

PRESS RELEASE

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**NJCH Awards 2025 Stanley N. Katz Prize for Excellence in Public Humanities to
“Honoring Cudjo Banquante!” Project**

The weeklong project brought to life the little-known story of Cudjo Banquante, an enslaved man who fought in Washington’s Army, gained freedom and became Newark’s first documented Black business owner

(Camden, NJ) – The New Jersey Council for the Humanities (NJCH) has announced the recipient of the 2025 Stanley N. Katz Prize for Excellence in Public Humanities, as well as three honorable mentions. The top prize was awarded to *Honoring Cudjo Banquante!*, a weeklong slate of 20 events that brought to life the little-known story of Cudjo Banquante. The effort was produced by a cross-organizational team administered by the Newark History Society to share a story that embodies both the brutality of slavery and the resilience of the human spirit within the context of America’s 250th anniversary.

Banquante was born of royal heritage in West Africa before being kidnapped and forced into slavery in New Jersey. During the Revolutionary War, he enlisted in George Washington’s Continental Army as a substitute for his enslaver, fighting in several key battles over four years. He later gained his freedom and became Newark’s first documented Black business owner, overseeing a thriving gardening enterprise that made his name a local landmark.

The awarded project, held in spring 2025, brought together a coalition of dozens of organizations and volunteers, including the NJ Daughters of the American Revolution, 1804 Consultants, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark History Society, NJ Center for Performing Arts, author Kofi Ayim, and many others.

“Cudjo Banquante’s life is a reminder that the American story is not complete without the voices of those too long left out. This project brings his extraordinary journey back into public memory. This is the precise work of the humanities and the reason why this exceptional project deserves the Katz Prize,” said Carin Berkowitz, executive director of NJCH.

In addition to the top prize, honorable mentions were given to three projects:

- The Red Bank Battlefield Archaeology Project, which has meaningfully engaged the public in the humanities work related to excavating and studying the Revolutionary War battle and burial site.
- Luna Stage Company's *The Ground on Which We Stand*, a theatrical piece collaboratively written by 12 playwrights inspired by the history and legacy of The James Howe House, the first home in the Township of Montclair to be owned by a formerly enslaved person.
- "Our Common Ground: Poetry in Community," a series of workshops held by People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos that used poetry, literature, and discussion to build community within marginalized communities in New Jersey.

The Katz Prize is named in honor of Stanley N. Katz, a longtime faculty member at Princeton University and former NJCH Board Chair. The prize carries with it a cash award of \$5,000. It is awarded annually and is supported by private donations. To learn more about the 2025 awardees, the namesake of the prize, and how to support future efforts, visit <https://njhumanities.org/katz-prize>.