

Reverence

Reclaiming the Forgotten



A Film by John & Erica Mills



A Personal Mission

"My goal is to give others the same gift my ancestors gave me: reverence."

Reverence is not simply a film about the past. It is about what becomes possible when forgotten people are remembered.

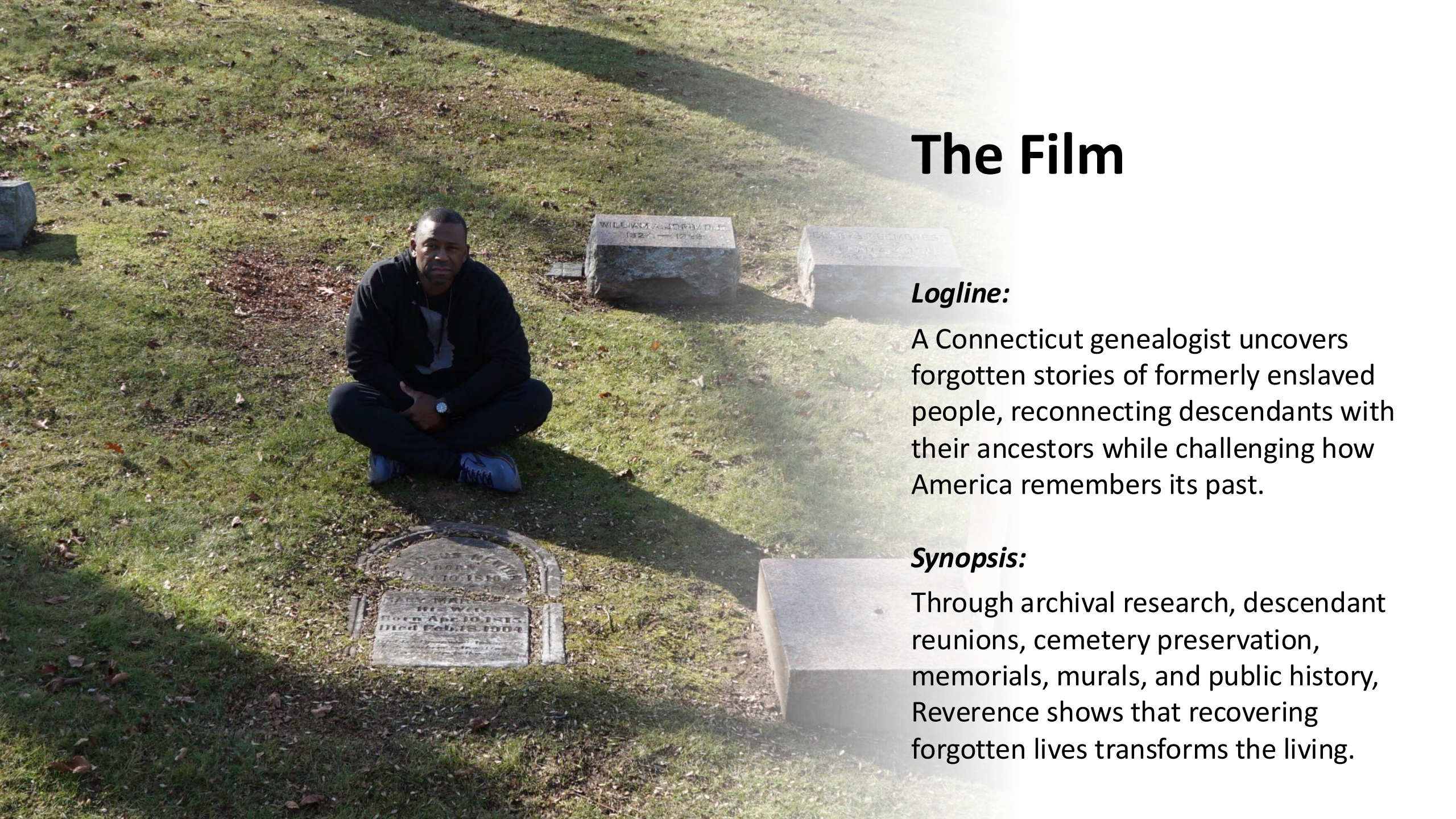


My Journey

“As a child, my father taught me to value Blackness.”

As an adult, I realized I was presenting myself to the world as though I believed I was less valuable than white Americans.

I wanted to make sure my daughter never arrived at that same place.”

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark jacket and pants, is crouching on a grassy field with scattered dry leaves. In the background, several rectangular gravestones are visible. One stone in the foreground has an arched top and contains the text: "JAMES H. WATKINS", "BORN", "10 10 1810", "DIED", "10 10 1815", "Died Feb. 18 1904". Another stone behind him reads "WILLIAM A. JORDAN", "1820 - 1888". A third stone to the right reads "ELIZABETH BOWEN", "1820 - 1888".

The Film

Logline:

A Connecticut genealogist uncovers forgotten stories of formerly enslaved people, reconnecting descendants with their ancestors while challenging how America remembers its past.

Synopsis:

Through archival research, descendant reunions, cemetery preservation, memorials, murals, and public history, *Reverence* shows that recovering forgotten lives transforms the living.



Why “Reverence”

On July 4, 2003, I walked into the woods looking for my ancestors.

Instead of finding them in the cemetery, I found them beyond the fence in an overgrown segregated burial ground.

I expected anger. Instead, I found **Reverence**. Reverence for people who endured enough suffering that I could exist. That moment reshaped my understanding of identity, history, and inheritance, and ultimately led to this film.



About John Mills

John Mills is a filmmaker, reverse genealogist, and founder of the Alex Breanne Corporation. His work reconnects descendants of formerly enslaved people with their ancestral stories through archival research, documentary filmmaking, public history, and community partnerships.

John's work has been featured by *The Kelly Clarkson Show*, *The Washington Post*, Connecticut Public Television, *Junior Scholastic*, and *The Areva Martin Show*. He is the author of *The Narrative of Primus* and a contributor to *A Century in Captivity*.



Beyond the Film

Most genealogists trace families into the past. John Mills specializes in tracing the past forward—finding living descendants of people history nearly forgot.

Every story ultimately ends with a conversation between people who discover they have been connected by history all along.

This documentary is one part of a lifelong mission to restore historical identity.

BOSTON
UNIVERSITY

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HEREBY CONFERS UPON

John Mills

THE CERTIFICATE IN

Genealogical Research

IN RECOGNITION OF SATISFACTORY COMPLETION
OF A PRESCRIBED SEQUENCE OF COURSES

PRESENTED ON THE 18TH DAY OF DECEMBER, IN THE YEAR
TWO THOUSAND AND TWENTY-THREE, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

Tanya Zlateva

TANYA ZLATEVA, DEAN
Metropolitan College & Extended Education

Melissa Johnson

MELISSA JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
Genealogical Research Certificate Program

Research Behind the Film

Boston University Certificate in Genealogical Research

John specialized in reverse genealogy—one of genealogy's most challenging disciplines—using archival records, obituaries, newspapers, and modern research techniques to reconnect living descendants with formerly enslaved ancestors.

In The National Conversation

The work featured in *Reverence* contributes to a broader national conversation about the lives of formerly enslaved people.

The research featured in *Reverence* has brought the lives of formerly enslaved people into classrooms, museums, national media, and public history initiatives.





Restoring History to Families

Each project culminates in returning a forgotten story to the people who inherited it. In that moment, history is no longer something they study—it becomes part of who they are.

Voices that Bring History to Life



John Mills
Filmmaker and Narrator



Dr. Jesse Nasta
Professor, Wesleyan University



Morgan Bengel
Curator, Old New-Gate Prison



Kevin Johnson
Historian, Connecticut State Library



Nicole Thomas
Historian, Connecticut Landmarks



Dawn Lathrop-Goode
Descendant



Michael Lathrop
Descendant

Reclaiming the Forgotten

Festival Recognition

- Official Selection – San Antonio Black International Film Festival
 - *Best Documentary Short*
- Official Selection – Twin Cities Black Film Festival
 - *Best Documentary Short*
- Official Selection – Independent Shorts Awards
 - *Best Documentary Short*
 - *Best First-Time Director (Male)*
 - *Best Editing*
- Semi-Finalist – Flickers' Rhode Island International Film Festival
 - *Best Documentary Short*



Key Creative Team

Director

John Mills

Producer

John Mills

Co-Producer

Erica Anastatcia Mills

Cinematographer

John Mills

Editor

John Mills

Story Consultants

Roger J. Kuhns

Anne W. Schmidt



Film Information

Runtime: 33 minutes

Format: Color

Country: USA

Audio: Stereo

Language: English

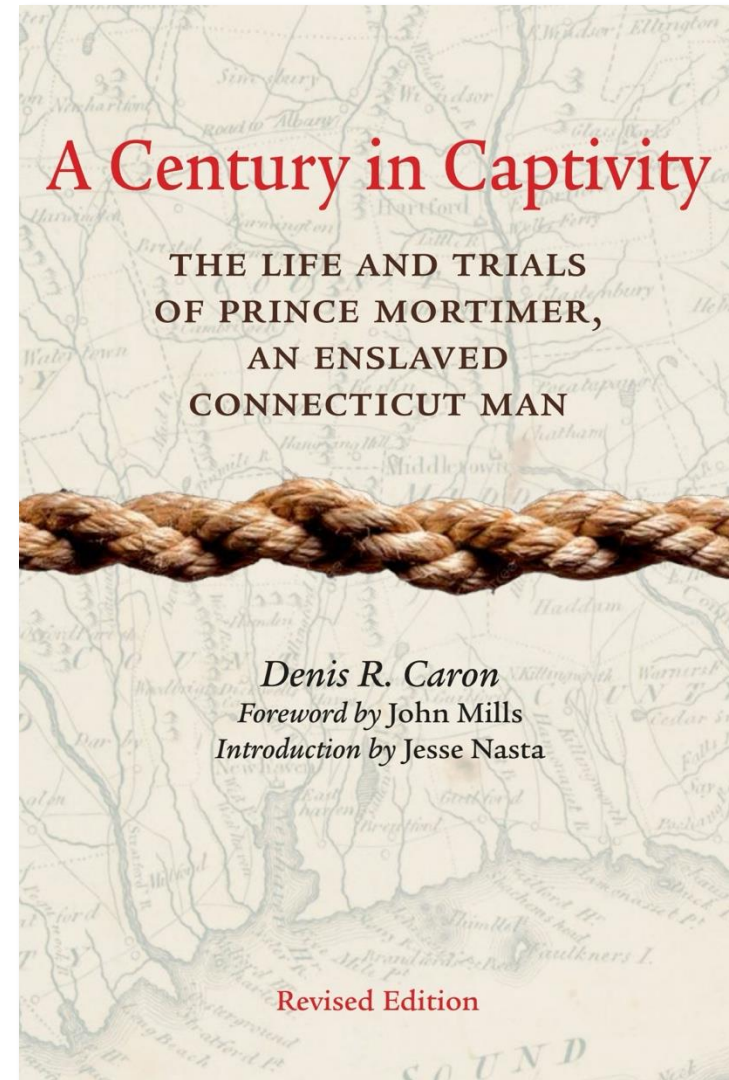
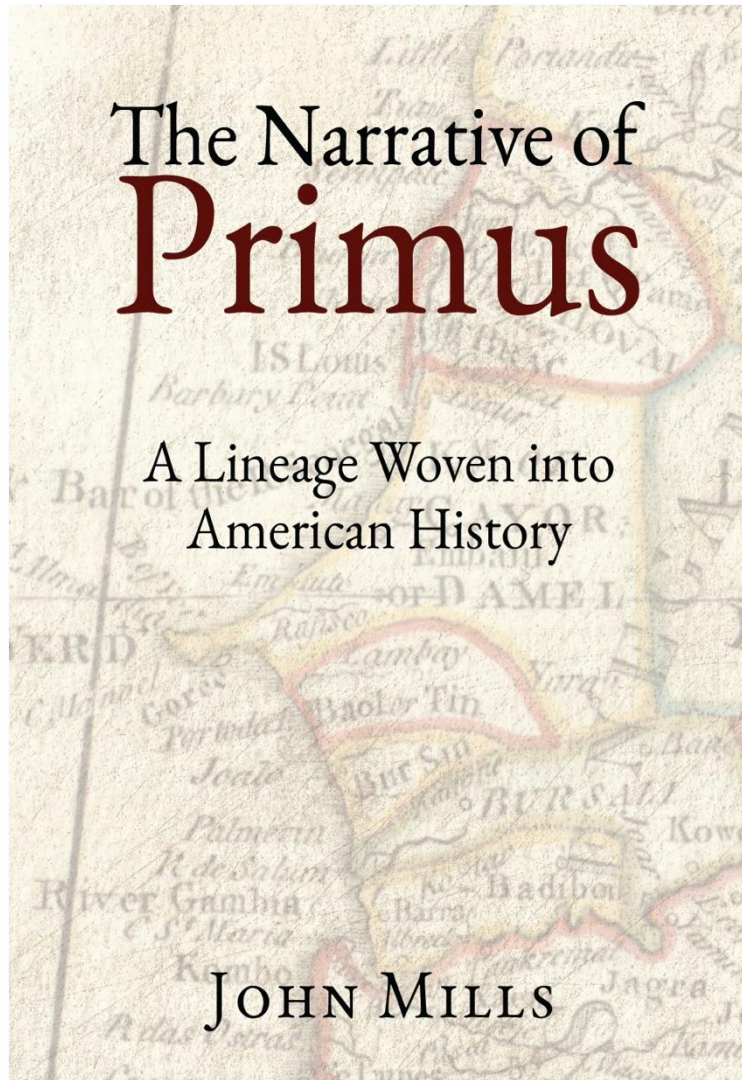
Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Genre: Historical Documentary

Frame Rate: 29.97 fps

Year: 2026

Published Works of John Mills





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