Antigone Chorus Members

Judy L. Armstong (Alto)

Judy L. Armstrong, sings with her church choir and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Choir. She is a former member of the Gospel Music Workshop of America, National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses (both St. Louis Chapters) and Dello Thedford Symphonic Choir. Judy has been employed for 16 years by the City of St. Louis through the Comptrollers Office.

Ferguson touched me from both sides of the issue. I have family and friends who are police officers and I believe each of them do a fantastic job. I am the aunt of four nephews, four great nephews and many nephews who call me Auntie Judy at church. I along with others want my loved ones and all to come home safely (police and our black boys and men). I am very much aware of both sides of the issue and I know that a few bad cops have made it hard for all. But I believe the calling of attention to this issue; will bring about a positive change.

Samantha Madison (Soprano)

Samantha Madison is a local professional performing artist who has been singing with the SLMPD Choir for 5 years.  She has also performed in many productions for the Black Rep, Gitana Productions, COCA’s Hip Hop Crew, Kode Redd,  and the MUNY and has worked with local singers Mai Lee and Soulo.  Samantha currently works for Better Family Life and serves as the rehearsal coach and guest choreographer/artist for KYPE (Kuumba Youth Performance Ensemble), performing arts instructor for *21st Century* in Normandy School District, and teen pregnancy prevention educator in St. Louis Public School district high schools.

Due to the unfortunate events of the tragedy in Ferguson, I have been placed in complicated & challenging yet unique positions. I am a single Black professional who grew up in a service oriented family and raised by a woman who currently serves as lieutenant for the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. It saddens me that I must worry about my brothers, my nephew, my cousins, and other men I love more than I want to. It worries me that my being a woman isn't a guarantee that my life is valued while in the hands of corrupt police. It angers me that a system that was built and created to purposefully eliminate Black people still exists. For almost 2 years I have had uncomfortable conversations with all sorts of people spread through various demographics. But the most interesting conversation I had was with myself in how I have arrived to the consciousness that I am developing as more tension arises, more Black men, women, and children are being killed by police, and corrupt individuals in power continue to sacrifice the very people that are meant to serve & protect. If a strong foundation of morals, ethics, and decency are not exemplified in people we as a country place our trust in, there will be more tension and divide, and society will cease to exist for those who cannot seem to benefit or survive.

Paul Hinton (Bass)

Paul is life a long citizen of St. Louis metro promoting peace, love and understanding. He is a Network Administrator for the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and has been singing with the SLMPD Choir for five years.

I am anxious to see how Ferguson and surrounding communities will be changed over the next decade.  I’m glad to be a part of the change.

De-Andrea Blaylock-Johnson (Soprano)

De-Andrea Blaylock-Johnson is licensed in the State of Missouri as a Clinical Social Worker and owns Sankofa Sex Therapy where she provides therapy to individuals and those in relationships of all types. She also serves as an executive board member of the Women of Color Sexual Health Network and a member of the Information and Education Committee of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri.

As a mental health professional and Ferguson resident, the civil unrest that followed Michael Brown's murder caused me to re-evaluate my position within my community and my ability to be a catalyst for positive change. I decided to partner with area organizations to be trained in trauma-informed therapeutic techniques so I could provide services to those in need. I also applied to serve on the Ferguson Commission. Although not chosen for this appointment, I continued to seek opportunities to use my skills to help others by facilitating community forums and providing free and low-cost therapeutic services to those in need.

Duane Martine Foster, Tenor Soloist

Duane Martin Foster is a native of St. Louis MO. and a proud alumnus of Normandy High School. He went on to receive his B.A. in Vocal Music from Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA where he was a soloist with the acclaimed Morehouse College Glee Club. Foster continued graduate studies at New York and Northwestern Universities before taking a turn towards the stage. His career spans from musical theatre and opera to dance and film, having accomplished the highest level of excellence in each discipline. He received his dance training from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center studying with teachers such as Ann Forsyth, Pearl Primus, Dwight Rhoden and Joan Peters. On Broadway, Foster appeared as Coalhouse Walker Jr. (u/s) alongside six time Tony award winner Audra McDonald in the smash hit musical Ragtime.

In 2006, Foster decided to return to St. Louis and to his alma mater to accept the greatest role of his life. He became the Speech and Drama teacher at Normandy Middle School. While at Normandy Middle Foster revitalized the theatre program by creating unique and innovative performing opportunities for the students: one of those students being Michael Brown.

Duane is now Fine Arts Coordinator for the Normandy Schools Collaborative and Choir Director at the high school. While at the high school, he created the Normandy Dance Academy which has hosted residencies with the Houston Ballet, Martha Graham Dance Company, Shaghai Ballet, Ensemble Espanol, Pilobilos and Alvin Ailey. As Fine Arts Department Chair, Foster has mounted some major high quality productions such as ***Dreamgirls, A Raisin In the Sun, The Color Purple*** and ***Ain't Misbehavin***.

Foster is committed to bringing the highest quality of arts education to the youth not only in Normandy, but in the greater St. Louis area. The exposure to high quality arts education brings a positive focus into the minds of the youth and allows for them to explore other cultures thereby gaining a greater respect and sensitivity for diversity. This sensitivity is essential as we work to stregthen the bonds of our communities.

Shelia Taylor (Sorpano)

Shelia R. Taylor is the office manager of Bethany-Peace United Church of Church, where she has been devoted for 10 years. She has extensive experience in managing office responsibilities and seeing to the needs of the pastor.Shelia began her employment at First National Bank in St. Louis MO which was acquired by Bank of America for 32 years in Telecommunication. Shelia was Network Operations manager for 10 years providing communications to all banking centers at Bank of America.

Shelia is a Christian and servant of Jesus Christ and attends Trinity Community Church in Saint Peters Mo under Pastor Willie D. Woodmore for 26 years. Shelia teaches Sunday school, toddlers 4-9, sings in the choir, under the direction of Philip Woodmore, and coordinates Women’s Fellowship, helpmeet to her husband, Deacon John Taylor, works in the administration office of the church managing/ordering office supplies and building supplies.

Shelia currently volunteers at The Freedom School in University City MO, teaches a Women’s Fellowship at Bethany-Peace UCC, holds a monthly bible study for God’s Small World Daycare. She lives in Black Jack Mo, has two adult sons, married 39 years and has one awesome grandson.

Christian Hamilton, tenor

I am twenty-three years old Christian Hamilton born and raised in saint Louis Missouri. I reflect a varied personality including ambition, and the qualities of generosity and thoughtfulness.  I am also a well determined and vigorous individual, yet pleasantly calm. I encourage fighting for what you desire and believe in, and doing it through god because nothing great comes easy and with god everything you trust in is possible. I attended saint Louis county schools as well as saint Louis community colleges motivated by my love for learning and succeeding as I strive to become an outstanding and successful man in today's society.  With the definitive goal of becoming a professional singer and performer. Through my passion for performing I have embraced an amazing interest in singing and acting. Did numerous musicals in high school and acting,  coca creative arts center.  I sing in different gospel groups around the saint Louis area. Also getting trained in Opera at the Theatre Opera House of saint Louis.  As a singer first tenor I have represented saint Louis at many different regional festivals, engagements, private events giving others the opportunity to embrace and appreciate who I am as a individual.  I am involved in keeping my dreams alive and as a role model,  creating avenues for the young men/women like me, which will help the establishment and development of my talents that can ultimately benefit our society.

As a young African American male I was devastated by the whole incident of a shooting of a unarmed black man. The first thing that came to my mind is that it could have been me, my father,  my cousins. I reflect on my ancestors and the slaves that fought for my freedom. You hear about an unarmed black man being shot down it brings you back to still being treated bad by society.

Lawrence Lewis, Bass

I have a bachelor of music from Webster and Master of Social Work from WashU. As a licensed clinical social worker I've had the opportunity to serve as a mental health responder during the original protests with BHR and also facilitated discussions with my youth group at Project ARK/The SPOT. I also assisted Duane Foster with the Normandy choir performance with Denice Graves and Christine Brewer.

Virginia Dulaney Cane, Tenor

I'm a native of Kinloch, MO where I began singing in my high school choir under the direction of Essie R. Metcalf.  Over the years I've sang in choirs throughout the Metropolitan St. Louis area including, the St. Peters A.M.E. Church, the Missouri Conference Choir of the A.M.E. Church, New Hope Baptist Choir in Edmundson, the Trinity Community Church Singers and the Philip A. Woodmore Singers.

Ferguson Impact Statement:

I grew up in Kinloch, Missouri, a historically black community located on the west side of Ferguson. Riding through, shopping in and going to schools in Ferguson has always been challenging for Kinloch residents.  I remember as a child how my mother, a highly respected educator and director of the North County YWCAs, was wrongly accused by a young white security guard, of stealing a bottle of vanilla flavoring from Krogers in Ferguson.  We were allowed to check out, spending $113 (a very significant amount back in the 60s!). As we began to exit the store, mother and I were told to leave our groceries and follow the guard to a room in the back of the store where he attempted to search my mother for the stolen item.  When she realized what he was looking for, she very politely told the store manager where the item had been placed after she decided not to purchase it. When the manager returned with the supposedly stolen item, we were let go but were told not to come in the store again! Of course Mom got a refund for her $113 dollars in groceries and politely told the manager, "don't worry about seeing us again, I'll spend my $100 a week grocery budget elsewhere"! Fast forward to the summer of 2013.  My nephew asked me to drop him off for court in Ferguson.  There was a line extending from inside the building out to the parking  lot with only African American people and a few Hispanics.  When my nephew came back, after giving his name to the clerk, I asked him if there were any white people inside who were there for court? His reply was, "yeah, but they work there"!  I told him the story about our shopping experience in Ferguson and sadly told him, "it looks like not much has changed in Ferguson". So when Michael Brown was killed a year later, I once again said, it looks like not much has changed in Ferguson.  I am truly saddened by the reality that in 2000 anything, we still have to caution our black  children about riding through, shopping in and going to school in Ferguson, because they have the wrong skin-tone.

Robert Crenshaw, Tenor

My name is Robert Crenshaw and I am 19 years old. I am a graduate of Central Visual and Performing Arts High School. Attended Roosevelt University’s, Chicago College of Performing Arts. In high school I was the Student Body President, Superintendent Advisor, Rotary Club member, Student Ambassador, Peer Leader, Announcement Team Captain, member of The Underground Tappers & The Dancing Six, CVPA’s Original Boys Octet member, and a Transform Ur Future member. In college I was the Wabash Community Council’s Vice President. I’ve performed in many musicals and landed lead roles in the majority of them. Former dancer for the Center of Creative Arts, but currently a Teaching Assistant for their summer camps. I’ve performed alongside Miss Missouri 2013 and famous dancer Stephen “Twitch” Boss. Placed 2nd then 3rd in the St. Louis Teen Talent Competition, with The Underground Tappers and then The Dancing Six. I’ve performed on The Fabulous Fox stage a total of 5 times.

When the events in Ferguson took place I was in disbelief. I never would’ve thought something that major would hit so close to my home. The event had upset me dearly so I decided to help out in the best ways that I could. I volunteered my services to the community alongside my church. I wanted to make a stand for what I believed in and by doing that I was a part of the peaceful protest that took place. My mentality has changed because of the event. Now I wonder, where will I be safe? Who’s to say something like this won’t happen to me. As an African American male I want to feel safe rather than feel like a target.

Rhonda Woods, Soprano

Rhonda Woods is a native St. Louisan and is a product of the St. Louis City and County Public Schools. Ms. Woods is a Veteran of the United States Air Force. She is a former St. Louis Metropolitan Police Officer and Special Education Teacher. As an African American woman and mother of two, one who is an African American male, Michael Brown's tragic and unjust death confirmed her fears of what can happen to her son if stopped or confronted by the police.

RhonniRose Mantilla

RhonniRose Mantilla is a 16 year-old junior at Parkway North High School. In addition to being an honor student, RhonniRose is a vocal student of Phillip Woodmore, receives acting training from master classes taught by Michael Beatty and Ben Nordstrom, and is a member of COCAdance; a jazz and modern dance company at the Center of Creative Arts. The death of Michael Brown showed RhonniRose that local law enforcement does not value the importance of young African American students like her self and Michael Brown. This tragedy affected her and her school so much that it created a lot of division in her school, and amongst her friends.

Kelli Hill-Lowe, Soprano

I'm very honored to have been asked to participate. I think it's interesting to see the very diverse group you are gathering to include law enforcement. I have participated in projects like this before including the conversations on peace lead by various artist that John Legend did last year and the President's town hall this year.  There is usually not a balance of those representing law enforcement, which for me means it doesn't tell the full story.

I'm Kelli Lowe, proud wife to Sgt Charles Lowe St Louis City Police Department and mother to the rambunctious 2 year old Cj Lowe. They are both the most important and best parts of me. I'm also President of the St Louis Police Wives Association. These women are a diverse group of intelligent, compassionate, service oriented Divas who I have the challenge and pleasure of leading.

When asked how Ferguson has impacted me it has taken awhile to even sit and think how to condense this into a few small paragraphs. It's hard to reflect when it's still a huge factor in your life.

So I guess I will start at the beginning explain all the ways it touches my life and then move from there and hope it's not too long of a tale.

When this all started as President of the St Louis Police Wives I had to make a few hard decisions right away. It has always been our job to assist Officers and Departments in their time of need. Usually that means for short periods when they are injured or god forbid someone passes in the line of duty, then we help their family. No one could prepare us to be asked to step in and feed and assist Officers during civil unrest. This could mean weeks, maybe months of figuring out 24\7 meals for thousands of Officers. A huge and daunting task. We decided we had to do it  and for 2 years now we have done just that. Over 58,000 meals and climbing at 5 Command Post. This is inclusive of providing them snacks, personal care items, hot food, and the smiling face they may need at the time. It has been something to stand with these men and women as they face some of the hardest times to one's spirit you could ever imagine. I have been there to see them come off the riot line after standing for hours and taking physical and mental abuse. I have watched them struggle with everyone thinking they are villians. I have witnessed the Black Officers who mind you take the hardest beatings, come in and look wiped out because they been branded traitors. I have watched them struggle to be Black and Blue at the same time. But I have also watched them at the same time put on their gear and not complain. I have seen them overcome. I have seen most of them still show and express compassion for those they protect and serve who had turned on them. How did that impact me in ways I can hardly explain. It has taught me that no matter what people can survive. They can see and endure impossible things and still be kind. They can separate work from life.

This has come in phases for me so phase two. As the civil unrest grew in Ferguson. I watched some of our very young police wives and families begin to struggle. Can you imagine what it was like to watch on television your loved one being yelled at, hit with water bottles and rocks, shot at randomly while you stand a line. Because of the media coverage this was pumping through police family homes daily. Where children are. Oh yes no one was thinking about Blue families. I started to take calls from families who were police families in Ferguson and St Louis County where addresses had been leaked and they had to move or hide. What do we do, what about our homes our pets. Pack up and leave we said, we will find you a place. I watched as people's cell phones, bank accounts, computers were hacked and in some cases personal finances turned upside down. Let's find legal help we said. I took calls from parents whose kids had began getting bullied at school, cause Mom and Dad are the police. In one particularly bad case the school staff was participatory and allowed a young man to be surrounded as other kids called his father a murderer. I think the teens may have had it the worst. As they watched their classmates in some schools leave and walk out to participate in protest they were left just sitting there. Doesn't mean they don't get the full gravity of what's going on in the world, but who is going to get up and shout obscenities at people who do the same profession as their parent, who they love and admire. I think watching the pride being stripped  from families who are honored to serve the community has been one of the hardest things during all this. Wives and children no longer wear t shirts or pins, or have bumper stickers that indicate their pride in their loved ones profession. They are being forced to hide. In those Leo families that are Black families often lines of division or being drawn. Sitting at the dinner table has become a lesson in holding ones tongue while nasty things are said about the police profession. Or its become an exausting exercise in explaining police procedure to the untrained eye. No matter what it's a hard place to be for anyone.

Phase three for me has been one of the most challenging. It's easy to lead people when you aren't in the midst of the storm yourself. But we all know that our God is one who believes there can be not testimony without a test!!! On July 14, 2015 in the early morning hours our families test came full circle. As my husband sat in his car in the Central West End in uniform providing security for this quiet neighborhood, he was blocked in and ambushed. Over a dozen shots were emptied into the front window of our personal car and by the Grace of God and an awesome bullet proof vest he survived. A bullet hit his vest in the upper torso. A hair more to the right and it would have hit him. To look at the car it's nothing short of a miracle that he survived. At 5am as I gathered my 2 year old out of bed and rushed to the hospital along with all the thoughts of worry, I began to feel defeated. Was this going to be life for Officers now. How bad had things really gotten. My day went from bad to worst as it was annouced to me prior to leaving the hospital about a odd event that was occurring outside. My police wife Sisters who had of course as we always do had come to be there with me and knowing what type of person I am felt the need to warn me that a protestor had showed up outside with a sign that said "How does it feel." As my mind filled with rage I began to think of all the ways I was going to walk right outside the hospital doors and tell him how I felt. Once again the test in testimony came to mind. Let me back peddle a bit. I haven't mentioned in this whole statement that I am Black and I lead a group of ladies that the vast majority of are white. They are my Sisters in Blue and through this whole time I had been preaching that we must all have an understanding of everyone's views. As mothers we could most assuredly identify with the grief of a mother who had lost her child in a violent way. We could all identify with a people who had felt oppressed and tired couldn't we. I had been saying let's not take a side there has to be a bridge and the one thing that we all wanted was for our families to feel safe wasn't that common for all. I had cautioned against over sweeping judgements about whole groups of people and because of our friendships and trust in my leadership that had followed. Now wouldn't you know the largest impact and lesson would come here. As I sat thinking here was my Black husband who had almost lost his life, who has always served the community he grew up in with honor being heckled by a protestor. I had to take a deep breath and practice what I preached understanding. And there would be more inhaling and understanding to come as we weren't embraced by the Black community because we were blue you see!!! There weren't any calls from clergy for us or alderman crying a foul at the level of violence thrown upon us. Here was a Black Life that mattered or did it because it was also a Blue one!!! My what a fix  we are in. This has perhaps been the largest lesson for me to learn how to navigate and be at peace between the two extremes. Wanting a safe world for the two most important people to me my husband who wears Blue and my Son who is Black and beautiful.

Well that's my story it still unfolds daily because we are still dealing daily with unrest. I'm hoping to take my lessons I've learned along the way and be able to bridge understanding on both sides of the issue. Make an impact if you will.

John Leggette, Tenor Soloist

John W. Leggette, a native St. Louisian, is the youngest of four children born to the Late John F. Leggette and Norma Leggette. He is a product of the St. Louis Public School system and a proud alumnus of Lincoln University of Missouri.

John is currently employed by the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department where he has proudly served as a Police Officer for the past 15 years. Officer Leggette is currently assigned to the South Patrol Division - District 1.

He is a member of the St. Louis Police Officer’s Association and currently serves as Chaplain on the Executive Board of the Ethical Society of Police. John is a life long member of the Pleasant Green MB Church were he serves in the choir.

After singing, the theatre is his second passion. He has performed in several theatrical plays and productions such as: “Is Your Ghost Holy?”, “Make a Joyful Noise” and “What a Difference a Day Makes”, “A Raisin In the Sun”, and “Tapestry of Shadows”, to name a few. John recently was featured in the hit Broadway musical “The Wiz” as the “The Wiz”, and won the Arts For Life - Best Performance Award for his portrail as the Wiz. John sings with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra’s In Unison Chorus where he had the opportunity to sing back ground for the Grammy Award Winning group - Take 6.

John is founder and Choral Manager of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department Choir, the SLMPD Choir is comprised of Commissioned Police Officers, Civilian Employees, and Community Volunteers. The SLMPD Choir is one of only three police choirs in the United Stated of America. John has had the privilege to share the stage with such musical greats at David Peaston, Fontalla Bass, Michael Bolden and The University of Missouri Columbia Concert Choir.

John’s desire to assist and encourage others whether it’s on the mean streets of STL or with a song had become his lifes’ mission. His personal motto is “If I can help somebody as I pass along then my living is not in vain.”

Gheremi Clay, Bass Soloist

Gheremi Clay, is a dancer, singer and choreographer from St. Louis, Missouri. At the age of 16, Gheremi decided to start dancing and training at the Center of Creative Arts (COCA), where he found himself in both COCADance and Hip Hop Crew for two years. Along with being apart of the student dance companies, Gheremi participated in COCA's musical performances of Ragtime, Bring it On, Songs for a New World and the most recent summer musical, Memphis, where he played the character, Delray Farrell. At 18, Gheremi traveled to Los Angeles, California and studied at AMDA and participated in the hip hop dance company, "The Badgers". Traveling back to St Louis, Gheremi has been able to share his talents as a dance teacher at COCA, Central Visual and Performing Arts High School, Best Dance and Talent Center, and many other studios/organizations. Gheremi, will be taking part in the play "Akeelah and the Bee" as character Dr. Larabee at COCA, alongside the play "Hamlet: See What I See" as ensemble!

De-Rance Blaylock, Mezzo-Soprano Soloist

Wishing God's Blessings on this and all future undertakings of this project!

Melissa Pickens, Soprano

Melissa Pickens has been performing and teaching for the last 25 years.  She graduated from Mizzou with dual degrees in vocal music performance and music education.  Melissa has performed on stage with professional choirs, in operas and musicals and as a soloist with orchestra.  She taught elementary school music for 6 years and currently teaches middle school choir and private voice.  Her students have performed as choir soloists, at the MUNY and in local music theatre productions.

Tameka Anderson, Tenor

I am 26 year old college student, studying to become a registered dietitian and pediatrician. I like to smile and think happy thoughts, like to cook and go go-carting.

Statement of Impact: I was affected as a black Christian person living in this city where no matter what setting I'm in,  someone will always judge me as a "typical"  black girl that don't have manners and is "using" the government, having lots of children.  I have my associates degree,  working on my bachelor degree and then my doctorate degree, worth no children.

Elise Oates, Soprano

I have live in North County for 46 years. I grew up in Berkeley not far from the border of Ferguson. I spent many years riding my bike in and around the Ferguson area. I have been heartbroken at the Ferguson riots and all of the riots for that matter. I respect those who lay down their lives every day to protect the public and I have had a heart for at-risk teens for several years. I love North County and will most likely live in the North County area for the rest of my life. My hope is that the unrest will discontinue as the unrest has been harmful to both law officers and civilians alike. I am happy to play a small role in helping to bring unity to the community I love.