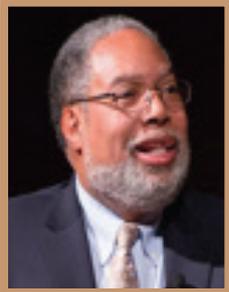


2018 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

◆ **Dr. Lonnie G. Bunch, III** ◆

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Award



Dr. Lonnie G. Bunch, III, has transformed the concept and understanding of African American history for generations to come as the Founding Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).

The desire to learn and captivation with history, was instilled in Dr. Bunch by his parents, both of whom were public school teachers and members of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA/NEA). As an inquisitive teen, he naturally turned to history for answers. "History, for me, became a tool to help me understand my own life," he says. "But I also realized that if a nation understands its history, it is a wonderful tool to help a nation figure out how they live their lives, how to understand the conditions they face."

As the Founding Director, Dr. Bunch was given the mandate to conceptualize, build and lead the NMAAHC. Dr. Bunch's fearlessness, optimism, and infectious enthusiasm have led to the creation of the largest collection of African-American artifacts ever gathered in one place. The Museum brings together the shackles of an enslaved child, Harriett Tubman's hymnal, the dress Lena Horne wore in *Stormy Weather*, Chuck Berry's Cadillac and even the Parliament-Funkadelic Mothership.

Bunch laid out this philosophy: "Rather than champion limits on controversy and debate in exhibits; museums and curators must have the courage and vision needed to embrace controversy. The greatest danger is not from threats to funding sources or pressures from government officials, but from the profession's willingness to self-censor exhibitions, to smooth the rough edges of history, in order not to offend in this politically charged atmosphere."

Dr. Bunch took the challenge of creating the NMAAHC with an understanding that he was creating a view of the nation through the lens of the African American experience. The museum would give people the chance to realize that we are more alike than we are different. The museum is based on a shared history of truth about black Americans, and more importantly about America.

Bunch said the goal of the museum was to have Americans remember and confront "America's tortured racial past - so we can illuminate all the dark corners of this nation's history, because if we don't, there is nothing as awful as a people who are forgotten." He explained that in essence, "this is a museum that says if you care about America, if you care about our ideals, if you care about our notions of spirituality, optimism, resiliency; this is the place for you."

Dr. Bunch has forged a new opportunity for all of us to honor and celebrate the many dimensions of the African American story, creating a place that encourages reflection, dialogue and understanding. Bunch brought this vision of history - of remembrance - to life in the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), where he first collected, then transformed an extraordinary group of artifacts into an urgent, powerful and profound illumination of the American story.