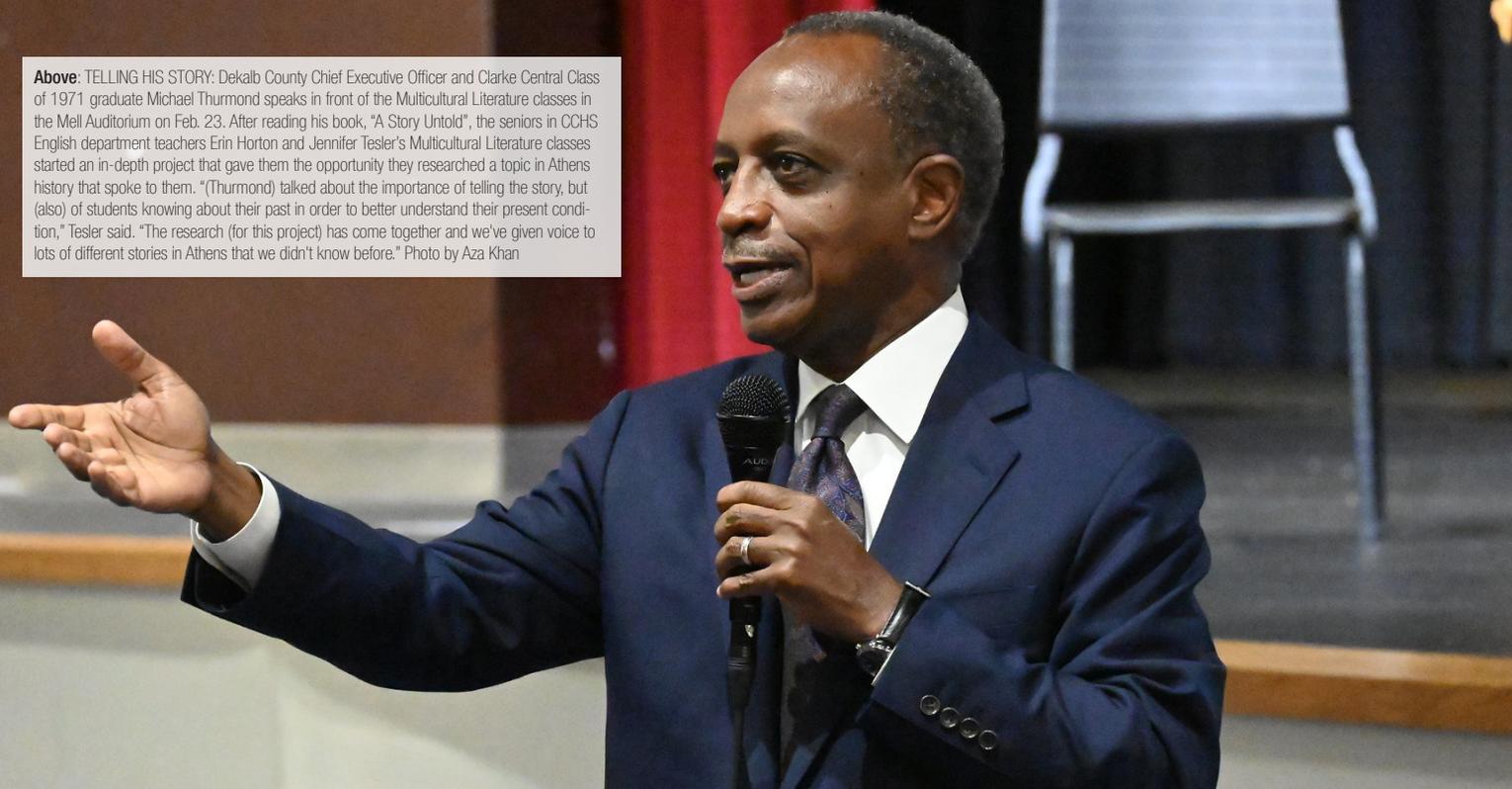


**Above:** TELLING HIS STORY: DeKalb County Chief Executive Officer and Clarke Central Class of 1971 graduate Michael Thurmond speaks in front of the Multicultural Literature classes in the Mell Auditorium on Feb. 23. After reading his book, "A Story Untold", the seniors in CCHS English department teachers Erin Horton and Jennifer Tesler's Multicultural Literature classes started an in-depth project that gave them the opportunity they researched a topic in Athens history that spoke to them. "(Thurmond) talked about the importance of telling the story, but (also) of students knowing about their past in order to better understand their present condition," Tesler said. "The research (for this project) has come together and we've given voice to lots of different stories in Athens that we didn't know before." Photo by Aza Khan



# UNCOVERING THE PAST TO CHANGE THE FUTURE

*CCHS Multicultural Literature classes have allowed students to uncover stories about their community's past and use what they learned to shape the future.*

BY RILEY RAMSEY  
Journalism I Student

In many high school literature classes, research often does not extend beyond the classroom and works are usually chosen from the American literary canon classics. However, Clarke Central High School 12th grade Multicultural Literature classes are taking on a project that provides a more immersive experience and allows for greater personal connections to their study.

CCHS English department teachers Jennifer Tesler and Erin Horton's research project is based on an important figure in Athens history that involves students in their community and requires an in-depth examination of Athens history.

"(Students) identified a topic, a purpose (and) their audience. They had to look for experts to interview whatever their topic was and then they had to interview them," Tesler said. "They really needed to find something that was important to them to research so that they could start an inquiry from that. It was really led by them."

The project was initially based on Michael Thurmond, author of "A Story Untold" and CCHS Class of 1971 alumnus. Thurmond graduated in the first year of the integrated CCHS, which combined the all-Black Burney Harris High School and the predominantly White Athens High School, which began integrating in 1963.

"Michael Thurmond noticed that there wasn't a textbook for his (high

school) Black history class," CCHS special education department collaborative teacher Brittany Carter said. "He had a teacher that looked at him and said, 'Well, then you write it.' He ended up doing the research that he needed to into the history of Athens and the Black men and women of Athens. He created the textbook, basically. He saw the need for that information that hadn't been shared and he filled it, so that's what segued us into doing our own research."

Students chose a wide variety of topics ranging from major events and locations of Athens history to inequities they identified in the world today. Though each student's project is individual, there have been some trends among their chosen topics. Carter works directly with students in both Tesler and Horton's classes.

"There's a group of students that are looking at housing insecurity. There's a group of students that are looking at The Varsity and the desegregation that happened there and that process. There are some students looking at Downtown Athens and how it's changed over the years," Carter said. "I like the freedom that the students have to come up with the thing they are most drawn to."

Thurmond came to CCHS to talk to the 12th grade Multicultural Literature classes on Feb. 23, shifting students' thinking on their research.

"I personally have noticed that a lot of the students felt a little bit more of a connection to the project itself seeing how Michael Thurmond developed his

process and getting to meet him and talk to him about what he went through to write his book,” Carter said. “A lot of them kind of realized, ‘Well, that’s possible. Yeah, I could do that.’ I think that has translated to them having a deeper appreciation for learning a little bit more about where they’re from.”

One of Tesler’s students, CCHS senior Lamar Haynes, has developed a better connection to his project after meeting Thurmond.

“It was cool (because) we met the author of the book we’ve been reading. (He told) us more that he didn’t write in the book -- things that we didn’t know about: how he used to live, how rough it was for him and how he changed things around Athens,” Lamar said.

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“I think (Thurmond’s visit) has translated to them having a deeper appreciation for learning a little bit more about where they’re from.”

**-- BRITTANY CARTER,**

CCHS special education department collaborative teacher

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Haynes’ project focused on homelessness in the Athens community. While researching and developing his project, Haynes learned things about his topic that changed his perspective.

“It’s not how we look at it. It’s harder for them to get a job, maybe because of their background, or their past or what they’ve been through,” Lamar said.

Carter says students are using sources that allows for greater depth than what is typical for most school projects.

“They are diving into looking at resources online, interviewing, visiting the archives through (the University of Georgia) digital archives, and looking at how these situations that they’re looking at have progressed over time,” Carter said. “(They are) figuring out how their research can potentially impact the community.”

To Tesler’s student, CCHS senior Andrea Haynes, the freedom and variety of sources made the project unique and engaging.

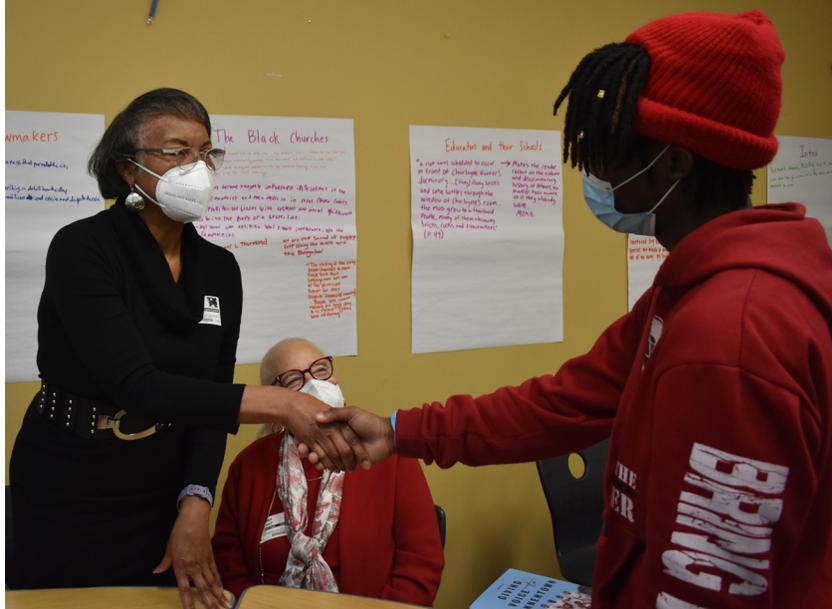
“When I think of research, I think about a lot of reading. I think about a lot of websites you have to visit and researching a topic that I don’t want to do because when you’re at a young age, teachers don’t really give you a wide choice range,” Andrea said. “Ms. Tesler let us pick a topic that we wanted to do. It hit home. When you can relate to something you have passion for, it’s easier to do than someone giving you some choices and you have to pick from them.”

Though the project is focused on teaching students about Athens history and individual research, Carter thinks it also teaches students skills for noticing and working to solve societal issues in the world around them.

“This project is helping to teach the students how to ask critical questions. How to kind of think of a situation or their community and go, ‘Wait, why is this like this?’ And then teaching them how to find the answer to that,” Carter said.

The final projects are presented in whichever format the student feels most represents their project, including websites, presentations, podcasts or research papers. However, Tesler’s goals for this project went beyond grades and the quality of the final project.

“(I hoped) that students would build confidence and know when they left this classroom, even though it’s not an (Advanced Placement) class, they can produce AP caliber work and they’re ready for college,” Tesler said. “(I hoped) that they would still end the school year with some joy and feeling like they had learned a lot at Clarke Central.”



**Top: IN-DEPTH RESEARCH:** Clarke Central High School senior Raudell Bazzell shakes the hand of former Linnetown resident and Linnetown Project President Hattie Thomas Whitehead in Room 234 on Feb. 2. According to CCHS special education department collaborative teacher Brittany Carter, speakers like Whitehead that came to visit the Multicultural Literature classes are one of the many resources the students used while developing their projects. “(We wanted) the students to be able to find the things that they’re curious about, and teaching them how to effectively research and get away from typical Wikipedia general searches, and learning and to understand the importance of a solid source, a credible source versus a non-credible source and understanding the difference between that. A research project is kind of a good way to do that because you’re forced to look at different outlets to find the most quality information that you can.” Photo by Aza Khan

**Bottom: CONNECTING WITH THE PAST:** Clarke Central High School seniors E’Chante Hull and Shaniya Freeman present their research projects to their Multicultural Literature class in Room 234 on March 4. The freedom students were given to choose their topic for the project and the wide range of resources they were provided to research gave Multicultural Literature student Say Paw, a senior, the opportunity to learn more about a subject that meant something to her. “(My project is about) the Asian community and how we came about and why we got to America and the things we’ve experienced in America,” Paw said. “I didn’t know about The Chinese Exclusion Act. I didn’t know about the Japanese people that got imprisoned because they were Japanese descendants. I learned a lot.” Photo by Lucas Donnelly