



# RCLM

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **Johnson C. Smith University receives Culture Blocks Grant to open new exhibit**

Charlotte, N.C., - March 14, 2019 – The James B. Duke Memorial Library at Johnson C. Smith University has received a grant from Culture Blocks to fund *RCLM 37*, an experiential exhibition of art and history that reimagines past, present and future narratives of the Beatties Ford Road corridor. The exhibit space is formatted to create multiple vignettes of collaged images playing off of the concept of a storybook; it is connected in such a way that there is no beginning or an end, and a continuum of time exists in which these events, people and places continue to endure.

*Influenced by the cultural aesthetic of Afrofuturism, RCLM 37 places Black people in the future of neighborhoods where that presence and history is witnessing the threat of erasure.*

Janelle Dunlap, Creative Director

The project started three years ago to collect, document, and preserve the history of the Beatties Ford Road Corridor/Biddleville community. Biddleville was built around Biddle University, now Johnson C. Smith University, in 1867 and is the oldest post-bellum in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Funded by Mecklenburg County, Culture Blocks is a community partnership between the Arts and Science Council, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, and Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation designed to bring arts and cultural experiences closer to where residents live. Culture Blocks provided funding for the James B. Duke Memorial Library to transcribe 52 oral history interviews, develop the Digital Smith online archival repository to host the interviews and transcriptions, and to hire a Creative Director to conceptualize the exhibit. The Levine Museum of the New South is also a partner, and provides expertise in museum design, manages the

exhibit team headed by Creative Director Janelle Dunlap, and features a review of historical content by Dr. Willie Griffin. Dunlap is a mixed-media social practice artist who uses space to disrupt expectations of time, culture, and community. She says, “the vision for *RCLM 37* is inspired by the selfless dedication of Judge Shirley Fulton, who dedicated years to the restoration of the Wesley Heights Neighborhood.”

The significance of the exhibit title *RCLM 37* refers to the Beatties Ford Road exit 37 off of Interstate 85. In the 1960’s, the creation of the Interstate-277 expressway loop and the presence of I-85 split the Beatties Ford Road Corridor/Biddleville community and wiped out several homes, schools, and businesses. Although Biddleville was not totally destroyed by urban renewal during the 1960’s and 1970’s, the longtime residents in this community are now witnessing gentrification as more white and high-income residents relocate to the neighborhoods.

*Stories and art can facilitate engagement in emotional topics like urban renewal.*

Monika Rhue, Program Director and Director of Library Services and Curation at Johnson C. Smith University.

Mrs. Rhue also stated that it was important to preserve the history of this community so that residents will have a permanent location to access the oral histories and photographs that chronicle its history. Mrs. Rhue hopes that the *RCLM 37* exhibition will engage the Beatties Ford Road Corridor and the greater Charlotte community and will allow a deeper understanding of Biddleville and the contributions of Charlotte’s black communities. She hopes it will tell a story that is less about economics and more about human relations and connectedness to community.

*We hope to change the attitudes of individuals on the important role in preserving, sharing, and displaying positive narratives of the Beatties Ford Road Corridor/Biddleville. We would like to give voices to long-time residents and provide a historical perspective to new and incoming residents as this community transforms culturally.*

Monika Rhue

The *RCLM 37* exhibition opens April 7, 2019. The opening reception starts at 3:00PM with African Drumming and Dancing with *Life As Art Production*, self-guided tours, live music with *Isaac Gonzalez* a rhythm and blues singer/song writer known as Gino Mathias, food, and a meet and greet with the artists. **RSVP at <https://jcsulibrary-reclaim37-exhibit.eventbrite.com>**

For more information about the exhibition, contact Monika Rhue at [mrhue@jcsu.edu](mailto:mrhue@jcsu.edu)

### ***About Johnson C. Smith University***

***Founded in 1867, Johnson C. Smith University is an independent, close-knit urban university located in Charlotte, N.C. It has a growing national reputation for integrating the liberal arts with business, the sciences and technology in ways that empower tomorrow’s diverse entrepreneurial citizens and leaders. Offering 22 fields***

*of study to more than 1,500 students from a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds, the university's excellent academic programs focus on servant leadership, civic engagement and global responsibility. For more information about JCSU, visit [www.jcsu.edu](http://www.jcsu.edu) or follow the university on social media sites [Facebook](#) , [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Pinterest](#).*