

Remembering Vietnam Program Series

Beginning in February, the National Archives at Kansas City will launch a public program series focused on the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War and how its impact affected Americans at home and abroad. This series coincides with an exhibition currently on display at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. titled *Remembering Vietnam*. More information about the exhibit can be found [online](#).

The first event of this program series will be on **Tuesday, February 27 at 6:30 p.m.** and will feature a moderated conversation with **Dr. Jim Willbanks** who served as an advisor on the Ken Burns and Lynn Novick documentary film *The Vietnam War*. Willbanks will be interviewed by Kansas City Public Television community outreach producer **Lindsey Foat** who will share clips of the documentary. *This program is presented in collaboration with Kansas City PBS.*



The Vietnam War is a ten-part, 18-hour documentary film series directed by Burns and Novick. In an immersive 360-degree narrative, the directors tell the epic story of the Vietnam War as it has never before been told on film as the documentary features testimony from nearly 100 witnesses.

Reservations are requested for this **free program**, RSVP to kansascity.educate@nara.gov or 816-268-8010.

Willbanks (USA Ret. Lt. Col.) is the former General of the Army George C. Marshall Chair of Military History and director of the department of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He is the author or editor of fourteen books, including *A Raid Too Far: Operation Lam Son 719*; *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History*; and *Abandoning Vietnam*. For 23 years Willbanks was an Infantry officer and served in the United States Army during the Vietnam War. He also served as an Infantry advisor with a South Vietnamese regiment during the 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Offensive.

Student Opportunity with International Relations Council

On **Wednesday, February 7 at 2:00 p.m.**, high school and college students from across Kansas City are invited to attend a free afternoon conversation with **Katherine Charlet**, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy. Charlet is the inaugural Director of the Technology and International Affairs Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She works primarily on security and international implications of evolving technologies. Reservations are required, email mhughes@irckc.org. *This program is presented in partnership with the International Relations Council.*

February 2018

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Upcoming Events

Unless noted, all events are held at the National Archives 400 W. Pershing Road Kansas City, MO 64108

- **FEB. 1** - 6:00 P.M.
PANEL DISCUSSION:
*INSURING A FUTURE**
- **FEB. 7** - 2:00 P.M.
STUDENT LECTURE:
KATHERINE CHARLET ON
CYBER POLICY
- **FEB. 10** - 2:00 P.M.
FILM AND DISCUSSION:
*TELL THEM WE ARE RISING**
- **FEB. 26** - 7:00 P.M.
LECTURE: MICHAEL
DINWIDDIE ON JAMES
REESE EUROPE*
- **FEB. 27** - 6:30 P.M.
FILM CLIPS: DR. JAMES
WILLBANKS ON
REMEMBERING VIETNAM

*ACTIVITY IS OFFSITE.

Black History Month Programs with the National Archives

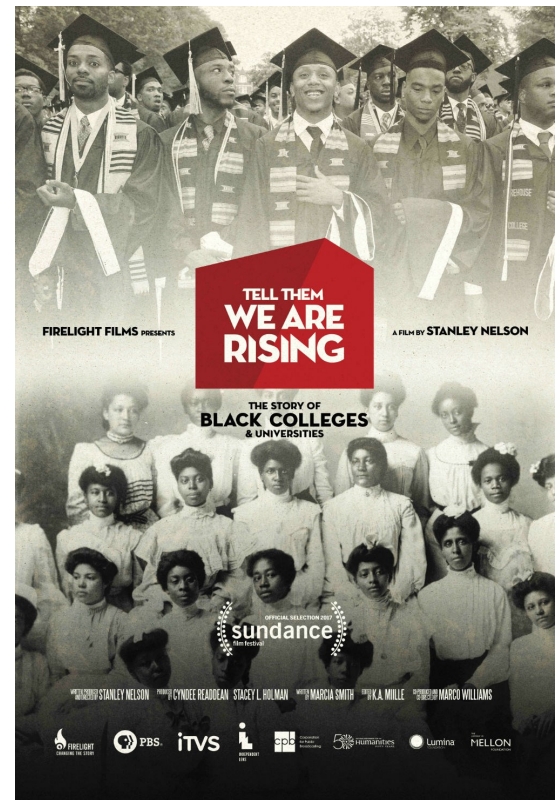
On **Saturday, February 10 at 2:00 p.m.**, the National Archives will co-present a screening of ***Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities***, with Kansas City Public Television. This event will be held at the Plaza Branch of the Kansas City Public Library, 4801 Main Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

The rich history of America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) began before the end of slavery, flourished in the 20th century, and profoundly influenced the course of the nation for over 150 years - yet remains largely unknown. With *Tell Them We Are Rising*, the latest documentary from Stanley Nelson and Marco Williams, the powerful story of the rise, influence, and evolution of HBCUs comes to life. A haven for Black intellectuals, artists, and revolutionaries - and a path of promise toward the American dream - HBCUs have educated the architects of freedom movements and cultivated leaders in every field while remaining unapologetically Black for more than 150 years. A key driver of Black social, political and economic progress, HBCUs were also a place of unprecedented freedom for African American students and a refuge from the rampant racism that raged outside the campus walls. [Reservations](#) are requested for this **free program**.

On **Monday, February 26 at 7:00 p.m.**, the National Archives will co-host professor **Michael Dinwiddie** who will discuss ***From Bandana Land to No Man's Land: James Reese Europe's Musical Journey***. This event is part of Park University's annual Spencer Cave Lecture Series and will be held at the GEM Theater, 1615 East 18th Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

Dinwiddie, associate professor at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, will speak about James Reese Europe and his impact on jazz in Europe during World War I. In a career that spanned the early years of the 20th century, Europe (1881-1919), called the "Martin Luther King Jr. of American music" by Eubie Blake, conducted the first jazz concerts at Carnegie Hall, collaborated with dancers Vernon and Irene Castle, and led the World War I "Hellfighters" Infantry Band, which offered Europeans their first exposure to *le jazz hot*. [Reservations](#) are requested for this **free program**.

The Spencer Cave Black History Month Lecture Series is named for Spencer Cave, who was born a slave at the start of the Civil War, later moved to Parkville, Missouri, in 1875 and worked for the University for more than 70 years before his death in 1947. *This year's lecture is sponsored by Park University's Program of History, and is presented in partnership with the American Jazz Museum, National Archives at Kansas City, National World War I Museum and Memorial, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, and the Greater Kansas City Black History Study Group.*



National Archives and American Public Square Host Panel Discussion on the Future of American Health Care

In 2018, the National Archives at Kansas City will continue its program series related to current affairs topics. On **Thursday, February 1 at 6:00 p.m.**, the National Archives and American Public Square will present an evening panel discussion titled ***Insuring a Future: The ACA and American Health Care***. This program will take place on the University of Missouri - Kansas City campus in Pierson Auditorium. To learn more and register, visit the [American Public Square](#) web site.

The panelists include **Rachel Nuzum**, vice president for the Federal and State Health Policy Initiative at The Commonwealth Fund; **Julie Rovner**, chief Washington correspondent at Kaiser Health News; **David Slusky**, assistant professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Kansas; and **Joseph Antos**, Wilson H. Taylor Resident Scholar in Health Care and Retirement Policy at the American Enterprise Institute. The event moderator is **Brian Ellison**, producer at NPR/KCUR-FM 89.3.

Hidden Treasures from the Stacks

“I Gave Them All of It” - *The United States v. George John Gessner*

On December 6, 1960, three days before he committed a crime that was punishable by death, George John Gessner called his mother. “Mom, I can’t take it anymore” he said, “I will not help them kill. I got to get away.”

That night the 24-year-old United States Army Private abandoned his post at Fort Bliss, Texas, and hitchhiked his way to Juarez, Mexico. From there, he made his way to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. In exchange for a visa and political asylum, he would tell Soviet authorities everything he knew about the Mark VII nuclear weapons program.

Gessner had plenty of knowledge to share with the Soviets. As a nuclear weapons specialist, he’d been trained specifically about the design, construction, and operation of the Mark VII. Developed in the 1950s, it was three times as powerful as the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Gessner had been grappling with what he saw as a crisis of conscience. It began in November 1960 when he experienced a religious conversion. His new belief system came with a deep aversion to violence and particularly weapons of mass destruction. He felt it was hypocrisy to hold these beliefs and still work in the nuclear weapons program. Gessner fell into a depression and began to drink heavily. He met with the Fort Bliss chaplain for guidance and wished to transfer to another unit. He also told fellow servicemen he wanted to sneak a nuclear bomb into the United Nations while Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was visiting, at which point he would demand world leaders sign a peace treaty or he would detonate the bomb.

Gessner arrived at the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City on December 9. He met with Soviet officials repeatedly in December and January, sharing all he knew about the Mark VII. Once they extracted all the information they could from him, the Soviets told him he would not be granted asylum or a visa. He fled Mexico City and eventually made it to Panama. On March 22, United States military authorities caught up with him. He was arrested and charged with desertion.

The Army suspected but did not know if Gessner shared nuclear secrets with the Soviets. While they had him in custody for desertion, they assembled a counterintelligence interrogation team headed by William Benson. At first, Gessner refused to speak with the team, but the Army Chaplain convinced him to talk. He was interrogated for over 90 hours before he broke.

On June 7, Gessner unburdened himself to the chaplain, telling him through tears “I gave them all of it.” He believed anything he shared with the chaplain could not be revealed to the interrogation team, but the chaplain summoned Benson who came to the chapel and recorded a conversation with Gessner without his knowledge.

Gessner was charged with five counts of violating the Atomic Energy Act. Each count was punishable by death or life in prison. Because Gessner was already serving time at the Fort Leavenworth Disciplinary Barracks for desertion, his trial was held at the United States District Court in Kansas City, Kansas. His court-appointed attorneys argued he wasn’t mentally competent to stand trial, but on the strength of his confession a jury of eight men and four women convicted him on all counts and recommended life in prison.

Gessner filed an appeal, and there things took a surprising turn. The 10th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the confession violated the 5th Amendment. “The Appellant was mentally ill, alone and without counsel, uninformed of his rights as they pertain to this prosecution, subjected to an extended and prolonged interrogation by six interrogators who used a technique of half-truths hinting lenience. A confession obtained by unconstitutional means for intelligence purposes cannot subsequently be used with immunity in a civilian criminal prosecution.”

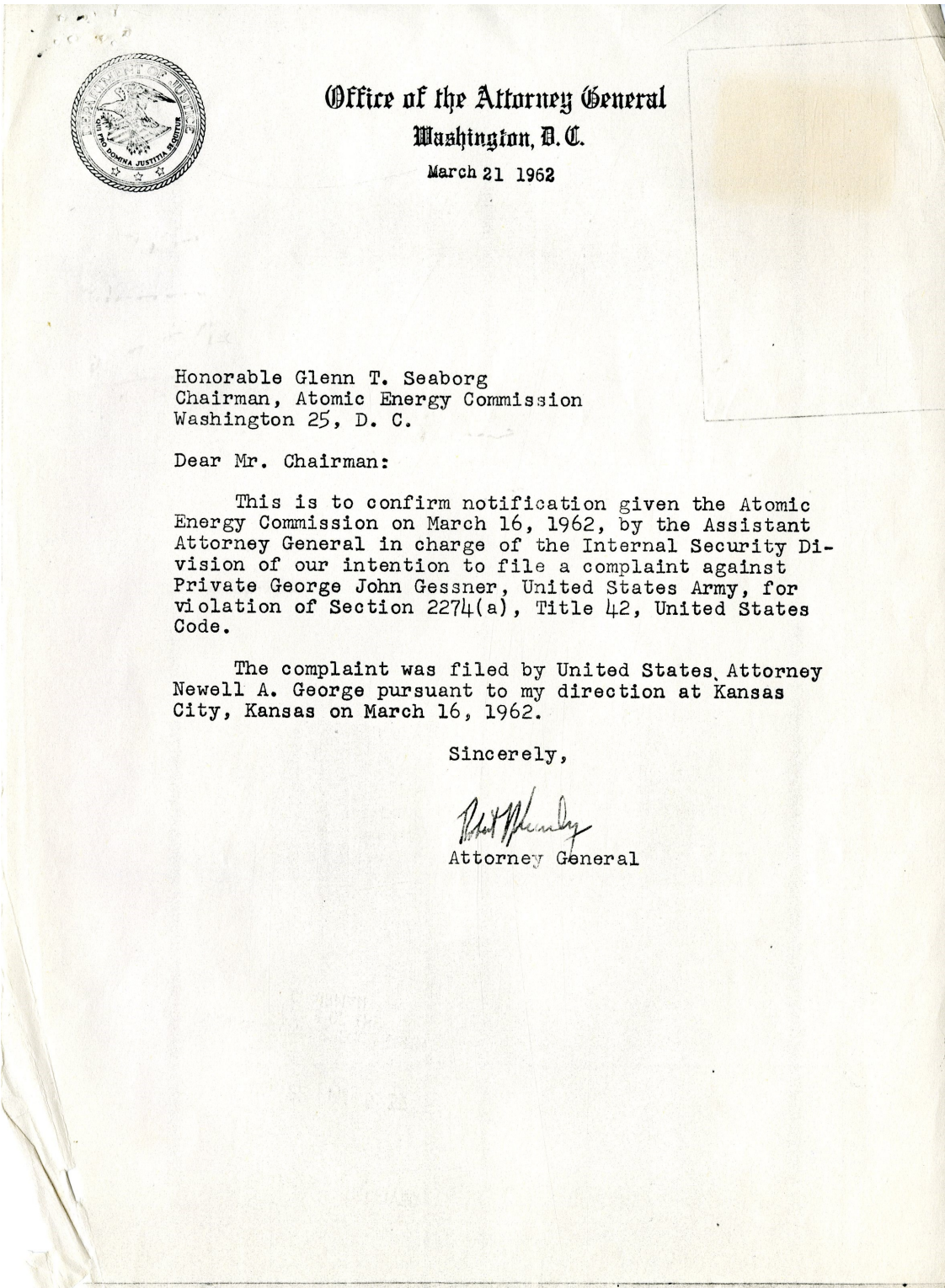
Although they were ordering a retrial, the court was not happy about it. The court stated “In remanding this case we are not unmindful that further prosecution under the Atomic Energy Act may not be possible although Gessner’s betrayal of the United States is despicable, sorely testing the administration of justice as an individual case. Further, his statement to the trial court when given the right of allocution at sentencing, is nauseating.”

(Continued from page 3.)

Without the confession, the United States Attorney felt the government was in a precarious position and Gessner could not be retried. A new trial would require testimony in open court about America's most closely guarded nuclear secrets. The government reluctantly released Gessner.

Gessner was defiant upon release. He was angry with the way he was treated and showed no remorse for his actions saying "Justice delayed is justice denied." George John Gessner disappeared from public view and died in 1974 at the age of 37.

The National Archives at Kansas City holds thousands of case files from the U.S. District Courts in Kansas, as well as Federal courts in Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota. For more information, email kansascity.archives@nara.gov or visit the [National Archives Catalog](#).



Left: Letter from Attorney General Robert Kennedy to the Atomic Energy Commission regarding Private Gessner. Record Group 21, Records of the District Courts of the United States, U.S. District Court for the Kansas City Division of the District of Kansas, Criminal Case Files, 1959-1985, KC-CR-341, U.S. v. George John Gessner. National Archives Identifier: 583082, National Archives at Kansas City.

Right: The court martial transcript in Gessner's desertion case. Record Group 21, Records of the District Courts of the United States, U.S. District Court for the Kansas City Division of the District of Kansas, Criminal Case Files, 1959-1985, KC-CR-341, U.S. v. George John Gessner. National Archives Identifier: 583082, National Archives at Kansas City.

LO: Well, do you feel.....let me put it this way. You are charged with having gone absent without leave from your organization which was the 34th Ordnance company (Special Weapons and Missiles) located at Fort Bliss, Texas. Was that your organization?

ACCUSED: Correct.

LO: That you went absent without proper authority on 7 December 1960, this is correct?

ACCUSED: It is correct.

LO: Further, that you were apprehended on or about the 22d day of March 1961, is this correct?

ACCUSED: This is correct.

LO: Now there is one further element in this offense. That when you went absent without proper authority, you at that time, or at some ~~with~~ subsequent time, intended not to return.

ACCUSED: I did not desire to nor have any intent of returning to my duties as a nuclear weapons technician. I have sufficient reasons from my own conscience for desiring never to work upon those weapons or upon any other weapons as such.

LO: Then you did.

ACCUSED: If my military duties would require me or place me in a position where I would be forced.....

LO: I don't mean to cut you off but I don't want to extend the proceedings unnecessarily. You have answered my questions, that you did not intend to return to your organization which was the 34th Ordnance Company, (Special Weapons and Missiles), you did not intend to return, that is a correct statement, isn't it?

ACCUSED: It is correct, I could not consciously, Colonel.

LO: I do not want to get into the moral aspects of your conscience. This may be something that you may want to bring out in mitigation. Now, are you satisfied with this agreement and that this agreement was made with your best interests?

ACCUSED: Yes, I am. I have talked with several people. I have done quite a bit of thinking on this and in my own mind I cannot see any way in which the legal guilt of this charge can be fought in any way, shape or form. I see no reason to anger anyone by putting them to additional expense to bring anyone to bear witness to my actions. This is to my mind unnecessary.

LO: Very well, now I do want to inform you further, that even though you have plead guilty in open court, even though you have informed me specifically of your guilt, you are nevertheless morally and legally entitled to plead not guilty and place the burden upon the prosecution to establish your guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Now at any time prior to the court coming in and announcing the sentence in open court you have the moral and legal right to change your plea to not

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GENERAL INFORMATION: The National Archives is open Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Closed on weekends and Federal holidays. Hours are subject to change due to special programs and weather. The National Archives is located at 400 West Pershing Road, Kansas City, Missouri, 64108.

The National Archives at Kansas City is home to historical records dating from the 1820s to the 1990s created or received by Federal agencies in Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. For more information, call 816-268-8000, email kansascity.educate@nara.gov or visit www.archives.gov/kansas-city. Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/nationalarchiveskansascity. Tweet us @KCArchives or #KCArchives. Find and follow us on Instagram at: [kansascity.archives](https://www.instagram.com/kansascity.archives).



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