

Steven Newsome

AAAM Board President: 2000–2002



Steven Cameron Newsome (1952–2012) was a visionary museum leader, cultural advocate, and champion of community-centered arts and humanities. As Director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Anacostia Community Museum for twelve years, he became widely recognized for advancing deeper, more meaningful relationships between museums and the communities they serve.

Under his leadership, the museum underwent a major renovation funded through a successful capital campaign, and he launched an annual summer academy, an intensive cultural education program for young people, hosted across three churches in the Anacostia neighborhood. Newsome began his professional life as a librarian, holding positions at Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago. He later served as Curator of the Vivian G. Harsh Collection of African American Literature and History at the Chicago Public Library, where he helped elevate one of the nation’s most significant archives of Black history.

Before joining the Smithsonian in 1991, Newsome directed the Maryland Commission on Afro-American History and Culture and the Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis. He co-founded the annual Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival and established Let Freedom Ring, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra’s annual tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Following his Smithsonian tenure, Newsome became Executive Director of the Prince George’s Arts and Humanities Council, where he expanded access to high-quality, diverse arts programming. He later served as the founding director of the Prince George’s African American Museum and Cultural Center, shaping its early vision and community mission.

A dynamic speaker and respected cultural voice, Newsome lectured and participated in programs across the United States and internationally, including engagements in South Africa, Brazil, Canada, Ghana, and Côte d’Ivoire. His belief in the transformative power of museums was unwavering: “Museums,” he said, “are not just storehouses for materials of the past. They are places for discovering, imagining, and remembering... but most importantly learning.” Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Newsome earned degrees from Trinity College (Hartford) and Emory University.