Salem.

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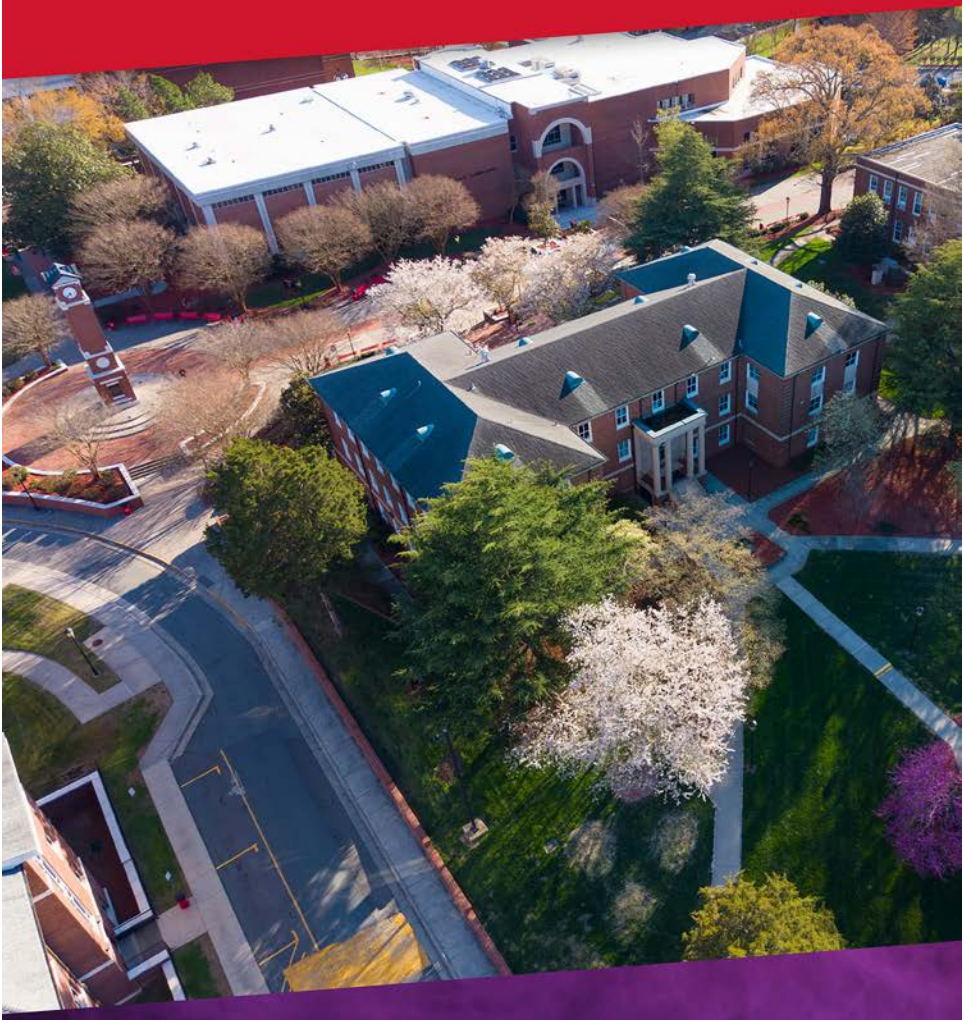

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