

# SJAM

# Social Justice Alliance for Museums



Kalamazoo VALLEY  
Museum

## Museum Background

Accredited by the American Association of Museums, Kalamazoo Valley Museum is operated by Kalamazoo Valley Community College and governed by its Board of Trustees. From its beginning in 1881 as a collection of curiosities in the public library basement, the Museum has always been a tax-funded museum. Until 1984, the museum remained a department of the Kalamazoo Public Library. From 1984 to 1991, the Museum received its operating support from the Kalamazoo City School District. In 1991, the Museum became part of KVCC and won the support of the community through a charter millage. Kalamazoo Valley Museum represents a successful partnership built from private funding and operates with public tax support.

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum preserves and interprets the heritage of Southwest Michigan and provides life-long learning opportunities to engage children and adults in history, science, and technology.

The Museum seeks to develop cultural, historical and scientific literacy through innovative exhibits, special exhibitions, planetarium programs, educational programs and weekend family events.



October 4, 2014 - January 19, 2015

## Project Background

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum and Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society are working together to continue the community conversation about race, equity, and social justice in this exhibit based on oral histories of contemporary residents of Kalamazoo. In this oral history project, several Kalamazoo residents speak about their work, ideals, hopes, and dreams for a Kalamazoo community that fully embraces social justice. What does an equitable society look like? Find out what a few of your neighbours think, and participate in the conversation!

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum has been collecting oral histories from area residents for more than 20 years. Some interviews have been integrated into both long- and short-term exhibits. The museum is beginning to digitize and catalogue these histories.

The Voices for Social Justice project debuted to the public 5 Oct with a panel of people who participated in the interviews, moderated by a local radio host. The project worked with a very small budget and so trained students and others to conduct interviews, use video and audio recording equipment and transcribe. This did create challenges and the process took the much longer than expected, and final “products” were not as polished as hoped.

The community were enthusiastic and there were no problems getting people involved. The project began with 10 people and has plans to continue to interview community members around social justice issues and engendering open discussion.

The project will expand through partnerships and building networks. The museum will be posting edited video interviews and full transcripts on their website, linking to other organizations with related concerns

Our partner in the Voices for Social Justice project is the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society under the aegis of their Healing Racism Initiative. The museum has participated with them in the planning and implementing of the annual Summit on Racism. The SMBH is undergoing a strategic planning process in which their focus will shift to social justice/healing racism while still embracing the idea of preserving heritage. They aim to become a clearing house for community social justice/racial healing activities.

### Community Background

Kalamazoo is a southwest Michigan city of about 80,000; the county where most audience members live), is closer to 200,000. In between Detroit in the east and Chicago to the west/southwest, Kalamazoo is home to medical research and development companies, among other industries, a state university, a liberal arts college of note (Kalamazoo College) and a community college that is very present in the community, and is the governing organization for the Museum. The population is diverse and culturally rich with a number of international scientists attracted by the research industry. Kalamazoo's African American population is about 10% of the city's population.

Philanthropy in Kalamazoo is active and promotes social justice focused predominantly on race and gender issues. Housing equity and law enforcement are also concerns. The Arcus Foundation supports LGBT social justice and donated the Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership at Kalamazoo College. The academic director was interviewed for the Voices project.

The Kalamazoo Promise fund supports children graduating from Kalamazoo Public Schools by providing free tuition at any public college or university in Michigan. The Kalamazoo Promise has garnered national attention and other communities are attempting to do similar programs. The fund has supported a number of students who would not have otherwise attended college, some are the first generation. The Kalamazoo Valley Museum works closely with children from poorer neighbourhoods (usually where families of colour live) and is represented on a committee working to bring equality to schools.