



# 2025 Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council Award Winners

## Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Grades 6-8



**Kassie Jo White and Brennan West**  
Thomas County Middle School

Thomas County Middle School students Brennan West and Kassie Jo White's exhibit for National History Day Georgia 2025, "Power to the People: The Rights and Responsibilities of Rural Electrification," explores the Rural Electrification Act, highlighting its transformative impact on rural communities and its enduring historical significance.

To develop their exhibit, Brennan and Kassie conducted in-depth research using primary sources from esteemed institutions, including the Library of Congress, the Georgia Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration, and various newspaper collections. Their scholarly efforts culminated in a compelling exhibit, a detailed process paper, and a thoroughly annotated bibliography.

Their outstanding use of archival materials earned them recognition at the 2025 State Contest, where they received the Outstanding Achievement in the Use of National Archives Records and Materials award from the National Archives Association.

## **Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Grades 9-12**



### **Jonathan Dorminy**

Sola Fide Homeschool

Accepted by John and Ann Dorminy on behalf of Jonathan Dorminy.

Sola Fide Homeschool student Jonathan Dorminy's performance for National History Day Georgia 2025, "Shirked Responsibilities: John Bingham's Fourteenth Amendment and Rights That Shall Not Be Infringed," explores the origins and evolution of the Fourteenth Amendment, with a particular emphasis on the influential role of Congressman John Bingham.

To support his research, Jonathan utilized a wide range of primary sources, including materials from the Library of Congress, Congressional Records, the Georgia Archives, the National Archives and Records Administration, various newspaper collections, and Sabin Americana. His thorough and thoughtful use of these resources resulted in a compelling performance, supported by a process paper and annotated bibliography.

A previous recipient of this award, Jonathan continues to demonstrate advanced research skills and a deep commitment to historical inquiry. His work this year exemplifies the highest standards of student scholarship.

## Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Undergraduate



**Max Besselman**

Georgia Southern University student Max Besselman is being recognized for his exceptional undergraduate research conducted through an internship with Sharing Stories of 1977, a nationwide public history initiative hosted by the University of Houston and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This project documents the lives of hundreds of state delegates who participated in the First National Women's Conference, held in Houston from November 18 to 21, 1977.

As part of this initiative, Besselman researched and authored biographies of eleven women, representing one-third of Georgia's elected delegates to the conference. His work drew extensively from Georgia-based archival sources, including oral histories from the Georgia State Archives, locally published obituaries, college yearbooks, and dissertations.

The biographies illuminate the lives of women who had largely vanished from the historical record, offering new insights into the political ideas they championed in the late 1970s. His work deepens our understanding of women's history, Georgia's political landscape, and the intersections of race and gender during this pivotal moment.

Max Besselman will present his research at the Georgia Association of Historians annual meeting in Milledgeville, at CURIO, the undergraduate symposium hosted by Georgia Southern University, and at the Sharing Stories Student Showcase at the University of Houston. Max's biographies will be published on the Sharing Stories website.

## Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Undergraduate



### **Ella Mortenson**

Savannah College of Art and Design student Ella Mortenson is being recognized for her oral and PowerPoint presentation, “The Historic East Side Theater: Reclaiming Savannah’s Black Entertainment History,” made on May 2, 2025, as a component of the Hungry for History Student Showcase from the City of Savannah Municipal Archives. This work stemmed from an adaptive reuse proposal for the East Side Theater in Savannah, a project from a previous preservation design course.

Mortenson’s work drew from a wide range of digital archives, including the Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah Jazz History Exhibit, Georgia Southern Digital Libraries, Georgia Historical Society, Georgia Historic Newspapers, and the UGA Brown Media Archives.

The East Side Theater opened on East Broad Street in Savannah in June 1946, during the era of Jim Crow laws, to offer African American residents on the city’s east side a more convenient entertainment venue. The East Side Theater closed in 1969 and has since become derelict, but it has captured the imagination of Savannahians for years.

Ella Mortenson’s presentation not only highlighted the East Side’s cultural legacy but also contextualized it within the broader history of Black entrepreneurship and entertainment in Savannah. Her work stands out for its compelling narrative and visual storytelling, using one historic structure to represent an era of African American cultural vibrancy and resilience.



### **Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Undergraduate**



**Hayden Reeves**

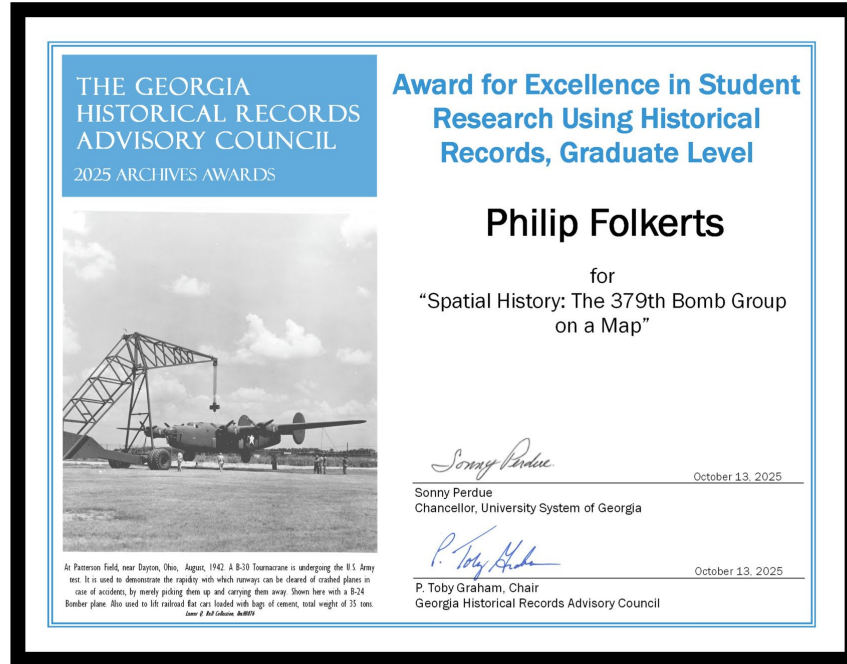
Georgia Southern University student Hayden Reeves is being recognized for his exceptional undergraduate research conducted through an internship with Sharing Stories of 1977, a nationwide public history initiative hosted by the University of Houston and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This project documents the lives of hundreds of state delegates who participated in the First National Women's Conference, held in Houston from November 18 to 21, 1977.

As part of this initiative, Hayden Reeves researched and authored biographies of eleven women, representing one-third of Georgia's elected delegates to the conference. His work drew extensively from Georgia-based archival sources, including oral histories through Georgia State Libraries, locally published obituaries, college yearbooks, and dissertations. His meticulous research received high praise from both scholars and project leadership.

Reeves's biographies illuminate the lives of women who had largely vanished from the historical record, offering new insights into the political ideas they championed in the late 1970s. His work deepens our understanding of women's history, Georgia's political landscape, and the intersections of race and gender during this pivotal moment.

Reeves presented his research at the Georgia Association of Historians annual meeting in Milledgeville, at CURIO, the undergraduate symposium hosted by Georgia Southern University, and at the Sharing Stories Student Showcase at the University of Houston. Hayden's biographies will be published on the Sharing Stories website.

## **Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Graduate**



### **Philip Folkerts**

Georgia Southern University graduate student Philip Folkerts is being honored for his digital history project, “[Spatial History: The 379th Bomb Group on a Map](#).” This interactive website maps all combat missions flown by the 379th Bombardment Group during its 24-month deployment in Europe in World War II.

The 379th BG flew more sorties, dropped more bomb tonnage, and sustained fewer losses than any other group in the Eighth Air Force, earning the prestigious Grand Slam Award and two Distinguished Unit Citations. Philip Folkerts’s project includes 24 monthly mission maps, each paired with detailed narratives drawn from aircrew accounts, mission reports, and strike photographs.

Folkerts’s research incorporated hundreds of primary sources, including airmen diaries, an unpublished memoir by General Maurice Preston, and extensive mission documentation from the Air Force Historical Research Agency and the National Museum of the Eighth Air Force.

By combining data visualization with historical storytelling, Folkerts’s work offers an accessible way to explore the scale and complexity of the air campaign. It exemplifies how digital tools can transform historical research and public engagement.

## **Award for Excellence in Student Research Using Historical Records, Graduate**



**Savannah Mae Tuten**

Savannah College of Art and Design graduate student Savannah Mae Tuten is being honored for her outstanding presentation delivered on May 2, 2025, as part of the Hungry for History Student Showcase hosted by the City of Savannah Municipal Archives. The presentation grew out of her thesis, “Visionary Art Environments: The Legacy of Laura Pope,” for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Preservation Design.

Tuten’s research explores the life and legacy of self-taught artist Laura Pope Forester and the historic Pope’s Museum in Cairo, Georgia, one of the oldest documented visionary art environments in the United States. The work builds on the recent recognition of Forester’s contributions, as reflected in the Georgia Historical Society marker erected in May 2025.

Through an oral and visual presentation, Savannah Mae Tuten highlighted Pope Forester’s artistic vision, her celebration of women’s contributions to history, and the challenges of preserving nontraditional art environments. Her thesis not only documents a cultural site but also proposes strategies for its continued preservation, bridging historical research with practical design solutions.

Savannah Mae Tuten’s project stands out for its originality, depth of archival research, and relevance to both preservation and public history. It brings renewed attention to a nearly forgotten artist and offers a model for preserving marginalized cultural heritage.

## **Award for Excellence in Student Archives-Centered Work in a Public Institution**



### **Kennesaw State University Public History Program**

Accepted by Tamara Livingston on behalf of KSU's Public History Program.

During the fall 2024 semester, students in Jennifer Dickey's Introduction to Public History course at Kennesaw State University curated a traveling exhibit titled "The Fight for Civil Rights: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Foot Soldiers of the Movement." This exhibit spotlighted Georgia's local participants in key moments of the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Brown v. Board of Education, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Sit-in Campaign, the Freedom Rides, and the Selma to Montgomery March.

Students conducted original research in archives such as the KSU Archives, Georgia State University Special Collections, the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library, the National Archives, and the Library of Congress. They crafted biographical profiles of civil rights "foot soldiers," including Daphne Delk, Rev. William H. Borders, Lonnie King Jr., Frank Holloway, John Lewis, and Deane Bonner. The result was an eight-panel traveling exhibition that debuted at the KSU Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast on January 17, 2025.

This project exemplifies excellence in student research by combining archival investigation, public history practice, and community storytelling. It honors unsung heroes and brings Georgia's civil rights legacy to life for new audiences.



## **Award for Excellence in Student Archives-Centered Work in a Public Institution**



### **Kennesaw State University Archives**

Accepted by Amber Smith and Tamara Livingston on behalf of KSU's Archives.

The Kennesaw State University Archives is being recognized for its outstanding work on the Mountains to Metropolis Oral History Project, an expansion of the long-running Thomas A. Scott Oral History Project, which began in the 1970s.

Faced with aging cassette recordings and limited resources, the Archives took proactive steps to preserve and digitize these interviews, recognizing the urgent need to safeguard Georgia's local history. In 2022, it received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to launch Mountains to Metropolis, a project designed to document the intersection of rural traditions and urban development in North Georgia.

The project offers a publicly accessible, searchable portal featuring audio and video interviews indexed and synchronized with transcripts using the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS). This platform enhances access and usability for researchers and educators and serves as a replicable model for other institutions managing oral history collections.

The KSU Archives' work exemplifies archival preservation, digital innovation, and public scholarship. By transforming decades of oral history into an accessible resource, it has ensured that the voices and experiences of Georgians will continue to inform and inspire future generations.

### Award for Excellence in Local History Advocacy



**Mark Clegg**

Mark Clegg is being honored for his book, *The Crimson and Gold*, a researched and resonant history that explores education, integration, and community identity in Athens, Georgia, told through the lens of high school football.

The book chronicles the stories of two local high schools, one historically Black, the other White, and the complex journey toward integration. Through interviews and research, Clegg captures the drama of desegregation, the loss of school identities, and the resilience of a community navigating change. His narrative brings to life the personalities of players, coaches, and families, while also addressing broader themes of race, memory, and belonging.

*The Crimson and Gold* preserves a chapter of Georgia's educational and cultural history, offering lessons that resonate beyond Athens.

## Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia's History



### **Gene Kansas**

Gene Kansas's *Civil Sights: Sweet Auburn, A Journey through Atlanta's National Treasure* offers an accessible way to explore one of Georgia's historically and culturally significant communities. Through storytelling, the book highlights Sweet Auburn's legacy in business, education, the arts, music, religion, and civic life.

At its center is Gene Kansas, writer, preservationist, and cultural developer, whose interest in history is evident throughout. With *Civil Sights*, Kansas has created more than a guidebook; he has crafted a tribute to a neighborhood that shaped the civil rights movement and continues to inspire. Sweet Auburn is not just a place; it is a symbol of resilience, creativity, and community.

Kansas's approach to public history, commitment to preserving African American heritage, and ability to connect audiences with place-based narratives remind us that the spaces we inhabit are inseparable from the stories we carry.



### Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia's History



#### **Greg Brooking, Ph.D.**

Greg Brooking's *From Empire to Revolution* offers a biography of James Wright, Georgia's last royal governor, and a researched portrait of loyalism during the American Revolution. His work challenges simplistic narratives by showing that Wright and many other loyalists did not oppose independence out of ideological rigidity, but made complex, personal decisions shaped by family ties, economic interests, and temperament.

For fifteen years, Wright governed Georgia, overseeing economic growth and population expansion while navigating tensions between colonial needs and imperial policy. Brooking's account presents Wright as a pragmatic and principled leader whose story has long been overshadowed in Revolutionary historiography.

Brooking's biography contributes to our understanding of colonial and Revolutionary America by restoring attention to a figure whose life and leadership illuminate loyalty, governance, and conflict. His work supports a more balanced view of the Revolution and its impact on individuals and communities.



## Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia's History



**Glenn Robins, Ph.D.**

Glenn Robins's *In a Debt of Gratitude: How Jimmy Carter Put Veterans' Issues on the National Agenda* is a study of President Jimmy Carter's efforts on behalf of Vietnam veterans, both as governor of Georgia and as president.

Drawing on primary sources such as the Legal Division and Veterans' Services records at the Georgia Archives and the Max Cleland Papers at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Robins provides new insights into Carter's early advocacy for veterans. He also uses White House records, including those of the Domestic Policy Staff, to document Carter's legislative strategies, public messaging, and engagement with veterans' organizations.

Robins's research highlights Carter's leadership on issues such as unemployment, Agent Orange exposure, discharge upgrades, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. His work challenges prevailing narratives and argues that Carter did more for Vietnam veterans in the 1970s than any other elected official.

With original scholarship and archival discoveries, *A Debt of Gratitude* addresses a gap in both Carter studies and Vietnam veteran history.

## Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia's History



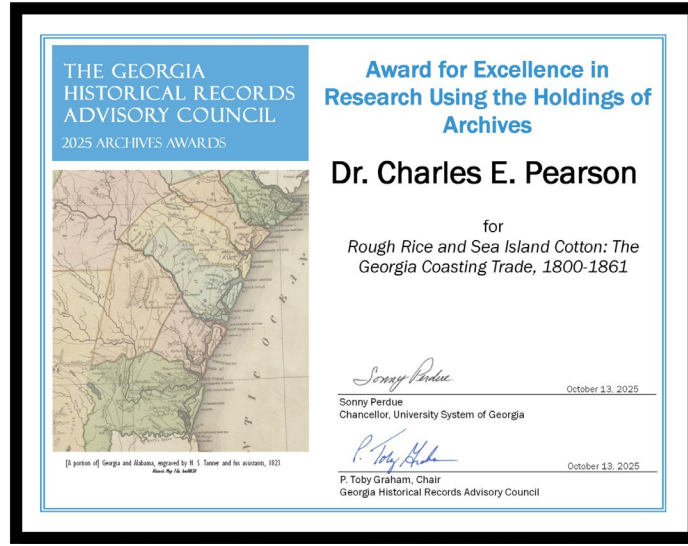
### **Sarah V. Ross**

Sarah V. Ross's *Social Roots: Lowcountry Foodways, Reconnecting the Landscape* examines the roots of the farm-to-table movement, tracing global and regional influences that shape Southern cuisine, especially Lowcountry foodways.

Ross invites readers to reflect on how cultural and environmental factors influence the meals we plan, prepare, and enjoy. Her writing bridges academic and artistic disciplines while drawing connections to the work of Wormsloe Plantation. Ross's narrative encourages readers to see food as a reflection of place, history, and identity.

This book contributes to food studies, environmental humanities, and Southern cultural history.

## Award for Excellence in Research Using the Holdings of Archives



### **Charles E. Pearson, Ph.D.**

Charles E. Pearson's *Rough Rice & Sea Island Cotton: The Georgia Coasting Trade, 1800–1861* studies the Georgia coasting trade in the early nineteenth century, a chapter in Southern maritime and economic history. Drawing inspiration from family stories about his great-great-grandfather, coastal ship captain Charles Stevens, Pearson reconstructs the lives, vessels, routes, and cargoes that connected Savannah to smaller ports and plantations from South Carolina to Florida.

Based on research that includes shipping lists from historic newspapers and materials from twenty archival repositories across the Eastern United States, Pearson documents the movement of commodities like Sea Island cotton and rough rice. His work is illustrated with maps, photographs, vessel diagrams, and tables that detail trade patterns, shipmasters, and port activity.

With footnotes, appendices, and a bibliography, *Rough Rice & Sea Island Cotton* supports scholarship on regional maritime trade and presents the work of coastal shipping as a narrative of economic and cultural significance.

### Award for Excellence in Research Using the Holdings of Archives



**Bradley R. Rice, Ph.D.**

Bradley R. Rice's *Joshua Hill of Madison: Civil War Unionist & Georgia's First Republican Senator (1812–1891)* provides an account of Hill's life and career.

Hill was perhaps Georgia's most prominent wartime Unionist, yet his life had not previously been the subject of a full-length biography. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives before the Civil War and opposed secession. During the war, he ran for governor as a peace candidate and later met with General William T. Sherman in an attempt to negotiate peace.

During Reconstruction, Hill supported President Ulysses S. Grant and endorsed Black suffrage, though his more moderate views often clashed with the Radical wing of the Republican Party. As part of a compromise between Democrats and moderate Republicans, Hill became Georgia's first Republican U.S. Senator, serving for two years before being replaced in 1873 by Confederate General John B. Gordon. Hill remained a respected Republican statesman until his death in 1891.

Drawing on archival sources, Rice brings to light the story of a principled figure whose gravestone describes him as "a staunch southern friend of the Union." Through notes, a bibliography, and engagement with primary sources, Rice's biography contributes to the study of Georgia's Civil War and political history.



## Award for Excellence in Research Using the Holdings of Archives



### **Laura Seifert**

Laura Seifert's *Faith in Education at the Skidaway Island Benedictine Mission* studies Georgia's Low Country, specifically Skidaway Island, within the context of post-Civil War social and educational history in Savannah and Chatham County.

Following the collapse of Reconstruction, several hundred emancipated African American farmers were relocated to Skidaway Island, a community left without infrastructure or institutions. In 1877, Benedictine monks arrived to convert and educate the children of this population, eventually establishing a church, monastery, and boys-only boarding school. From its founding to its closure in 1900, the mission became a site of negotiation and tension between the educational aspirations of freed Black families and the agendas of Catholic and Protestant missions, local governments, and religious societies, each seeking to shape the community's future through education.

Seifert used sources from institutions such as Belmont Abbey, the Diocese of Savannah, the Georgia Historical Society, and the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System.

Seifert's blend of archaeological exploration and archival research addresses issues such as industrial versus academic curricula, student labor, and racial dynamics, culminating in a thesis on how nineteenth-century educational structures laid the groundwork for the inequities present in the twenty-first century.

## **Lifetime Achievement Award**



### **Penelope Cliff**

For more than three decades, Penelope Cliff has devoted her career to preserving Georgia's historical records, expanding public access to archives, and inspiring future generations of archival professionals. Her leadership, scholarship, and teaching have left an impact on students, institutions, and communities across the state.

As Director and Assistant Professor in Clayton State University's Archives and Information Studies program, Cliff developed curricula that blends academic rigor with hands-on training. Her mentorship has shaped the careers of students now serving in archives and libraries throughout Georgia. During her tenure as Education Specialist at the Georgia Archives, she created lesson plans, led tours, and developed programs that brought Georgia's documentary heritage to life for audiences ranging from schoolchildren to historians.

Her five years teaching history at Gordon State College were marked by integrating archival resources into the classroom, encouraging critical thinking, and demonstrating the use of primary sources in understanding the past. At the Thomaston-Upson Archives, where she served for sixteen years, including as Director, Cliff modernized operations, expanded collections, launched

digitization initiatives, and built community partnerships that supported the preservation of local history.

Holding a B.A. in History and an M.A. in History with a concentration in Archives, Cliff has conducted research, led public programs, and welcomed visitors into the world of archives. Her work reflects the view that archives are essential resources for understanding our past and shaping our future.

## **Lifetime Achievement Award**



### **Sheila McAlister**

Sheila McAlister has contributed to digital access in Georgia through her work and leadership of the Digital Library of Georgia, expanding the availability of archival materials to institutions, researchers, and the public statewide.

McAlister began her career at the University of Georgia in 1996 as a staff member in the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, later transitioning to the Richard B. Russell Library as Electronic Access Coordinator. In 2001, she joined the Digital Library of Georgia, a GALILEO initiative based at UGA, where she advanced from Project Manager and Digital Metadata Coordinator to Assistant Director, and Director in 2014.

Under her leadership, the Digital Library of Georgia grew into one of the state's largest digital repositories. Today, it provides access to more than one million digitized items and more than three million pages of newspaper content. To support this growth, McAlister secured more than one million dollars in grant funding, enabling the expansion of digitization efforts and infrastructure.



McAlister also strengthened the DLG's relationships with educational and cultural institutions across Georgia. Her work in formalizing the subgranting program has enabled a range of organizations, from historical societies to universities, to contribute collections to the DLG, ensuring broader representation and access to Georgia's documentary heritage.

Throughout her career, Sheila McAlister has supported innovation, collaboration, and equity in archival access. Her efforts have supported digitization, preservation, and public engagement with historical records.

## **Lifetime Achievement Award**



### **Laura McCarty (posthumous)**

Accepted by Mary McCartin Wearn and Phil Smith on behalf of Laura McCarty.

Laura McCarty's career at Georgia Humanities spanned three decades. She began as a program assistant for grants and later became the state coordinator for National History Day, guiding Georgia students and educators as they pursued recognition for historical projects. In 2018, she became president of Georgia Humanities, a role she held until her retirement in 2024.

Under her leadership, Georgia Humanities distributed more than \$1.67 million in federal funding to organizations across the state, support that strengthened the capacity and sustainability of Georgia's humanities institutions. Laura McCarty also led the organization through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining the organization's mission and operations. Beyond her work with Georgia Humanities, Laura McCarty was a member of the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council, where she served as vice-chair of the Research Panel for multiple cycles.

Laura McCarty passed away in January 2024. Her leadership and advocacy contributed to Georgia's humanities landscape.

## **Lifetime Achievement Award**



### **Amir Jamal Touré, J.D.**

Amir Jamal Touré is a cultural historian, educator, and advocate for African and Gullah Geechee heritage whose commitment to archival work and historical preservation has had an impact across Georgia and beyond.

Touré's ancestral roots in the Lowcountry, dating back to 1814, inform his work in preserving the history and heritage of his community. His academic achievements, including degrees from Savannah State University and Mercer University's School of Law, are matched by his contributions to cultural preservation.

As founder of the Geechee Kunda Cultural Center, Touré has established a repository for Gullah Geechee history, language, and traditions. This institution functions as both an archive and an educational space, offering programs, exhibits, and research opportunities that document the Gullah Geechee community. His efforts to preserve historical sites, such as the Cluskey Embankments, demonstrate his dedication to safeguarding records and cultural landmarks.

Touré's role as an educator at Georgia Southern University and Savannah State University reflects his commitment to historical education. Through his teaching, he engages students and the public in the study of African American history, oral traditions, and archival research. His leadership on the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission reflects his dedication to documenting and recognizing Georgia's cultural heritage.

Beyond education and preservation, Touré's contributions as a researcher and oral historian have supported understanding of Georgia's African American history. His advocacy for documenting Gullah Geechee stories through oral history projects, podcasts, and public talks has amplified voices that have been marginalized.

Amir Jamal Touré's work supports preserving the history of the Gullah Geechee people for future generations.