

MILE SPRING 2021 Program Descriptions

Programs will be presented on ZOOM this spring. You will receive weekly emails regarding the programs and any changes in the schedule as well as the ZOOM address.

March and April – Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:30 – 3:00 PM

Tuesday, March 2: Cowboy Songs and Yodels

Roger Tincknell is back by popular demand for our MILE Community. This time, he will sing and tell the background of Cowboy Songs and Yodels. He will include country and western songs, cowboy ballads, plus yodeling instruction! We encourage you to sing-along as long as you are muted! Then at a special moment in the program, Roger will ask the MILE members to unmute themselves to try yodeling all together. It will be a great experiment and lots of fun!

Presenter: Roger Tincknell earned a BA, UMASS, Amherst, and an MA, HART School of Music, Hartford, CT. With over 45 years as a classroom teacher, music specialist and performing musician, Roger has offered educational and participatory music programs for schools, libraries, senior centers and other community organizations. Roger performed “Traditional Americana and popular music from the 1940’s to 1960’s” for our opening event in the Fall of 2019.

Thursday, March 4: *The Burning Years* – Book Talk

Felicity Harley, a political and environmental activist, will lead a book discussion on her book *The Burning Years*. In *The Burning Years*, Felicity sets out to depict, within the framework of a multi-generational story that reads like a hybrid of science journal and science fiction, a plausible – and ultimately alarming – scenario that corresponds with what many of today’s scientists see as an impending environmental disaster brought about by political and industrial indifference to, and defiance of, global climate change; accelerated by a host of last-minute counterproductive measures that not only damage the planet in the long term but also threaten the very survival of mankind. In preparation for this discussion, a PDF copy of the book was emailed to MILE members on January 4.

Presenter: Felicity Hartley received a BA Social Science, University of California, Berkeley. Felicity is a polished public speaker, published journalist, writer and a poet. She was born to an English father, a Caribbean mother, and was educated in Europe. As a former member of the British Foreign Service posted to Iran, she possesses excellent communication and networking skills. Active in political and social affairs, she served as the Executive Director of the World Affairs Council of Connecticut (WACCT) until June 2013 when she left to resume her writing career. In 2013, her work was published in an anthology called *Gathered Light – On the Poetry of Joni Mitchell*, alongside writers such as Wally Lamb, Kim Addonizio, Fred Wah (Poet Laureate of Canada), Larry Klein, Susan Deer Cloud, Cornelius Eady, and others. In celebration of the 65th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on behalf of Poets for Human Rights, Felicity was the winner of the 2013 Anita McAndrews Award. In 2014, she was commissioned by Hartbeat Ensemble to write the play *Transplant*. In 2015, her book of short stories *Portraits and Landscapes* was published and is available on Amazon. Currently Felicity is working on a five-part science fiction series. The first in the series *theburningyears.squarespace.com* was published by Double Dragon Publishing in February 2017.

Tuesday, March 9: Around the World in 80 Gardens

In 1872, Phileas Fogg went around the world in eighty days. Since that time numerous adventurers have replicated that feat in various ways, most famously Monty Python alumni Michael Palin in 1988. Today you can do the same trip by air in 36 hours or 90 minutes if you are aboard the International Space Station. To Dr. Richard Benfield’s knowledge none have done it in 75 minutes while visiting all of the world’s great Gardens.

Around the World in 80 Gardens is the culmination of the presenter's career in tourism to the world's great gardens. Rather than just documenting gardens with a "Show and Tell" in this fast-moving interactive session, he begins with the the Reform Club in London (the starting point for Phileas and Michael, but going in reverse). By starting in the lush gardens of the Pacific, through South America and Europe to South East Asia and Australia, Dr. Benfield will show garden enthusiasts and laymen alike the different and unique gardens and floral kingdoms of the world. For example, he will take attendees through the three acres of gardens in Singapore airport, the arid gardens of Australia and the tropical gardens of the Seychelles (home of the love nut!), the Canary Islands and culminating in the beautiful English country gardens of his home country. Richard will finish with the unique and different gardens in the United States and Canada ... in total 80 gardens in seven continents and following albeit in reverse, the route of our fictional friend, Phileas Fogg. ALL ABOARD!!

Presenter: Richard Benfield earned a BS (Honors), University of Aberdeen, an MS from the University of Alberta, and PhD, University of Oklahoma. Richard is Past-Chair and Professor Emeritus, Department of Geography, Central Connecticut State University

Thursdays, March 11, 18, 25, April 1, 8, 15: Great Decisions 9:30—11:30 AM

Great Decisions is a discussion forum that follows a curriculum developed by the Foreign Policy Association (www.fpa.org). It is supported by Great Decisions program materials which present basic information on each topic. Participants read the topical section for that week, then come to the sessions to discuss their various points of view with one another. Active participation is encouraged, but not required. We will have four sessions using the Great Decisions materials and two open discussions on current events – with the topics chosen by the participants. In an age where our political discourse has become more polarized, Great Decisions provides an excellent opportunity for open, fair, objective discussions – and helps the participants understand multiple perspectives on these topics.

Topics and schedule for the Spring are as follows:

- March 11: Global Supply Chains and National Security
- March 18: Persian Gulf Security Issues
- March 25: Open Discussion
- April 1: Brexit and the European Union
- April 8: Struggles Over the Melting Arctic
- April 15: Open Discussion

The sessions will be conducted via Zoom. Participation is limited to 20, so register soon!

The program materials are required and are purchased separately. They are available in print (\$32) and various e-book formats (estimated cost \$20-25). Contact the moderator for details and to reserve your space at budsielaff@sbcglobal.net.

Moderator: Bud Sielaff, a retired business executive with degrees in engineering, marketing and finance. Bud is a member of MILE and has been a moderator of the Great Decisions program since Fall 2018. He has a business strategy background, has had extensive international travels, and closely follows world events as an interested citizen.

Thursday, March 11: Good Nazi (documentary)

Based on the book *The Search for Major Plagge* by Dr. Michael Good, this film explores the story of one man of moral courage and the Jews of Vilna that he helped save during the Holocaust.

Moderator: Dr. Michael Good, a family physician who grew up in West Covina, California and attended Occidental College in Los Angeles majoring in Political Science, graduating in 1979. He received a medical degree from the University of Rochester's School of Medicine. He has practiced family medicine in Middletown CT for the last 35 years and lives with his wife Susan in Durham, CT.

Tuesday, March 16: The Great Hunger 1845-1852

This historical presentation is about the Great Hunger of Ireland and its cause and effect. You will see artwork from the permanent collection at Ireland's Great Hunger Museum. This lecture will include the topics of natural disaster, government corruption and mismanagement, evictions, land grabbing, and emigration. Comparisons will be made with the plight of the Irish peasantry and the generational trauma associated with the Hunger today.

Presenter: **Ryan Mahoney, Executive Director or Margaret Vaughan, Assistant Manager** from Ireland's Great Hunger Museum, located at 3011 Whitney Ave., Hamden, CT. and home to the world's largest collection of visual art, artifacts and printed materials relating to the Irish Famine. The museum preserves, builds and presents its mini-collection in order to stimulate reflection, inspire imagination and advance awareness of Ireland's Great Hunger and its long aftermath on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thursday, March 18: Great Decisions

See program details – March 11

Thursday, March 18: *The Kiss of Sweet Scottish Rain: A Walk Across Scotland*

Rob McWilliams, Connecticut author and newspaper columnist, will talk about the walk across Scotland that inspired his first book, *The Kiss of Sweet Scottish Rain* (published by Connecticut-based Homebound Publications in 2018). The presentation, fully illustrated with photographs from the trek, will provide information about Scotland's history, nature and cultural background. A Q&A session will follow.

Presenter: Robert McWilliams was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and moved with his journalist father's job to the south of England at the age of three. Rob graduated from Wadham College, Oxford, with a BA Honors in Modern History. He worked as a tour guide and English teacher in France and Spain before joining Reuters News Agency in London. Rob spent 16 years at Reuters as a business manager in Hong Kong, Japan, the US, Venezuela and Brazil. He has also written for *A.T. Journeys*, the official magazine of the Appalachian Trail, and *Ctvisit.com*. Rob enjoys hiking and traveling off the beaten track. He does consultation work on information privacy and volunteers with the Nature Conservancy, Appalachian Trail and other outdoor causes. He is now a US citizen and has lived in Connecticut with his wife and daughters for 20 years.

Tuesday, March 23: The Saints in the Mirror: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti

A famous Haitian proverb says that you must be Catholic in order to practice Vodou. This is true because practicing believers of Vodou are also members of the Church where one prays to both Catholic saints and African gods that comprise the Vodouesque pantheon. This presentation explores the beliefs and rituals of Vodou as well as the historic events that contributed to the reinterpretation of the Catholic saints in terms of Vodou.

Presenter: Leslie Desmangles is Professor of Religion and International Studies emeritus. A native of Haiti, he was educated in Haiti, Canada and the United States and holds a PhD in Anthropology of Religion from Temple University, specializing in African and Caribbean religions. His more than 25 years of field research in Haiti and Benin in West Africa has been reviewed in many publications and he has lectured throughout the United States and the Caribbean. He has published many articles and an award-winning book, *The Faces of the Gods* (University of North Carolina Press). Dr. Desmangles was featured in radio programs including All Things Considered on National Public Radio and the BBC. He was interviewed on NBC's Good Morning America, the Phil Donahue Show, Dateline, the Today Show and CBS This Morning.

Thursday, March 25: Great Decisions

See program details – March 11

Thursday, March 25: Dancing with Stress – The Mind & Heartscape of Meditation, Poetry & Tai Chi

Meditation, poetry and Tai Chi can all help us navigate through our daily stress. Meditation can illuminate the shadowed memories we all hold of a child's mind state. Poetry asks us to rev and rumble, to purr and prance the engine of childhood, of myth, of abstract joy, of curiosity. The term used by the Chinese when referring to doing or working on Tai Chi is to play. It is a marriage of the Brain, the Breath, and the Body.

Together, we will move our limbs, infuse our bones with our minds, and listen to the gentle murmurings of the heart at ease. Using techniques from Yoga as well as tools offered to us by a variety of Chinese Arts, we will remember and re-awaken our youngest selves.

A sense of humor is all that is needed to take part in our session.

Presenter: Stephen Watson has immersed himself in Eastern philosophy for over 35 years. He is a regular poetry contributor to "IAM Online" an Internal Arts Magazine, the world's premiere source for online martial study. Stephen has been inducted into numerous Halls of Fame including the Oriental Martial Arts College's Hall of Honor as a "Bruce Lee Legend." He is also a regular instructor for Tai Chi at MxCC.

Tuesday, March 30: Herbs for Ailments

You will learn about the root cause for most ailments as we age. With this basic foundation, we will then build upon what has been done traditionally to remedy individual ailments safely without harsh side-effects through herbal application.

Presenter: Master Herbalist, Jenavieve Hawks is certified in herbology and nutrition from The School of Natural Healing. Third Eye Herbs is Jenavieve's wellness coaching business where she educates on the traditional uses of herbs.

Thursday, April 1: Great Decisions

See program details – March 11

Thursday, April 1: Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely

The author, Andrew Curran, will be delivering insight from *Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely*, his new biography on Denis Diderot (1713-1784), the prophetic and sympathetic philosopher who helped build the foundations of the modern world. (This book was one of Amazon's top ten history books of the first half of 2019). He will talk to us about the ways this 18th-century French thinker was centuries ahead of his time by challenging all of his century's accepted truths, from the sanctity of monarchy, to the racial justification of the slave trade, to the norms of human sexuality. Join him for a vivid account of a thinker whose works still edify us today.

Presenter: Andrew Curran has contributed to the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Newsweek*. He is the author of *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment*; *Sublime Disorder, Physical Monstrosity in Diderot's Universe*; and *Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely*. Curran is a fellow in the history of medicine at the New York Academy of Medicine and a *Chevalier dans l'ordre des Palmes académiques*. His current project book, which he is undertaking with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is a study of what he calls the "dead sea scrolls of race," sixteen unpublished manuscripts on the subject of *blackness* that were submitted to the Bordeaux Royal Academy of Sciences in 1741. Curran received his BA from Hamilton College and his PhD from NYU. He is the William Armstrong Professor at Wesleyan University.

Tuesday, April 6: Music in Africa

This presentation will explore the diversity of musical expression throughout the African continent with a combination of listening to recordings, viewing videos, discussion and hands-on performance. We will survey the continent as a whole, explore regional features and discuss in depth specific pieces, genres and countries. We will also look at the social and political horizons of music, including its role in everyday life and rituals and how musical experiences have changed in contemporary life. Additionally, the presence of African music in social media, including the spread and impact of African rap and hip hop, will be explored.

Presenter: John Dankwa received a PhD from Wesleyan University, a M.Phil. from University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and a BA Music from University of Cape Coast, Ghana. John has taught courses in African music and culture at several universities including Wesleyan University, Kennesaw State University, GA, and University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Thursday, April 8: Great Decisions

See program details – March 11

Thursday, April 8: The Art and Science of Trash Talk (In Sports)

As long as there has been competition, there has been trash talk. Defined as bragging or insulting comments made toward an opponent to psyche them out, athletes have used trash talk for ages to gain a competitive advantage. But does trash talk actually work? This program will explore the colorful history of trash talk in sports as well as its use in other contexts. Finally, it will delve deeper into the science of trash talk to look at its psychological and emotional effects on an opponent and how those affect motivation and performance.

Presenter: Karen McDermott received her PhD in Communications from UConn. Her research specializations are in sport communication, persuasion, crisis communication, image repair and emotion. Her doctoral dissertation on trash talk appears to be the first study to empirically test and statistically model the effects of trash talk on an opponent's competitive performance.

Tuesday, April 13: Middletown's High Street & Wesleyan University (book)

Middletown's High Street and the Wesleyan University (founded 1831) campus that today occupies much of its length, reflect the history of Middletown, Connecticut, founded in 1650. As the town became a busy port engaged in the West Indies trade, mariners, clergy and academy teachers populated the street. During the Industrial Revolution, the founders of Russell Manufacturing Co., Wilcox, Crittenden & Co., and Starr Arms called High Street home. The spectacular views of the Connecticut River below encouraged the building of spacious homes of the latest architectural design that are now part of the Wesleyan campus. As the campus expanded, academic and fraternal club buildings were erected on the street, notably its famous "Brownstone Row." Many famous personages, such as Washington, Lafayette, President Taft, Gertrude Stein, and then Senator Barack Obama, have visited High Street. Authors Alain Munkittrick and Deborah Shapiro will discuss the history of High Street that led to the publication of their book, *Middletown's High Street & Wesleyan University*.

Presenters: Alain Munkittrick, an architect and Wesleyan graduate, served on the Wesleyan Landmarks Advisory Board and as President of the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust. **Deborah Shapiro**, a graduate of Connecticut College and UCONN School of Law, is the past Executive Director of the Middlesex County Historical Society and currently the Municipal Historian for the City of Middletown.

Thursday, April 15: Great Decisions

See program details – March 11

Thursday, April 15: Titanic: The Connecticut Connections

When the *Titanic* sank on April 15, 1912, there were 33 passengers onboard with Connecticut connections. This presentation focuses on the story of the ship itself as well as those passengers on it with interesting stories, especially those with Connecticut links: the very sad story of James Kelly, the character assassination of William T. Sloper of New Britain, the moving and tragic story of Jane Carr of Windsor Locks and others.

Presenter: Phil Devlin has a BA from UCONN and a MALS from Wesleyan University. Before retiring, he taught English, History and Latin at Haddam-Killingworth High School. Phil is currently writing a book about Jane Carr, an absolutely fascinating human-interest story.

Tuesday, April 20: Becoming an Astronaut and the First Mom in Space

You will see a power point presentation representing Dr. Fisher's journey to becoming one of the first six female astronauts for the US Space Program. She will tell you about her mission and career and what it was like to be one of the first women with NASA. Learn about her experiences of juggling a demanding career with raising a family. She will also give you information about the future of our space program and space travel/tourism.

Presenter: Dr. Anna Fisher graduated from San Pedro High School, San Pedro, California, 1967; received a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and a Doctor of Medicine from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), 1971 and 1976, respectively; received a Master of Science in Chemistry from UCLA, 1987. She began medical school at UCLA in 1972 and, following graduation in 1976, commenced a one-year internship at Harbor General Hospital in Torrance, California. After completing that internship, she specialized in emergency medicine and worked in several hospitals in the Los Angeles area. Dr. Fisher was selected as an astronaut by NASA in January 1978. She was a mission specialist on STS-51A, which launched from Kennedy Space Center on November 8, 1984.

Thursday, April 22: Madam CJ Walker portrayed by Gwendolyn Quezairé-Presutti

Actress Gwendolyn Quezairé-Presutti is a living history artist who brings you the story of Madam CJ Walker. Madam Walker was an entrepreneur, philanthropist and activist. She followed her dream, turning her life into a true "rags to riches" story, 'the wealthiest Negro woman in the United States if not the entire world.' She founded Madam C.J. Manufacturing Company (cosmetics), mobilized a network of 20,000 African American women as sales agents, factory and office workers. Her sales agents earned between \$5 and \$15 dollars a day when unskilled white laborers were earning \$11 a week. More than a history lesson, she offers inspiration to women – regardless of race – on how to succeed against all odds. There will be an Interactive Q&A opportunity to discuss Jim Crow laws as well as personal challenging experiences Madam Walker encountered, adding relevance and realism to her story.

Presenter: Gwendolyn Quezairé-Presutti is an Actor, dramatist, historian and storyteller. Gwendolyn began Historical Performing in 1997, at The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures as an Educational Interpreter. She received the Theatre in Museums Interpretation Techniques Certification at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indiana. After moving to Connecticut in the fall of 2001, the Connecticut Historical Society Museum hired her as an Educational Interpreter. Shortly after arrival, she developed a character, which she researched and scripted for the Amistad exhibit, telling the perspective of the African captives. She taught and performed at the Museum as an Artist-in-Residence for more than ten years. Gwendolyn performs in New England and nationally. She performed as an actor in many commercial and historical films, more recently at the Hartford Stage Company.