

# Curriculum Vitae

## **KIRAN SINGH SIRAH (he/him)**

Storyteller / Arts & Culture Thought Leader / Folklorist / Artist / Peacebuilder



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## PERSONAL PROFILE:

KIRAN SINGH SIRAH is an award-winning Storyteller, Folklorist, Arts & Culture Creative Thought Leader, Artist, and Past President of the International Storytelling Center. For more than two decades, Kiran has established award-winning arts, cultural and human rights initiatives in numerous countries. These programs have received recognition from UNESCO, The White House, The United Nations, and the European Commission. He has spoken at the Library of Congress, the Kennedy Center, American Public Health Association, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, The Pentagon, The US State Department, and numerous World Peace, Arts, and Culture assemblies.

In 2015, he was invited to the White House in support of storytelling efforts for national grassroots peacebuilding efforts. An advisory member to UNESCO Scotland and a Rotary World Peace Fellow, he has developed articles, toolkits, and talks on interdisciplinary storytelling and creative approaches to relationship building in communities around the globe. Kiran has been a thought leader on projects with the Smithsonian, League of American Orchestras, Google Arts & Culture, Dollywood, Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, The British Council, American Folklore Society, Library of Congress, South Arts, NASA, National Endowments for Arts & Humanities, and special arts & peacebuilding collaborations by invitation of Yo-Yo Ma and Dolly Parton.

Kiran passionately believes in the power of human creativity, arts, storytelling, and the notion of a truly global multicultural society. In 2017, he was one seven people worldwide selected to receive the “Champion of Peace” award at Rotary International Day at the United Nations in Geneva and was recently nominated for his work to receive a National Education Association Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights and Civil Rights award.

Kiran also serves in advisory roles in numerous professional organizations including, Senior Fellow for the Alliance for Peacebuilding, USA Ambassador for Generations for Peace, Executive Board of American Folklore Society, Collective Impact Leadership Council of STRONG ACC, East Tennessee Foundation, Advisory Network UNESCO Scotland, and New York City’s City Lore Project. Previously, Kiran served with Tennesseans for the Arts, the International Storytelling Center, The Association of American Cultures, African and Caribbean Network (Scotland), and Scottish Refugee Week.

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## AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

- Executive Board of American Folklore Society. Invited to the Executive Board of American Folklore Society, to advise, build relationships, and support the convening of 900 scholars, cultural workers, activists, artists, and educators, from across the nation and around the world for the 136th annual conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on the theme: Crossing the Global Storm: Networks, Solidarities, and Communities in Struggle. [Executive Board of American Folklore Society](#) June 2024.
- Rotary International and the United Nations. “Champion for Peace” Award for advancing storytelling for world peace. Presented Keynote at Geneva Peace Week, 2017. [Feature](#)
- Nominated for the National Educational Association Martin Luther King Jr. Human and Civil Rights award. 2023.

- United Way Unsung Heroes' Award. 2022.
- Purdue Peacebuilding Big Idea Challenge winner; Purdue University, 2019
- Invited by chairwoman Jane Chu to present at the Kennedy Center, for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts. 2016.
- Received "Exceptional Ability" Greencard by US Government, for specialist and unique contributions to benefit the citizens of the United States. 2015.
- Paul Harris Fellow Award; Rotary International, 2011 & 2022.
- Rotary World Peace Fellowship. 2011-13.
- Invited to serve as an advisory member to UK National Commission for UNESCO Scotland and invited to meet with UNESCO Director General, 2011
- Scottish Arts Leadership Achievement. Creative Scotland. 2010.
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Scotland recommendation for "Bigot Busters," 2007
- Invited to present exemplar project at the First Minister of Scotland Summit on Sectarianism, 2006
- Enterprise for Scotland award for "Sense over Sectarianism," 2005
- Invited to chair session on "Diversify" at the UK Museums Association Conference, 2004

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## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & LEADERSHIP:**

**Creative Lead for Storytelling; A Gift of Hope. Independent Storytelling & Narrative Change Keynote Speaker and Facilitator, Arts & Culture Thought Leader/ Folklorist/ Socially Engaged Artist/ Peace and Justice consultant. June 2023 to present.**

Kiran provides creative thought leadership to grassroots and social impact sector partners, practitioners, change-makers, justice philanthropies and foundations, in harnessing their creative potential and organizational capacity to promote peace, advance racial and social justice, and cross-cultural community empowerment dialogues. Drawing upon more than two decades as a cultural, narratives for peacebuilding and non-profit leader, Kiran provides program design, mentorship and community centered approaches to build trust and empathy, that empowers others to lead transformative change - on their own terms.

- **Imagined, Designed and Facilitated Community Food, Gender Justice and Storytelling Convening.** A Mellon funded project on behalf on University of North Carolina's Department of Women and Gender Studies' Feminist Theory and Social Justice series. Host venue—The Sonja Hanyes Stone Center for Black Culture and History. September 2024.
- **Facilitated "Stories to Meet this Moment"** community conversation workshop, for Waymakers Collective annual gathering. Arden, NC, August 2024.
- **Led Keynote and Cultural Narrative, "Stories for Hope & Change."** Building inclusive systems, relationships and opportunities for the 10 million served by Tennessee Valley Authority's Office of the General Council. August 2024.
- **Delivered Closing Plenary, "Storytelling for Shifting Power and Change," and narrative advocacy for** The Special Education Legislative Summit organized by the Council for Exceptional Children and the Council of Administrators of Special Education. Alexandria, VA and Washington D.C. US House and Senate. July/August 2024.
- **Lead Facilitator for National Dialogues, "Telling Stories That Matter: In Times of Crisis."** Led, planned and designed dialogue workshops and community participation

sessions for public folklorists, artists, and activists for the American Folklore Society and Living Traditions Network. May 2024.

- **Provided Narrative Specialism for the Co-Creation of a Disinformation in the City Response Playbook** with University of Melbourne. February – May 2024.
- **Commencement Speech Keynote with Mary V Jordan Multicultural Center** [commencement speech keynote](#). May 2024.
- **Advisory Grants Reviewer with Folk and Traditional Arts**, “In These Mountains” infrastructure grants & programs with South Arts and Mid Atlantic Arts. Nov 2023, and February 2024.
- **An advisor for Walking Together**, a new national initiative focusing on folklife in communities of color to bolster support for emerging traditional artists/practitioners of color and cultural organizations/collectives that are led by and accountable to communities of color. Ongoing.
- **Lead Thinker and Program Design for Storytelling, Human Rights & Global Peacebuilding initiative** (Canada). Ongoing.
- **Keynote Speaker for Rotary International’s Arch Klump Society**. Major fundraiser for the five global peace centers, Chapel Hill/Duke, Makerere University, Uganda, Turkey, Middle East and North Africa. April 2024.
- **Presented Plenary and Design for Three Day Storytelling Community Building Retreat** for artists and community members, with the RiffRaff Arts Collective’s “We Need to Talk!” initiative. Funded by an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts; Princeton, WV: March 2024.
- **Keynote Speaker on the theme of Storytelling to Build a Culture of Belonging**, for the 39<sup>th</sup> Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, on the theme of Storytelling to build a culture of belonging. Hawai’i. [Pacific Rim](#) and panel participant for **Conversations on Storytelling: Speaking and Listening to our Indigenous and Ancestral Voices** at University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. [Ancestral and Indigenous Storytelling](#). February 2024.
- **Led, Designed and Moderated, “How Do We Break Through the Silence & Act for Peace & Justice: Israel/Palestine Crisis.”** A peace activist healing and story testimonial session that explored cultivating stories of power and resilience, as a tool for building relationships, how to work through difficult conversations, build empathy and cross-cultural understanding. Participants included Palestinian and Israeli, Muslim and Jewish peace activists. January 2024.
- **Keynote Speaker and Workshop Facilitator for AUCD Conference**. Presented two plenaries, two storytelling workshops and thematic design thinking, for the Association for University Center on Disability (AUCD) for the 2023 conference on the theme *Emerging Leaders Shape the Future Through the Power of Storytelling*. November 2023.
- **Narrative Thought Leader, Emcee and Storyteller-in-Residence for Appalachian Big Ideas Festival**, in Hazard, Kentucky. An Appalachian-centered convening focused on disrupting the narrative, advancing social justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and building inclusive dialogues. October 2023. Write-up by Tasha Sams: [Program Spotlight](#)
- **Led Storytelling for Community Power Workshops** at World Culture Festival, West Virginia, September 2023.
- **Provided Consultation on The Potential of Storytelling in Conflict Engagement and Building Relationships** for The Center on Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). A subsidiary partner of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. Participants include conflict specialists, attorneys, mediators, parent centers, special education needs representatives and advocates for special educational needs, mediation and early dispute resolution. September 2023.

- **Workshop Facilitator for Waymakers Collective.** An Appalachian Futurism project rooted in equitable justice, creative cooperation, and sustainable stewardship. August 2023.
- **Storytelling Creative Thought Leader for Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Creative Encounters;** Living Religions. Storytelling Creative Thought Leader. Imagined, design and delivered dozens of daily storytelling community conversations, presentations and facilitation of main stage narrative session panels, as part of a Storytelling as a Sacred Gift- theme. The National Mall, and Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. July 29 and July 9, 2023. Write Up: [Humanity Stories](#)
- **Narrative Imagining Conversations and Sharing Sessions** with peacebuilding, regional and national artists, arts and humanities advocacy leaders, social justice and transitional justice activists, human and immigrant rights defenders, and policymakers. (Ongoing communications with organizations such as Welcoming America, Carter Human Rights Center, Othering and Belonging Institute, National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Appalshop, various Transitional Justice institutes). Ongoing.

**President, International Storytelling Center (ISC)- Arts, Humanities, and Educational Non-Profit). Jonesborough, TN; August 2013 - June 2023**

Kiran dedicated a decade to advancing ISC as the global flagship for storytelling through expanding the definition of storytelling, highlighting marginalized and underrepresented narratives, celebrating unsung heroes, increasing accessibility to storytelling for all, for families, and promoting storytelling as a tool for peace and social inclusion. Overseeing 111 jobs, and an annual economic impact of 8 million dollars. In his time, he also brought significant cultural, operational direction, financial stability and growth to ISC (transforming the institution from Chapter 11 bankruptcy to a thriving global institution) and developed a variety of values focused innovative new programs including Freedom Stories, Stories as Medicine, Appalachian Youth Story Summit, the More *than* One Story Initiative, while also steering the National Storytelling Festival through to its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as the leading festival of its kind in the world. Through his work, ISC has received recognition and major funding from the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, Purdue, the Mellon Foundation, South Arts, New Pluralists Collective, Rockefeller Philanthropies, Omidyar Group, Acton Family Giving, East Tennessee Foundation, and led the institution to become among the top rank of Major Cultural Institutions (MCI) for the state of Tennessee. Kiran has represented ISC at numerous world peace and national assemblies and developed partnerships with major cultural institutions including the Smithsonian, the United Nations, the Library of Congress, American Public Health Association, Google Arts & Culture, Dollywood, and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. In 2017, he was honored as a "Champion of Peace" at Rotary International Day at the United Nations for advancing storytelling for world peace and invited to develop storytelling and healing programs with the City of Charleston following the 2015 massacre at "Mother" Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. He has collaborated and been invited as a creative thought leader with Yo-Yo Ma and Dolly Parton, on amplifying Appalachian traditions, and educational programs. He has used story methods in advocacy and coalition building for a bipartisan peace initiative at the US Senate, which became US law, known as the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Mass Atrocities Prevention Act. Leadership feature: [Namaste Y'all Write up](#)

**Fellow, Rotary Peace Fellowship: UNC/Duke Chapel Hill, NC; Duke University Certificate in international peace and conflict resolution/conflict prevention. 2011-2013**

Masters Fellowship at the University of North Carolina's Department of American Studies Folklore, combined with international peace and conflict resolution/conflict prevention. Research focusing on "Aesthetics of Home through Narratives, Memory, and the Arts" emphasizing the power of human creativity; finding a sense of home. Thesis: A Stone in the Brook. Kiran was one of ten people worldwide selected to this fellowship for advancing the arts for social change and peacebuilding in the world.

**Arts Manager, Sense Scotland Glasgow, Scotland; 2009-2011**

**Managed the Helen Keller International Arts Award exhibition and program.** Led and managed a national team, including 120 artists from 26 supporting countries: for the international arts and communications programs supporting people with complex and diverse dual disabilities. Kiran established formal UNESCO recognition for Sense Scotland's arts & disability center, Touchbase, as part of UNESCO Creative Cities and oversaw all the national Arts & Health, Drama, Performing Arts and Music programming and numerous Creative Scotland artist commissions. Kiran also wrote for Deaf Blind International (DBI) publications and advocated for the rights and inclusion of artists with disabilities, as part of mainstream arts recognition.

**Learning Curator, Glasgow Museums, Scotland; 2002-2009**

Served as Learning Curator with primary responsibilities for St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life & Art, Kelvingrove 21<sup>st</sup> Century Refurbishment Project, Gallery of Modern Art, and Glasgow People's Palace Museum of Social History. Also held responsibilities to develop city-wide social justice and inclusion initiatives across 13 museums, 40 libraries, and community health initiatives, that served a population of 3 million people.

**Glasgow Museum Learning Curator Project Examples:**

- **Arts for Social Change.** In 2002, Kiran became the first Learning Curator of St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow, the UK's only museum of religion. Kiran established and built an award-winning national program and developed a city-wide arts action plans to establish Scotland's first museum citizenship and understanding sectarianism heritage project. At that time, Scotland had few resources in which to understand this subject fully, which was politically challenging to do so. It included building relationships across the Christian denominations, including Protestant societies such as The Orange Order and Roman Catholic run Republican groups, such as The Hibernian Lodges. As well as programs with diverse group of artists, poets and musicians and cross border community relations from across the divided communities within Scotland and Northern Ireland. Kiran built a 'Societies Emerging from Conflict' partnership with Ulster Museum, in Belfast, which used museum objects, and stories by people affected by the sectarian 'troubles'. Projects included empowering community leaders, people of diverse faith traditions, dialogues with ex-paramilitary members, elected officials, as well as football 'old firm' supporters and territorial gang members, to collect stories, songs, and sectarian related objects. Examples include poetry written on prison-issued toilet tissue by Republican hunger striker Bobby Sands as well as sectarian 'football songs' that related to Protestant 'hero' King William of Orange. This



program went on to become one of the largest and most successful programs of its type in the UK and Ireland. It received recognition from both The Scottish Government and The Northern Ireland Assembly to which around 100,000 people across communities have since participated. The program supported cross political dialogues, from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and, by invitation of the European Commission was shared as a model of practice with counterparts from Palestine, Israel, The Middle East and North Africa. The programs established around 70 creative partnerships, dialogues between youth gangs and the police, restorative justice and more. As a result, Kiran was invited to be the City of Glasgow's representative in a twinning program with the City of Marseilles, France, as part of the 2007 European year of International Dialogue.

- **Exploring Contemporary Issues. In the lead-up to the 2007 bi-centenary commemorations of the abolition of the British slave trade.** Kiran initiated a city-wide coordinated response to marking this important and significant year which came to be known as "Towards Understanding Slavery: Past and Present". It included relationships and research with Scotland's African diaspora community, people of different faith traditions, artists, poets and musicians. This led to the development of a series of community exhibitions and public programs that used objects from museum collections historically collected and interpreted through only western institutional Euro-centric structures. An 'African Voices' program sought to challenge colonial legacies by reinterpreting these objects through first- person narratives of artists from Scotland's 'new communities', encouraged the relinquishing of institutional control and empowering diverse interpretations of the aesthetics of cultural property. This work challenged the idea of 'static' culture and utilized contemporary traditions drawn from African and Caribbean folk traditions, including a Glasgow Haitian Voodoo alter, a Rastafari reggae sound system, and the commissioning of new contemporary art works for the museum collections on themes of 'products of slavery' by working with artists of mixed British and African Caribbean heritage.

#### **Education Officer, National Museums Scotland. 2001-2002**

**Established 'Side by Side: A Celebration of World Faiths in Scotland.'** A national post-9/11 educational interfaith public folklife festival and dialogue program, in partnership with Scotland's diverse faith communities. The first event took place 6 months after 9/11 and invited around 6000 people of Scotland diverse faiths and traditions, to share stories, objects, and participate in an Understanding Scotland's Faith Traditions, program series. Six museum handling kits were created in collaboration with six major religions (Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism) communities and established a multiply museum and *places of worship* school visits program.

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## **SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS & CREATIVE PROJECTS**

- **Closing Plenary Speaker** for the 39<sup>th</sup> Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, on the theme of Storytelling to build a culture of belonging. Hawai'i. [Pacific Rim Conference](#)
- **Keynote Speaker and Workshop Facilitator** for the Association for University Center on Disability (AUCD) 2023 conference on the theme *Emerging Leaders Shape the Future Through the Power of Storytelling*. 2023.
- **Narrative Change Thought Leader for Appalachian Big Ideas Festival**, October 2023. Write-up by Tasha Sams: [Program Spotlight](#)
- **Storytelling Creative Thought Leader for Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Creative Encounters**; The National Mall, and Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. July 29 and July 9, 2023. Write Up: [Humanity Stories](#)
- **Keynote and Story Leadership Training for Rotary International Leadership Team**. This was part of Rotary leadership Global Support Seminar to train and introduce regional leaders from 19 different countries on storytelling as a community building practice. Rotary International Headquarters' One Rotary Center. February 2023.
- **Hosted, Planned and Facilitated "Changing the Narrative" roundtable discussion with The Emancipator's Co-Editors**. The Emancipators project is part of The Boston Globe and Boston University Center for Antiracist Research led by anti-racist activist scholar Dr. Ibram X. Kendi. January 2023.
- **Provided Thought Leadership, and Facilitation with Yo-Yo Ma's Our Common Nature initiative**. Kiran was tapped as a thinking partner and workshop leader for a special storytelling and music convening that took place May 13-15 in Western North Carolina. The project was by invitation of UN peace ambassador and renown cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Project celebrated Appalachian traditions. Other partners included The Office of Performing Arts and Film, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Service, elders of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Cherokee Nation, Cherokee museum, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Black in Appalachia, Big Ears Festival, National Park Service, Radio Lab and others. The project convened around 45 cultural and eco-activists and practitioners from across Appalachia and beyond, to help explore the emerging story of how culture connects people to the natural world and how biodiversity and human diversity strengthens our relationship to nature and to each other, brings us empathetic connections as we imagine and build our collective future. 2022 and 2023.
- **Oversaw Unsung American S/Heroes Storytelling Initiative**. A special spotlight initiative to celebrate the stories and legacies of American changemakers. Speakers included Navajo Code Talker, Peter McDonald, Apollo 13 Astronaut Fred Haise, and special feature of three women from New Orleans; Leona Tate, Gail Etienne, and Tessie Prevost, who were the three of the first four Black six-year-olds to integrate McDonogh Elementary School in New Orleans in the 60s, which played a central role as a battleground for desegregation. 2019-2023
- **Provided Creative Thought Leadership to Artists at Work (AAW)**. A program of The Office of Performing Arts and Film. The project imagined a WPA-inspired approach to recovery that put artists at the forefront of social impact and transformation. AAW was awarded \$3 million from the Andrew Mellon Foundation. The project has since formed over 80 partnerships and employed hundreds of artists across the USA. 2021-2022.
- **Keynote "Reimagining Narratives" for Main Street America National Conference**. Main Street America - a subsidiary of The National Trust for Historic Preservation. A nationwide network of coordinating programs and local communities. It includes thousands of members from small to large rural and urban towns and cities, representing around 2,000 communities across the country with a goal of bringing economic vitality



back downtown, while celebrating their historic character, and bringing communities together. The conference took place in Richmond, VA. 2022

- **Keynote for Rotary Presidential Conference.** Houston, Texas, 2022.
- **Keynote for World Artists Experience.** World Artists Experience is a global online network and conference to cultivate artists worldwide. 2021
- **Keynote for Knoxville's Maker City Summit.** Knoxville, TN: 2021
- **Participated as a Panel discussant for "How Do We Talk to Each Other? A Storytelling for Racial Justice** a panel discussion for the final Freedom Stories Project.; virtual: 2021. An ISC collaboration with Southern Poverty Law Center and Highlander Center.
- **Keynote for Rotary District Conference.** Greely Rotary District Conference. 2021
- **Keynote for the Future Assistant Conference** held across western Europe. 2021
- **Keynote for Center for Rural Strategies.** A plenary talk for the annual Rural Assembly Everywhere conference presented by the Center for Rural Strategies. 2021
- **Keynote for Rotary E-club of World Peace.** Themed: "The Power of Storytelling," 2021
- **Invited to participate as a New Pluralists Collaborative** focus group partner, aimed at developing a focal area for future New Pluralists/ Rockefeller Philanthropies, grant-making. Other change leaders included, On Being Project, One America Movement, Braver Angels, Common Ground USA, Mediators beyond Borders International, Faith Matters Network. New Pluralists plan to distribute \$100 million dollars over 10 years. 2021. Ongoing.
- **Keynote for Peace Speaks Up.** "La paz se toma la palabra" (Peace Speaks Up) project presented by the Cultural Affairs office of the Bank of the Republic of Colombia. 2021.
- **Designed Building Peace Storytelling Platform Space** with colleagues from Brazil, Colombia, India, and the United States. The story platform created a safe healing space for sharing stories and personal testimonies around complex issues of human rights, conflict resolution, and peace building. 2021.
- **Led and Designed Stories for Racial Justice Community Building Talk/Workshop** series, in partnership with Rotary Club of Stuart, Virginia. These community town-hall style conversations in a small town called Stuart, Virginia, named after a Confederate general, J.E.B. Stuart aimed to illuminate more than one story in community wide discussions on contested symbols like flags and statues—and complex histories related to the US South and notions of "home." 2021.
- **Delivered Applied Storytelling Keynote for 600 Educators and Teachers for Niswonger Regional Learning Day.** A professional development summit for regional K-12 teachers across disciplines sponsored by the Niswonger Foundation; Greeneville, TN. 2021
- **Keynote for Big West Zone Institute.** An event for 600 Rotary leaders. AZ, 2021
- **Developed and Designed Young Appalachian Story Summit,** a three-year National Endowment for Humanities funded program, and workshop series for young activists, artists and changemakers from across Appalachia. TN: 2021.
- **Provided Humanities Social Impact Study Presentation to the National Council of Traditional Arts** on the impact of the NEH funded Freedom Stories initiative; 2021
- **Award Panel Participant for "Hope in Action"** – an advisory project and grant administered by the East Tennessee Foundation to address systemic racism and support racial equity in East Tennessee.
- **Served on National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellows review and selection panel.** The highest award the country gives that honors folk and traditional art. This year it included presenting Mama Linda Goss, a pioneer for the Black American storytelling movement, as a NEA Heritage Fellow. 2019

- **Served on National Endowment for the Humanities Community Conversation grants review panel.** 2018.
- **Designed, Established and Evaluated a New Stories as Medicine program.** This “narrative medicine” program trained 300 healthcare and racial justice practitioners at the start of the 2020 Covid 19 pandemic. The training followed up with trainings in Ballarat, Melton, and Maribyrnong, Australia, for community healthcare workers and racial justice and community inclusion practitioners focused on the power of storytelling to create safe spaces for community dialogue, empathy and understanding. 2020.
- **Keynote “Your Values, Your Story, Your Impact,” for League of American Orchestras—**Focused on the reimagining the narrative, the intersection of music and storytelling, and using the arts to build cultural diversity. Around 1500 participants were in attendance representing both small and large orchestras. 2020
- **Initiated Freedom Stories: Unearthing the Black Heritage of Appalachia, initiative.** Following the murder of George Floyd, Kiran wanted to go beyond just issuing a statement but to create a program that served the community at a time of need and during this critical moment, when people had a right to talk about what’s on their minds. The program, 'Do Black Lives Matter in Appalachia?' emerged as the first public event of that program, which launched on July 3, 2020. It brought together Black activist youth, scholars, historians, community leaders, and artists to discuss topics such as “race bias in education,” “the continual struggle for civil rights,” “Jim Crow Appalachia; slavery by another name” and aspirations for a more just and equal community. Over 12,000 people attended that first virtual event and it has since reached around 1.5 million people worldwide through a free multimedia co-owned community resource for dozens of Black cultural and community organizations. The program culminated in a cross partisan congressional briefing and has been received exemplary recognition for its depth and innovation by organizations such as National Humanities Alliance, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. 2019-2021.
- **Invited to Present to Biden-Harris Arts and Humanities Transition Team** on the importance of the arts and humanities in rural regions such as Central Appalachia; virtual: 2020
- **Led Two-Part Training for Colleagues at the Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico—**Project focused on how to gather and tell the stories of “The Land of Enchantment” including BIPOC stories and ethical frameworks. Project included training with practitioners from the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Forestry Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service on how to understand storytelling as a community building tool to support telling the story of nationally designated “wilderness” locations, participants attended from all four US times zones. 2020.
- **Imagined, Developed and Implemented a Unique Storytelling Seal of Excellence Arts & Health Partnership** with regional health institute, Ballad Health. Project enabled a new rural hospital to become designated the world’s first storytelling hospital. A place not just for high quality care to treat illness, but also a community center that fosters and encourages wellness through the arts. This included designing storytelling-related elements embedded into the architectural design, to community storytelling events and health literacy workshops, to specially story trained staff and establishing a Junior Board of youth storytellers. 2019.
- **Keynote: The Power of Storytelling and Personal Narrative** to effect national policy movement building change for colleagues around Scotland. 2019
- **Invited to Present Opening Story Activation for “Lights for Liberty.”** A local/national vigil aimed at ending human suffering and human (children) detention camps on the

US/Mexico border. The story Kiran told was a personal one and used values frameworks to appeal to not only to vigil attendees, but also to the news channels, news reporters, cross cultural and political spaces, that could help people at home, consider this human rights violation based on their own morals, virtues, and values. 2019. Kiran uses this example often in training change leaders to build cross cultural/social movement building coalitions.

- **Keynote: “Storytelling and Peace,” +Peace Coalition Launch and United Nation’s International Day of Peace plenary lecture;** New York, NY: 2019
- **Invited by Dolly Parton’s Team** to Keynote and Provide storytelling and literacy training for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library *Homecoming*. Pigeon Forge, TN. Pigeon Forge, TN: 2019
- **Keynote/Storytelling for Change Narrative Facilitation for Reclaiming Appalachia Conference.** Reclaiming Appalachia conference was a FAHE and NeighborWorks America conference focused on eradicating systemic and persistent poverty in the Appalachian region. 2019
- **Established a Storytelling Peace Initiative with Purdue Peace Institute.** As the inaugural winner for The Big Idea Challenge contest to help reduce armed conflict and political violence in the world. Project incorporated games theory, with storytelling tools, to help young people imagine a story of the world without conflict. 2021.
- **Keynote: National Museum of African American Music.** Talk opened the Rivers of Rhythm Institute for Social Education conference, a teacher training focusing on music as a tool for equitable education practices. The talk introduced storytelling as a tool for embedding equity in education. The National Museum of African American Music (NMAAM) is the only museum dedicated to preserving and celebrating the many music genres created, influenced, and inspired by African Americans. Nashville, Tennessee 2019.
- **Presented Talk Series and Interactive Workshops for Rotary International Peace Symposium** at the bi-annual Rotary International Conference held in Hamburg, Germany. 2019.
- **Keynote Speaker and Facilitator. Crossroads: Change in Rural America.** Kiran was invited by Georgia Humanities as a speaker and workshop leader at the Crossroads: Change in Rural America in collaboration with Wayne G. Clough, Secretary Emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution and Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and Smithsonian Affiliations. August. 2019.
- **Invited participant in a Global Discussion with Institute for Integrated Transitions** on the role of narrative to help fragile and conflict-affected states achieve more sustainable transitions out of war and crisis. 2019.
- **Provided Arts & Narrative Consultation for Idaho Commission on the Arts.** At the invitation of the Idaho Commission on the Arts and Governor’s leadership institute, Kiran presented talks and workshops on the role of storytelling and the arts in education, leadership, and building community. 2019
- **Keynote: “Storytelling: The Power of Peace,” for US Department of Defense** as part of the opening event and three-day dialogue for Collaborative and Adaptive Security Initiative (CASI;) Project explored with representatives of 40 US government agencies, the role of narrative as an alternative to violent combat. Arlington, VA. 2017
- **Presented *On the Move* Program for Smithsonian Folklife Festival 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.** A City Lore curated series of performances and conversations based on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the immigration act theme. National Mall. Washington DC. 2017.

- **Keynote “Stories of Home” Creative Placemaking Leadership Summits.** South Arts (covering 14 southern US states) and Appalachia conferences, Columbia, SC 2017, Chattanooga, TN, 2019.
- **Lead Professional Development facilitator for South Arts “Folklorists of the South.”** Folklorists and cultural activist retreat, Canton, Mississippi. 2017.
- **Guest Speaker for Arts of the Rural-** National digital exchange collaboration with RUPRI and National Endowment for the Arts. 2017.
- **Consultation for NASA- JPL: Storytelling & Space Exploration.** Kiran provided consultation with NASA-JPL teams to develop arts and culture strategies for its Cassini Solstice Mission that explored Storytelling & Space Exploration. The ideas included an educational initiative to use storytelling in a variety of applications to help kids better understanding space exploration, Saturn, and even life on Planet Earth. 2016.
- **Keynote “The Transformative Power of Storytelling: A Social Force for Social Change.”** Invited to present the Botkin Lecture, as part of the 40th Anniversary of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress; Washington, DC: 2016
- **Developed Strategy & Story Circle Leadership Advocacy** to host partnership meeting with House Foreign Relations Committee, which introduced the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act and in 2019 enabled it being signed into US law. US Senate, Washington, DC: 2016. [Case Study](#)
- **Keynote, Design Thinking and Facilitation at Mother Emanuel AME Church.** Invited to lead a Storytelling and Healing program in Charleston, South Carolina, following the deadly shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church--which took nine parishioners' lives. This was part of a series of events aimed at fostering healing and community dialogue. It included an official storytelling proclamation of friendship between two southern cities, a round table to discuss contested symbols, a private social change capacity conversation with educators and artists, and an empowerment workshop for students from the only inner-city high school in Charleston, Burke High School. 2016. This project is discussed in Kiran’s 2016 [A TEDx Talk Storytelling: A Peaceful Power.](#)
- **Provided Partnership Facilitation with Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.** Developed US State Department partnership via its Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and Institute for Contemporary Education and the Dialogue Institute. The project brought 20 youth leaders from Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq to Cherokee, North Carolina. Kiran cooked a traditional Indian “halal” meal for all the participants and led the fellows in a deep dive story exploration to help them make sense of their experiences and cultivate the stories they wished to foster relationships with one another, their respected communities, and in building relations between their home nations and the US. A follow up storytelling meeting was arranged at the US State building in DC in which Kiran led and advised on a series of global storytelling pilot programs for 50 global nations in collaboration with US embassies. 2016.
- **Building Dolly Parton’s First Resort. A Storytelling Site of Excellence.** Kiran initiated, led and established a unique Arts and Culture partnership with Dollywood. Kiran’s expertise helped Dollywood’s Dream More realize Dolly’s vision of using storytelling arts to bring families together—help tell Dolly’s story more broadly. As Dolly Parton’s first resort hotel, the envisioning took place prior to the resort’s official opening in 2015, to ensure story concepts were embedded in the design from the outset, to include shared values, family philosophies and mutual commitment to cultural preservation, regional development, and promoting positive change to bring families together. The new resort now includes multigenerational storytelling traditions, training, performances, a festival and other special activity. Kiran envisioned a site of storytelling seal of excellence, for the new resort- and a multi-arts family festival for artists,

songwriters, and storytelling performers. Kiran also received a personal thank you letter and flowers from Ms. Dolly Parton and an invitation to a special event hosted by Ms. Parton. 2015

- **Provided Facilitation at World Peace Symposium in São Paulo, Brazil.** Project supporting capacity for global peace activists to use narrative thinking to build collaboration and strategies for a conflict free world. São Paulo, Brazil. 2015.
- **Keynote and Round Table Facilitation for the Association of American Cultures.** Kiran traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to led keynote and roundtable discussions with members of the Black/African American, Latinx, Native American/First Nations, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ+ communities, of South Florida communities focusing on building a culture of equity using the arts. 2015
- **Led a Cultural Diplomacy Initiative for South African Storytelling Delegation.** Kiran invited and hosted a delegation of artists and leaders from South Africa to the US, as part of an international collaboration for building storytelling festivals and events across the African nation. Kiran advised and supported their process to create South Africa's national storytelling festival, integral to South African traditional heritage. 2015.
- **Invited to Participant in Arts, Social change and Conflict Transformation** convening, as part of Andrew Mellon Foundation-funded convening of arts, social change and conflict transformation (ACCT) resolution specialists. A project to establish a global field and platform to support the arts and culture in conflict as a values-driven collaboration to design and activate strategies to strengthen the arts, culture and conflict transformation ecosystem, worldwide. Brandeis University. 2015.
- **Provided Mentorship for National Poetry Out Loud Champions.** Kiran led a mentorship initiative with Poetry Out Loud, National Endowment for the Arts, The Poetry Foundation and all State Arts agencies. These exceptional 17 year spoken word poets, compete in a national contest with around 80,000 participants. Kiran mentored five POL champions in preparation, building confidence, and provided ongoing support for their future endeavors as artists, activists and in cultivating new works for national stages. 2014- 2019.
- **Co- Principle Investigator and Thought Leader on Smithsonian Confronting Contention: Deploying Culture in Conflict Resolution.** A bridging difference through cultural exchange partnership with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage symposium convening with cultural heritage professionals, peace-building professionals, educators, and programming specialists to explore the best practices in cross-cultural documentary processes, international relations, cultural heritage preservation and interdisciplinary exchange. National Museum of Natural History. November. 2014.
- **Developed Collaboration with UN Education and Master Peace** for a global storytelling youth program. Mentored a 24-year-old Kenyan storyteller-environmental activist, Velma Mukuro, to enable her to present her story live at the UN's International Day of Peace event in New York City, alongside Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, UN Peace Ambassadors; Dr. Jane Goodall and Yo Yo Ma, on International Day of Peace, United Nations in NYC. 2014.
- **Invited to the White House for Community Partners Action Summit.** Selected to attend and share models of practice as part of selected group of 80 national community leaders. Washington, DC: 2015
- **Keynote: Stories for the World.** Presented plenary on World Storytelling at Singapore's International Storytelling Festival. Singapore's old parliament building. 2014.
- **Led a Series of Startup Consultations** to advise the possibilities for storytelling center startups in East Africa and for a National Center for Storytelling for Ireland. 2015.

- **Presented Academic Paper, on “Narratives of Hope,”** at the Society for Anthropology North American conference; Durham, NC: 2013
- **Presented “Challenging Conventional Narratives of Peace” at the Beyond the Comfort Zone Conference: Chapel Hill, NC.** Spring. 2013
- **Presented “Social Justice Folklore,” at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage;** Washington DC: 2013
- **Keynote “Arts for Social Change” at United Nations; New York, NY.** Keynote address on to international delegation at United Nations; New York, NY: 2012
- **Presented “Ethnography at Street Level” at the American Folklore Society** conference; New Orleans, LA: 2012
- **Presented “Poetry for Social Change”** lecture at the Peace-to-Peace Conference; Greenwood, SC: 2012
- **Presented Models of Culture & Peacebuilding Practices in Colombia.** Delivered around 20 talks, and consultations focused on social responsibilities with Colombian social impact counterparts. Focused on the role of arts & education, and peace promotion with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); Bogotá, Ibaguë, and Cartagena, Colombia: 2009
- **Delivered “The Engaged Museum” Talk and Examples by Invitation of UNESCO & British Council. Edinburgh, Scotland.** UNESCO British Council Managing World Heritage Sites conference; Edinburgh, Scotland: 2008
- **Designed Multi-Arts Program for World Refugee Day.** In partnership with Scottish Refugee Council, Amnesty International World Refugee Day. Glasgow, Scotland: 2008
- **Led Design and Delivery of Freedom of Nine Cities Revisited.** A special remembrance event and public community conversation, to honor legacy of Nelson Mandela’s freedom visit to Glasgow in which the Freedom of Nine Cities was first established by ACTSA. People’s Palace, Glasgow. 2008.
- **Led, Moderated and Facilitated “Museums of the Future” with UK Museums Association.** The session focused on emerging leadership “Moving on Up” development integral to a UK Museums Association initiative. 2008
- **Invited to be Glasgow’s representative in European Commission “Societies in Crisis” sister city project.** Shared best practices and social inclusion models in this project convening sponsored by the European Commission. Project aimed at better structuring and enriching educational approaches, sharing intercultural participation across Europe, Middle East and North Africa and the Mediterranean; Marseilles, France: 2007
- **Presented “Challenging Sectarianism,” Lecture and Interactive Workshop at the Gallery of Modern Art.** Shared examples of arts approaches to challenge religious discrimination and led community conversation as part of a city-wide initiative to address Scotland’s “Secret Shame.” Glasgow, Scotland: 2007
- **Keynote Speaker at Conference on World Religions, England.** 2007
- **Developed Social Justice Learning Program “Faith to Faith: F2F.”** A free public adult social justice learning program focused on community conversations, by people of diverse faiths and traditions. Enabling the broader public to discuss and debate issues relating to religion in Scotland and the world; Glasgow, Scotland: 2002- 2008.
- **Designed and Curated 16-panel Exhibition “Sense over Sectarianism.”** Project also included establishing artist grants, dialogues with youth gangs, and incorporating their new restorative justice artworks within the mainstream museum exhibits. A program using the arts and creativity to support conflict resolution. 2007.
- **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland.** Kiran was part of the management curatorial team that had been tasked to develop a £30 Million refurbishment and radically rethinking the way in which the Kelvingrove museum



presented objects, history and connected stories to a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience- as participants. Kiran's job was to make sure that the exhibits and the entire museum experiences were accessible, inclusive, aligned with contemporary topics and supportive to young people and families, and could attract traditional and new audiences to the museum's immersive experiences. The project involved community focused groups, unique research, new narrative, and interpretation strategies. Kiran established a Junior Board to make sure their youth input (and humor) was incorporated into the redesign, developed the immersive arts interactive galleries on themes of communication, the Arctic, and Arts Discovery centers, social justice issues. In the first year of opening, the museum received unprecedented visitor numbers -3,000,000 in the first year, in a city of 600,000 people. The museum received world acclaim for the future of museums, using storytelling approaches within a traditional context. Kiran also helped host the Queen and Prince Phillip, as part of the official opening. 2004-2007.

- **Keynote “Engaging with Communities and New Arrivals” at Ulster Museum.** Invitation at the request of Northern Ireland Museums Council and Conference; Belfast, Northern Ireland: 2005

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## PUBLICATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS:

- **The Transformative Power of Storytelling: A Social Force for Social Change.** *Telling Migrants' Stories* edited volume. The University of Illinois Press, 2024. A chapter that was first delivered as part of the Benjamin A. Botkin Folklife Lecture Series at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress on May 25. 2016.
- **Examining Thumbprints.** A blog focused on remembering the stories that are difficult alongside the brighter parts of our collective histories. Adapted from keynote delivered for Main Street America. October 2022.
- **Contributed the Forward for *Speak Peace: Words of Wisdom, Work, and Wonder.*** A national publication led by storytelling artists in response to the murder of Alton Sterling. 2019.
- **“Storytelling and Community in Jonesborough, Tennessee,”** Main Street America article for The National Trust for Historic Preservation. 2016.
- **“Telling Stories That Matter,”** a toolkit for exploring one's potential as a storyteller, used in communities and schools across the US and 18 countries. 2013 (rev. 2016)
- **“Challenging Stigmas, Celebrating Disability,”** Deaf Blind International. 2010.
- **“Towards Understanding Slavery,”** an article for Glasgow Museums exhibitions commemorating the bicentennial of Scotland's abolition of the slave trade. 2007
- **“Museums must be aware of their place and responsibilities within the wider discourse of their societies.”** Op-ed for UK Museums Journal. 2007.
- **Review and Critique of the British Museum's Guide to World Religions.** Material Religion. 2005.
- **“St Mungo Museum: Thick-skinned but Full of Faith!”** an article for *SHCG News*, the Social History Curators Group biannual publication. 2003.
- **“Cultural institutions, under pressure from COVID-19, need Congressional help”** Op-ed in support of congressional support for the Arts & Humanities. The Tennessean, 2020.

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## EDUCATION:

- **University of North Carolina/Duke University; Chapel Hill, NC:** M.A. in Folklore/American Studies & Graduate Certificate in International Peace & Conflict Resolution; Rotary Peace Fellowship. 2011- 2013.
- **Newcastle University; Newcastle Upon Tyne, England:** M.A., in Museum, Gallery, and Heritage Studies; 2001- 2003
- **University of Leicester:** Postgraduate in Art Education. 1999.
- **University of Wolverhampton; Wolverhampton, England:** B.A., Honors in Art & Design, 1994- 1998 (inclusive of Erasmus program at National College of Art & Design (NCAD), Dublin, Ireland).

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## IN THE NEWS AND MEDIA:

### Selected examples.

- [Choose to be Curious Podcast](#) An episode on Curiosity, Stories & Belonging. 2024.
- [A TEDx Talk Storytelling: A Peaceful Power](#), an example of how Kiran displays creativity, through storytelling, to advance peacebuilding calls for action. 2016
- [The Path of a Global Storyteller](#) Video Podcast. Kiran describes his journey as a storyteller and cultural practitioner for social change. His beliefs in the value of folk arts storytelling to build community. 2023.
- [Article](#) from *The Johnson City News & Neighbor* outlining Kiran's work initiating ISC's Stories for Change initiative, "Storytelling Programs for At-risk Youth Resonate with Sirah."
- ["Namaste, Y'all"](#) by Jeff Ruby. In August 2017, a small group of white supremacists planned to stage a Confederate rally in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA. It had been two weeks since violence erupted at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and people's anger had not cooled. This article describes Kiran's work to promote and advance nonviolence action.
- [Radio Podcast](#) Interview with John Shuck, host of *Progressive Spirit* on NPR, Aug. 2014
- [AA Magazine for the Arts feature.](#)
- [BBC Scotland Interview](#)
- [Blue Ridge Country feature.](#)
- [Viewing the South through three lenses.](#) A 1-minute reflection in which Kiran Singh Sirah describes the value of listening to unheard but important stories. Recorded as an introductory video from a partnership between ISC and E Pluribus Unum in 2022.
- ["What We Bring: Immigrant Gifts" Blog.](#) As an immigrant artist/storyteller, curator. A series of performances and conversations based on the 2017 Smithsonian Folklife Festival's *On the Move* program.

- [Rotary Peace Fellow/United Nations "Champion of Peace" honoree](#) Storytelling Center president to be honored by UN.
- [Elie Wiesel Conflict Prevention act advocacy](#) Kiran leads a story-circle dialogue at the US Senate in D.C, introducing a peace initiative- this conversation led to a cross cultural and bi-partisan agreement to advance The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act getting passed by both the House and Senate, receiving 367 to 4 vote and was signed into law by the President on January 14, 2019.
- [International Speaker discusses social justice and peacebuilding](#) Information poster for Kiran's engagement in Charleston, SC. 2016.
- [Article](#) describing the impact on students from Kiran's storytelling and empowerment workshop as part of the Charleston stories for healing initiative.
- [Examining Thumbprints](#) Blog for Main Streets America.
- [Congressional Briefing](#) presentation of Freedom Stories, as the first ever marked project to center Black heritage storytelling integral to celebrating our nation's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary storytelling revival.
- [Blog](#) "How to be a Stone in the Brook." The news coming out of Afghanistan in 2021 reminded Kiran of his own family's experience as refugees, 50 years ago, when they were forced to flee their home in Uganda along with 50,000 others. Kiran wrote a blog and led numerous advocacy efforts with humanitarian organizations, media outlets, to encourage people to explore how they could feel empowered to help.
- Other project examples: [Kiran's project profile](#)

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## TESTIMONIALS:

*"Kiran understands at a very deep level that art not only holds intrinsic value but is a powerful tool for social change. I have seen him link poetry, storytelling and photography with issues as diverse as gang warfare, human trafficking, peacebuilding, and countering violent extremism. This ability to link disparate world views and modalities for peace is extremely rare, and Kiran is a genius in this regard. His ability to link different cultures, his brilliant ingenuity, his vast creativity, his love for a wide range of storytelling traditions – and his modesty -- strike me as the values we desperately need during a polarizing and traumatic time in the world. Kiran is a once-in-a-generation social leader" - Melanie Greenberg, Managing Director, Peacebuilding, Humanity United. Omidyar Group.*

*"Kiran is an exceptional individual that has led outstanding arts and humanities projects towards collective impact. By scaling up his Storytelling for All approach to ensure equity, diversity and critical conversations are core to the arts, and public discourse at large. Kiran is constantly working for social change, whether he's training troops in using storytelling for non-violence conflict prevention strategy at the Pentagon or empowering grassroots student activists across the US South to share stories on their own terms. His goal is always to amplify the voices and stories of America's most historically marginalized groups and help advance multiculturalism as a foundational core value for our nation. Kiran brings a mastery and unique expertise to the field of storytelling and narrative change for the benefit of the wider American public, where his*

*accomplishments are undeniably far above what is expected from his peer group. Although newer to our nation, he has established himself as a national leader, an interdisciplinary specialist, a public folklorist and educator, whom is always creating important national dialogue collaborations across the United States, and beyond.”* – **Dr. William Ferris, Joel R. Williamson Eminent Professor of History. Senior Associate Director. Center for Study of the American South. Former Chair of the National Endowment for Humanities.**

*“Kiran’s work building community and cross-cultural constructive ties among people through their most cherished and meaningful cultural assets is much needed in our globalized societies, in search of a creative, peaceful future. I applaud him for his talent, devotion, innovation, and energy in service of his cause—the cause of all of us.”* --**Dr. Daniel Sheehy, Director Emeritus, Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage**

*“Kiran’s contributions explore culturally diverse approaches through working with communities affected by conflict and marginalization.”* - **Joanne Orr, Chair of UK National Commission, UNESCO Scotland Committee**

*“Compared to other education and public relations professionals whom I have worked with, Kiran Sirah has a sharp instinct for presenting complex information from a relatable and fresh perspective.”* --**Dr. Alice Wessen, Public Engagement Manager, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory**

*“Kiran has already made an enormous impact, both in the United Kingdom and since 2011, in the United States, and he will continue to do so. On November 3rd, 2012, Kiran was invited by the Rotary International Representative to the United Nations to deliver a keynote address to discuss his work and ideas for using the arts as a force for social change. He spoke to an audience of more than 1,300 Rotarians, United Nations officials and representatives from worldwide international development organizations in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. During the two days before his keynote address, Kiran walked all over the city, listening to stories of residents’ experiences with the storm, which led him to dedicate his speech “to the people of the city who took me in and offered inspiration, truly Telling Stories that Matter.”*” - **Susan E. Carroll Managing Director. The Duke-UNC Rotary Peace Center.**

*“Through the story arts, he has been able to break down barriers, heal hearts and improve the human condition. Working with teachers, he supports the use stories to fuel the imaginations of students and build their self-image and self-determination. He is firmly on building community. I don’t believe there is any element of our society that Kiran could not- and would not- face for the purpose of bringing peace and well-being to our world. His gentle and caring spirit fills all the space around him. Being with Kiran is both inspiring and soothing. He has a calming and peaceful nature putting you at ease and making a space for open and meaningful dialogue. Through our work at the Niswonger Foundation, Kiran has provided support for our college leadership program, for the educators across the region, for school children, and to me, personally, as a mentor and friend. Kiran is the very definition of nonviolent activism. He doesn’t shy away from the hard questions. He merely uses his tremendous talents to share life lessons peacefully, respectfully, and convincingly. I want to keep learning from him.”* –**Dr. Nancy Dishner, President and CEO, Niswonger Foundation.**

*“He is a true leader in advancing the role of storytelling in our nation’s historical and cultural research. I was a first-hand witness to Mr. Sirah’s approach to his craft. Many social scientists*

*may view it as an intellectual exercise, but Mr. Sirah sees the connections between storytelling and real-world social issues with unusual clarity. He uses it as a tool to build empathy, defuse painful divisions, and construct a more peaceful world. Mr. Sirah's work is directly relevant to some of the United States' most urgent national interests today. A country that is in severe need of increased cross-cultural compassion and awareness should take heed of the potential contributions of Mr. Sirah.* --**Harold Closter, Director [former] of Smithsonian Affiliates.**

*"With his background in the arts as well as an ability to teach effectively, Kiran gives individuals and communities new ways to approach collaborative efforts aimed at conflict resolution on any level."* - **Rebecca Popham, Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation-USA**

*"Kiran Sirah is an exceptional individual who brings a broad background and a true mastery to the field of storytelling. Kiran Sirah's significant accomplishments have enjoyed widespread acceptance and implementation by the storytelling community and are undeniably far above what is expected from his peer group and have established him as a nationally and internationally outstanding researcher in his field. His work is certainly important to the field and to the United States"* --**Congressman [Former] Phil Roe, 1st district, Tennessee. (a sponsor for Kiran's 2016 exceptional ability Greencard)**

*In my career, talent like Mr. Kiran Sirah's is difficult to find, both in terms of professional practice and in terms of theoretical understanding."* -- **David Stanley, Protocol Officer, U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, GA**

*He gave an outstanding talk about the power of stories for community building and peacemaking."* - **Nicole Saylor, Head of the Archive, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress**

*"Kiran brought a fresh, creative energy to our team and helped us to think about creative storytelling in new ways. The toolkit he developed while he was with us continues to be a useful resource for the global network of Partners all over the world."* --**Julia Roig, President, Partners for Democratic Change**

*"We have engaged the work and expertise of Mr. Sirah to enable our fellows' experiences to focus on developing personal narratives that promote the core values of our program in particular to advance comprehension of democracy and religious liberty as core values in the United States"* -- **Barbara Zasloff, Ph.D., President, International Center for Contemporary Education**

*"Kiran's scope of work and influence are not limited to Tennessee. He recently received a call from the White House asking him to speak about response to recent tragic events through storytelling. Calls like this across the country and the world are not uncommon for Kiran as he is a known leader in his field of professional storytelling, expertly communicating its impact on community development, social justice, and peace. Kiran Sirah's brilliance in purpose, message, and action is a gift to Tennessee and our country. His accomplishments and impact are unique and significant and his work propels him toward his personal goal of peace in the world."* - **Stephanie B. Conner, Immediate Past Chair, Tennessee Arts Commission.**

*"Kiran is one of those thinkers whose ideas often seem, at first glance, brilliantly outside of the box; on closer examination, however, one realizes that they're not so much outside of the box as busily re-framing the box, re-conceptualizing possibilities in strikingly original ways. What*

*emerges is not necessarily what one expects, but instead what one couldn't even have imagined . . . but which seems to make complete sense once it's in place.*" -**Dr. Glenn Hinson, Acting Director, Folklore Program, University of North Carolina**

*"Kiran is truly an expert in the field of professional storytelling."* --**Dr. Brian Noland, President, East Tennessee State University**

*"He is very creative and accomplished in a variety of visual and performing arts and uses these talents to facilitate the expression of identity by marginalized and troubled communities for which he demonstrates compassion and understanding. His work has shown the value of the arts in bringing together communities in conflict, promoting mutual understanding that lays a foundation for conflict resolution. Most important is that Kiran has the will and an abundance of charm needed to inspire others to support him in positive actions towards these ends."* --**Frank Webb, D.Phil. Professor of the Practice of Public Policy, Duke Center for International Development, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University**

*"Kiran's commitment to thoughtful dialogue, connecting people across difference and conflict, and creating transformative educational experiences is exceptional, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from him."* --**Emily Chavez, Outreach, The Consortium in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University**

*"Kiran embodies the transformative power of storytelling. A mosaic of cultural influences have shaped his identity, and his journey from a multicultural upbringing to becoming a global advocate for using stories as bridges for peace and understanding is truly awe-inspiring. From childhood lessons in resilience to empowering marginalized communities, Kiran's life is a testament to the potency of narratives in healing, connecting, and fostering change. His work as a Rotary Peace Fellow, his successful ten-year leadership tenure at the International Storytelling Center, and his involvement in pioneering initiatives like Freedom Stories exemplify his dedication to social justice and community empowerment. Kiran's passion for global peace through storytelling is both palpable and impactful. Every day he illuminates a path toward a more interconnected and empathetic world. We need leaders like Kiran now more than ever"*-**Mark Cruise- Health and Social Impact Leader, Innovator and Advocate.**

*Kiran is a master storyteller and a dynamic facilitator whose work brings people together across lines of difference in pursuit of a more just and peaceful world. I've been involved in storytelling for social change projects around the world for the past 15 years and I have yet to meet someone as skilled and passionate as Kiran in this work-* **Dr. William McInerney- Gates Cambridge Scholar.**

*I had the immense privilege of working with Kiran to engage our disability community on impactful storytelling, and his insight, passion, and adoration for the art of storytelling was ever-present. His content expertise took our programming to the next level, and his ability to engage and empower others in their own journeys to storytelling is incredible to watch. Not only has his work ignited a fire for storytelling within my own work, but his mentorship has inspired both my professional and personal growth -* **Margaux Whitehead, Program Specialist, Public Health Professional. Association of University Centers on Disability.**

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