



## Keepers Of The Culture, Inc. – Philadelphia's Afrocentric Storytelling Group 2019 Annual Affiliate Report

Peace and Blessings from the Executive Board, Council of Elders, and Membership of Keepers Of The Culture, Inc. the Philadelphia Affiliate of NABS, Inc. We send love and gratitude to our ancestors, griots who came before us, to our co-founders Queen Mother Mary Carter Smith and Queen Mother Linda Goss, and to the current leadership of NABS Inc., President Janice Curtis Greene, and the NABS Board of Directors, who work do diligently to keep Black Storytelling alive, flourishing, and keep those who carry this blessed unified and ever evolving in the spirit of excellence. We present to you our 2019 Annual Report reflecting our fulfillment of our mission, "Telling Our Story, Claiming Our Glory".

### October 2018

KOTC partnered with the Locs Conference, creating a storytelling program for the children of the attendees. A one-hour storytelling show was put on with stories centered around hair and Aesop stories. The program was such a success, KOTC was invited to return in 2019.



October was also the time of year for KOTC's 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Family Day, a collaboration with the Free Library of Philadelphia. Oni Lasana, one of KOTC's most dedicated members served as the Creative Director. The show's theme, "Aint It Funny" comprised of stories from Aesop, Anansi, and Brer Rabbit. Tellers included KOTC members and children from the KIPP Philadelphia Preparatory Academy.



### December 2018

KOTC produced "Kwanzaa with KOTC" a night of storytelling, drumming, and music with stories centered around Black culture during the holiday season. There was a center stage for adults and a separate section with KOTC members engaging children with stories and activities. With over 75 in attendance, we were at capacity at Atiya Ola's Spirit First Foods, a vegan/vegetarian restaurant owned by KOTC officer, Atiya Ola. KOTC also collaborated and produced a Kwanzaa program with the Cecil B. Moore Recreational Center. Past President Irma Gardener Hammond and KOTC Co-Founder Jawara Bishop put on another Kwanzaa event for elders at the Simpson House, a local nursing home.

**Keepers of the Culture, Inc. presents**



**KWANZAA**  
with **KOTC**

**12.27.18 6:30PM**  
Storytelling Drumming Music Fellowship

Atiya Ola's Spirit First Foods  
310 South 48 Street, Philadelphia, PA 19143  
Questions? Call 267.761.1433



**www.kotcinc.org**

KOTC Members begin to submit stories to the Jumping Jellybean Podcast as a collaboration with Shanthini Venugopal, a fellow storyteller based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Every Sunday 2.00pm- 3.00pm



**STORYTIME**  
with Shanthini Venugopal  
www.aforadio.com

Photo by Asha Krishna



**February 2019**

Due to the multiplicity of events that take place in Philadelphia during Black History Month, KOTC members devoted their time to collaborating with various schools and community organizations.

**March 2019**

In March, the President Elect took a more active role in leading KOTC. A system of procedures and forms were established to streamline the operations of KOTC. This included paperwork and processes for booking tellers, budgeting for productions, finances, and renting venues. The President Elect also made the executive decision that there would be no Love Night for 2019. He recognized that KOTC needed to rest and regroup as an organization. There was much to plan for 2020 and he wanted the Elders “to stop working so hard and just sit down!”, for they were over exerting themselves, working tirelessly without complaint for every KOTC event. The only event that was to be put on in the summer was “Stoop Stories”, which had no Elders on the planning committee, allowing them to truly rest and participate at their leisure.

### **April 2019**

KOTC established a partnership with the KIPP Philadelphia Preparatory Academy in North Philadelphia. This partnership included a residency for members to tell stories the classrooms, on ramping of The Watoto Of Joy, KOTC's youth branch of tellers, and access to the schools classrooms, cafeteria, and 450 seat auditorium for meetings gatherings, and productions. KOTC changed their meeting location to KPPA to help establish relationships with the students. Past President Irma Gardner Hammond and Co-Founders Jawara Bishop were the first tellers to kick off the residency, teller stories to children on Fridays, and joining the children for lunch in the cafeteria on Tuesdays.

KOTC created an exhibit at the 2019 African American History & Culture Showcase in Philadelphia, celebrating 400 Years of Resiliency, when the first Africans arrived in North America. KOTC member engaged with attendees, recruiting new members, telling the importance of books and storytelling, and promoting their summer storytelling event, Stoop Stories. Over 300 attendees completed member interest forms and subscribed to the email list and “Habari Gani”, KOTC quarterly newsletter. KOTC also told stories and performed spoken worked to an audience of 200 attendees on the “Congo Square” stage.



### **May 2017**

The onset of the spring season came a time for KOTC to band together and support each other. Life Member Barbara Easley Cox and Past President Irma Gardner Hammond both experienced the transition of their sons unexpectedly. KOTC showed the true spirit of Harambee, pulling together to cover two beloved queens in our family. KOTC Members participated in the memorial services of both sons, reading poetry, serving meals, providing photography and video, and creating and implementing a tailored libations ceremony by President Elect, Paul D. Best, “Our Sun Paul”.



Three Elders of the KOTC family, Co-Founders Jawara Bishop, Wanda Gigetts, and Past President Irma Gardner-Hammond are nominated for the NABS Brother Blue Circle of Elders.

## June 2019

With the addition of new members within KOTC, KOTC began a series of Storytelling Workshops to train new griots in the Black Oral Tradition that ran from June to September. From researching stories, to adapting stories, to voice cadence and body language, members old and new engaged in trainings and various "Griot Homework Assignments" from workshops planned and implemented by Co-Founders Dr. Caroliese Frink Reed, Wanda Gigetts, Jawara Bishop, and Past President Irma Gardner Hammond.



KOTC Members Irma Gardner Hammond, Nashid Ali, and Carla Wiley. design and implement a Naming and Enstoolment Ceremony for a local elder celebrating their 90th Birthday. They

researched the family's history and identified four matriarchs in the family tree, creating stories based on the family's history and a ritual for future celebrations of the elders in the family.



KOTC President Elect Paul D. Best, "Our Sun Paul" decides to do his Master's Defense as a storytelling show. KOTC Members showed up and participated as he used storytelling to convey his two years of research on how children of Color engage in fiction literature in middle school.



After finishing his Master's program, the Council of Elders prepares Paul D. Best to step in as President. KOTC passes down the original artwork of the KOTC logo by the late Columbus Knox "Our Sun Paul". The tradition is for the artwork to be displayed in the home of the current president during his or her tenure.





## July 2019

President Elect Paul D. Best, "Our Sun Paul" promotes the upcoming KOTC Production, "Stoop Stories" throughout the city. The idea was to tell stories all over neighborhoods in Philadelphia on the stoops of residents. He goes on air on 900am, WURD to promote the event and to tell stories as a teaser.



**WURD**  
96.1FM | 900AM  
Black Talk Media.

# SUMMER OF FREEDOM TOUR

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA

96.1FM • 900AM • WURDRADIO.COM

**PAUL D. BEST, "OUR SUN PAUL"**  
PRESIDENT OF KEEPERS OF THE CULTURE, INC.  
LIVE INTERVIEW & STORYTELLING THURSDAY AUGUST 1ST 10:00AM



**KEEPERS OF THE CULTURE, INC.**  
Philadelphia's Afro-centric Storytelling Group

## STOOP STORIES: City Hall Edition

*Storytelling on Philly's biggest stoop...*

**TUESDAY AUG. 6TH 12 NOON**  
Rain Date: Wednesday, Aug. 7th, 12 noon

**SATURDAY AUG. 10TH 11:00AM**  
Rain Date: Saturday, Aug. 17th, 11:00am

1400 John F Kennedy Blvd, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Join KOTC in the City Hall courtyard for a **FREE** pop-up storytelling show! Bring a chair or sit in the courtyard seats as we tell stories, sing, drum, and enjoy the summer weather!

For more information please visit [www.kotcinc.org](http://www.kotcinc.org) or call (317) 759-4732

"TELLING OUR STORY, CLAIMING OUR GLORY"

## August 2019

The summer reaches a peak as KOTC begins August with The Kickoff of Stoop Stories, taking place in the City Hall Courtyard, the "biggest stoop". KOTC engaged over 100 visitors, children and nearby city employees during the lunch hour during the week and late morning on the weekend. The program consisted of local stories about people memories on their porches and stoops, and block parties. The kickoff was a great hit, leaving many people calling in, wanting their homes to be the host for the Stoop Stories 2020!



KOTC begins to make press kits for its members, beginning with updated photos for each member. First up, Co-Founders Wanda Gigetts, Dr. Caroliese Frink Reed, Jawara Bishop, and Past President Irma Gardner Hammond. All photos were taken by President Elect, Paul D. Best, "Our Sun Paul".



As a part of their residency with the KIPP Philadelphia Preparatory Academy, KOTC donates over 150 books and arts and crafts supplies to the incoming 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. This initiative was spearheaded by long time KOTC member, Carla Wiley.



### **September 2019**

Past President Ron Carter along with portion of the KOTC Council of Elders meet with Mural Arts Philadelphia, officially beginning the process of having a mural dedicated to the impact and legacy of Keepers Of The Culture, Inc. on display to the city of Philadelphia!



The KOTC 2019 Inauguration installs and celebrates the new board while celebrating the president's graduation, taking a new KOTC Family Photo!

- Paul D. Best, "Our Sun Paul" -President
- Deitra Morrison- Vice President
- Bernadette "Birdie" Rogers- Recording Secretary
- Oni Lasana- Corresponding Secretary
- Nashid Ali- Treasurer
- Ron Carter, Atiya Ola- Spiritual Caretakers



### October 2019


KOTC partners again with the Locs Conference, this year they are given an exhibit table and another slot in the program to put on a storytelling show. Over 250 attendees completed member interest forms, KOTC tells story to a nice crowd of families, promotes their 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Family Day, and is graced by a visit from past NABS Member Sonia Sanchez!







**KEEPERS OF THE CULTURE, INC.**  
Philadelphia's Afrocentric Storytelling Group



**JAMBO MAMA AFRICA!**  
Stories From The Motherland  
23RD ANNUAL FAMILY DAY

SUNDAY OCTOBER 27TH 2019 - 2PM  
PARKWAY CENTRAL LIBRARY  
1901 VINE ST. PHILADELPHIA, PA  
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
WWW.KOTCINC.ORG - 317.759.4732  
JOIN US THIS DECEMBER FOR "KWANZAA WITH KOTC"  
"TELLING OUR STORY. CLAIMING OUR GLORY"

KOTC participates in the Ascension ceremony for Baba Komi Sankofa, husband of long time KOTC Member Atiya Ola.

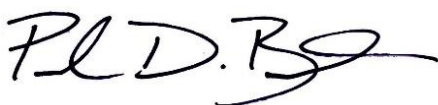


With the help of Past NABS President Queen Nur, KOTC accepts an offer to establish a residency with the Penn Museum for their Africa Galleries exhibit. KOTC members will research the artifacts and tell stories based on their origins from November 2019 to March 2020, with priority given those who completed the Summer Storytelling Training and Workshop Series as their first residency!

## Conclusion

While this year has been long and intense for KOTC members, we stand before in a perpetual state of Gratitude. The tough times allowed us to pull together and support each other. Just when we felt we were down, a divine ray of strength illuminated us all, allowing us to reinforce the bonds we shared with each other. The joyous and happy times continuously show us the blessing of carry the legacy of the Griot, and the amazing and invaluable things that can happen when we all come together in unity.

**In Spirit, In Love, In Culture,**



Paul D. Best, "Our Sun Paul"  
President  
Keepers Of The Culture, Inc.

