

# Ella Baker Memorial RFP

## INTRODUCTION: ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ohio State University at Newark, the university's largest regional campus, is commissioning a statue of Civil Rights and human rights activist Ella Baker (1903-1986). The campus has allotted \$150,000 for the artwork.

Ohio State Newark has served an increasingly diverse population of Ohio students for 65 years. The campus, shared with Central Ohio Technical College (COTC) since 1971, comprises 200 acres of gently rolling green lawns, featuring an amphitheater, a campanile, and a pond enlivened with two running fountains and bisected by a footbridge. As an open-admission regional campus with strong ties to the local community, Ohio State Newark fulfills the university's land grant mission by offering an accessible education and the advantages of a liberal arts school: small class sizes, a faculty committed to teaching as well as research, and academic enrichment in the form of faculty mentoring in research, multiple learning communities, an Honors program, and opportunities for education abroad. The campus considers the diversity of its student body to be one of its greatest assets. In the fall of 2021, 34% of the student body identified as members of minority groups. Of its roughly 2,730 students that year, 63% identified as white, 20% as African-American, and 5% each as Hispanic, Asian or mixed race.<sup>1</sup>

The campus is filled with public art in the form of 18 life-size bronze sculptures. Ten of these are from sculptor Gary Lee Price's "Great Contributors" series. Lent to the campus by J. Gilbert and Louella H. Reese, through their Thomas J. Evans Foundation, the series honors the ideals represented by various world figures: Mark Twain, William Shakespeare, George Washington, Claude Monet, Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Harriet Tubman, Amelia Earhart, Joan of Arc, Mother Teresa, and the Wright Brothers. Price's work is unique in depicting these historical giants not standing on pedestals but seated on bronze benches that offer an open seat for students to join them. Three more Price sculptures are not of the "Great Contributors" series. "New Heights of Knowledge: Dreams," depicts a young African American woman seated on a pile of books looking eagerly toward the future. Another represents the continents as a circle of friendly animals waiting for the visitor to join them ("Circle of Friends"). Nearby is a shy pig invited in ("Charlie Black"). A second eager piglet by Carrie Gantt Quade completes the vignette ("Charlotte").

The campus is also home to three sculptures by J. Seward Johnson, known for his hyper-realistic work combining bronze with texture and paint. They depict individuals involved in leisure activities: fishing ("Day Off"), daydreaming by the pond ("Summer Thinking Girl") or playing chess in the shade ("The Winner"). (See map in Appendix).

While the "Great Contributors" series gestures toward important intellectual and aesthetic achievements, ideas, and values, the campus seeks to improve its collective artwork to better capture and mirror the richness and diversity of the campus's student body as well as the diversity of intellectual and cultural traditions that inform the campus's research, teaching, outreach and engagement. This effort to redress the issue is rooted in work that the Ohio State Newark faculty initiated in 2017, when its Cultural Arts and Events Committee, after polling the faculty, recommended that the administration commission a statue of Ella Baker. The goal was to allow more students to see themselves reflected in the artwork they pass daily. The administration then consulted with staff and students, who endorsed the idea. As far as our research can tell, it would be the first statue honoring Ella Baker in the world.

Ella Baker was a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement--the most important American social movement of the 20th century--yet has often gone unrecognized. Although as influential as Martin Luther King Jr, as a black woman, her work has been comparatively invisible.<sup>2</sup> Scholars attribute this not just to her gender and the dominance of a simplistic, King-centered narrative of the Civil Rights Movement, but to the decentralized

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<sup>1</sup>Ohio State Newark. "Ohio State Newark Snapshot 2021-22," Ohio State Newark, May 12, 2022. [newark.osu.edu/faculty-and-staff/campus-departments/marketing-and-public-relations/publications.html](https://newark.osu.edu/faculty-and-staff/campus-departments/marketing-and-public-relations/publications.html).

<sup>2</sup>Patricia S. Parker, *Ella Baker's Catalytic Leadership: Communication for Social Justice* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), xi.

leadership style she modeled. Rejecting the top-down, charismatic leadership model, Baker quietly laid the groundwork for activism with a group-centered, antihierarchical approach. She focused not on imparting wisdom but on empowering individuals and local groups to recognize their own potential and find their own solutions.

It was a radical vision of participatory democracy that recognized the knowledge of members of marginalized and oppressed groups. Belinda Robnett described this as “bridge leadership,” a “vital behind-the-scene work of the Civil Rights Movement, carried out mostly by Black women in the segregated communities of the Jim Crow South.”<sup>3</sup> Ella Baker’s grassroots activities created a bridge connecting individuals’ personal lives with the political lives of civil rights organizations. She explained the importance of involving people “interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership among other people,” for only by empowering and teaching others would social justice struggles live beyond a generation.<sup>4</sup>

As a young woman, Baker declined to follow her mother’s urging to become a schoolteacher, but was a profoundly influential teacher nonetheless—a master teacher—particularly focused on empowering younger generations to trust their own judgment and forge their own paths. For these reasons, Baker is the ideal choice to be recognized on a college campus.

Born in 1903 and raised in North Carolina and Virginia, Baker left the South for New York after graduating as valedictorian from Shaw University in 1927. There she worked with activist groups and developed educational programming for Harlem Library. She went on to provide consumer and worker education for the Works Progress Administration. From then on, “wherever the struggle was, she was on its cutting edge,” writes Charles Payne.<sup>5</sup>

She invigorated the training programs for the NAACP in the 1940s, helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the 1950s, and guided the next generation toward creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. It was her support and mentorship that empowered students, invigorated with new ideas of leadership, to found SNCC and a new youth-led phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Writes Payne:

Ella Baker remains a compelling figure because of her confidence in the capacities of ordinary citizens; because of her persistence, her rejection of dogmas and ideological fixity, and her rejection of hierarchies of race, class, education, nationality, and gender; because of her willingness to sublimate her ego to her politics; because of her limitless confidence in young people; because of her commitment to working for causes, not organizations; and because of her insistence on principled and supportive human relationships—in short because of the clarity of her commitment to democracy as both means and end. <sup>6</sup>

Baker’s legacy continues to shape struggles for social justice by serving as a model of decentered leadership and grassroots organizing. Biographer Barbara Ransby describes her as a “radical humanist” because she embodied a philosophy of love for all people, while at the same time engaging in revolutionary activism to help empower people to create a democratic and just society.<sup>7</sup> Depicting and celebrating Baker as an inspiration, teacher, mentor and key facilitator to younger generations of activists will mirror back to students, faculty, and the community a more accurate reflection of who we are and what we represent. At the same time, it will help to tell a fuller narrative of the Civil Rights Movement.

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<sup>3</sup>Parker, *Ella Baker’s Catalytic Leadership*, xii.

<sup>4</sup>Ella Baker, “Developing Community Leadership,” in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, ed G. Lerner, 345-352 (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 392.

<sup>5</sup>“Give Light and the People Will Find a Way,” in *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition*, edited by Charles M. Payne and Carol Sills Stickland, 56-66 (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 57.

<sup>6</sup>Payne, “Give Light and the People Will Find a Way,” 57.

<sup>7</sup>Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 194.

**Budget:** Up to \$150,000

**Requirements:**

**Materials:** Bronze (preferred)

**Size:** Life-size

**Style:** Realistic preferred

**PROCESS**

**Phase 1:** Submit qualifications/sketches/past work; artist's CV and/or website submission; up to 8 digital images (TIFF or JPEG) of past works that communicate the quality and characteristics of the sculpture; sketches indicating the general characteristics of the proposed commissioned artwork.

**Phase 2:** Up to three semi-finalists will be awarded \$1500 honoraria to develop a comprehensive proposal including a maximum of two pages of text describing the intent, characteristics, material, scale, any required care and maintenance, and a description of the applicant's connection to the subject matter; specifically why being involved in this project is meaningful for their work; and a preliminary budget listing fabrication and design costs, artist fee, shipping and installation, and self-insurance costs. The semi-finalists will also be offered the opportunity to visit campus.

**Phase 3:** The competition will result in an award of up to \$150,000 for artist fees, design, fabrication, and installation of the artwork. The selected artist will be publicly announced; the sculpture installed; and educational and outreach activities scheduled.

**SELECTION COMMITTEE**

A committee representing campus and community stakeholders will review all submissions for the competition and make recommendations.

**How to submit:** Submit materials as attachments or link via email to Virginia H. Cope, cope.38@osu.edu.

**TIMELINE**

- a. October 2022: Distribute RFP
- b. December 15, 2022: Phase I proposals due
- c. January 15, 2023: Phase I finalists announced
- d. April 15, 2023: Phase II proposals due
- e. May 15, 2023: Selected artist(s) notified & public announcement made of selected artist
- f. Fall 2023-Spring 2024: Sculpture installed; educational and celebratory outreach events

For any questions regarding the sculpture, please contact Virginia H. Cope at cope.38@osu.edu

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## APPENDIX

**Location:** The map below shows the location of the current statues. Red circles indicate potential locations for the Ella Baker statue. To see photographs of all 18 statues and a video of campus art and potential locations for the Ella Baker Memorial Statue, [visit go.osu.edu/NewarkArt](http://go.osu.edu/NewarkArt)



**OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY NEWARK  
CENTRAL OHIO TECHNICAL COLLEGE SCULPTURES**

- 1.** “The Wright Brothers” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 2.** “A Day Off,” J. Seward Johnson
- 3.** “Summer Thinking,” J. Seward Johnson
- 4.** “Monet” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 5.** “Abraham Lincoln” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 6.** “The Winner,” J. Seward Johnson
- 7.** “Shakespeare” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 8.** “Albert Einstein” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 9.** “Benjamin Franklin” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 10.** “George Washington” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 11.** “Amelia Earhart” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 12.** “Charlotte,” Carrie Gantt Quade
- 13.** “Circle of Friends,” Gary Lee Price
- 14.** “Charlie Black,” Carrie Gantt Quade
- 15.** “New Heights of Knowledge: Dreams,” Gary Lee Price
- 16.** “Mother Teresa,” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 17.** “Joan of Arc,” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price
- 18.** “Harriett Tubman” (Great Contributors Series), Gary Lee Price



**THE OHIO STATE  
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**NEWARK**