

FLAT ROCK TOGETHER

Celebrating Our Village And Neighbors

David Weintraub: Pushing Back Against Cultural Amnesia

June 14, 2025 Bruce Holliday

Flat Rock documentary filmmaker David Weintraub will debut his latest film, *Color Beyond the Lines*, on June 21 at Blue Ridge Community College. The world premiere commemorates the 60th anniversary of the integration of public schools in Henderson County. The presentation also marks the culmination of three years of research and filmmaking, focused on the largely untold story of segregated Black schools in Henderson County - and the generations of students, teachers, and families whose lives were shaped by them.

From early Reconstruction-era efforts to the consolidation of Black education at 9th Avenue School, to the sometimes uneasy realities of integration in the mid-1960s, the film traces a determined pursuit of quality education against a backdrop of systemic obstacles. It's a story, Weintraub says, that helps correct "cultural amnesia"—a term he uses to describe the historical forgetting that can obscure vital parts of our communal identity.

According to Weintraub, "what struck me as I interviewed Black elders throughout the county was their great desire to instill a good education in their children. Although most embraced the integration of schools, they were saddened by the loss of precious institutions like the 9th Avenue school."

From Brooklyn to the Blue Ridge



DAVID WEINTRAUB

Discovering Filmmaking—and a Mission

"I had no idea what I was doing," Weintraub says of those early days. He had no formal training in filmmaking and had to teach himself everything from editing to archival research. The project took seven years to complete, in part because so much of the history had vanished. South Beach had once been home to a vibrant Jewish community—many Holocaust survivors among them—but their legacy had been largely erased by development and gentrification.

The film uncovered what Weintraub calls a case of cultural amnesia: a communal story forgotten or replaced with something shinier, more marketable. "People didn't come to Miami to die," he says. "They came to live—to find each other, to rebuild community, to sing old songs and tell old stories."



STUDENTS IN FRONT OF 9TH AVENUE SCHOOL

The experience sparked a deep commitment to uncovering and preserving overlooked histories.

"I didn't start making films full time until maybe five or six years ago," Weintraub explains. "Filmmaking was kind of on the side. I was running ECO here, the Environmental Conservation Organization in Hendersonville, starting in 2007. While I was doing that, I made some films for ECO and also began working on *The Golden Side of the Tracks* about Overtown, Florida, using footage I'd collected in South Florida." This film was David's first foray into black history and helped inform this current work on *Color Beyond the Lines*. The parallels to his future work in Henderson County were striking: communities displaced under the banner of progress, history erased or neglected.

Coming to Flat Rock

After a decade in Florida, Weintraub and his wife began visiting Western North Carolina to escape the heat. They fell in love with the natural beauty and community spirit of the area and eventually settled in Flat Rock with their young son. "I wanted him to grow up catching frogs and salamanders, like I did," he says.



In Hendersonville, David found work in environmental advocacy and began using filmmaking as a tool for public education and awareness. In 2009, he founded the [Center for Cultural Preservation](#).

The Center's mission is to safeguard the living history of Southern Appalachia. Weintraub has since completed more than 50 documentary films, tackling topics from Cherokee traditions to Southern Appalachian farming. His oral history archive includes hundreds of interviews—many of which are available through the Center's website—and he has worked to make them searchable through metadata tools that allow users to find themes like moonshining, basket-weaving, or textile work.

"I've done about 500 oral histories, most of them in the Southern Appalachians, and many of them in Henderson County," he says. "The goal is hearing these people—our community members, our long-term ancestors and relations—being able to tell their stories in their own dialect, their connections, their values, their challenges, their joys."

Among his best-known films are [Guardians of Our Troubled Waters](#), a documentary about river keepers and conservationists; [Come Hell or High Water](#), which recounts the Great Flood of 1916 and its impact on Western North Carolina; and [Nature's Wisdom Thru Native Eyes](#), a look at history, culture and hope through the eyes of our nation's First People. Nine of Weintraub's films have been broadcast nationally on PBS.

David understands his films cannot fully explain every subject he tackles, but they are an important effort nonetheless. "I can't tell the whole story," he says, "but I can tell the rest of the story—the parts that get left out."

Color Beyond the Lines emerged from conversations Weintraub had with Ronnie Pepper, a community leader and member of the Black History Research Committee of Henderson County. Weintraub had already collaborated with the group on oral history training and projects. When they realized the 60th anniversary of school integration in Henderson County was approaching, they saw an opportunity to explore the long-overlooked Black educational experience in the region.

The film began with interviews of 9th Avenue School alumni and expanded to cover the broader history of segregated Black schools, going back to the 1870s. In the early decades after emancipation, Black families and communities in Henderson County built more than two dozen schools, sometimes in churches, sometimes in homes, and sometimes just outdoors. By the 1920s, several dedicated buildings existed in areas like East Flat Rock, Edneyville, and Green River.



Ronnie Pepper, president of the Black History Research Group, says, "Going back to when our people were enslaved, we realized that if we were going to truly be free it was important to have a good education."

DAVID FILMING WITH RONNIE PEPPER

One of the East Flat Rock schools was part of the Rosenwald School initiative, a national program that supported the construction of hundreds of Black schools across the South. Many of those structures no longer exist, but Weintraub and his team tracked down remnants, including foundations hidden in the woods and a schoolhouse now encapsulated inside a private home.



ALUMNI OF THE 9TH AVENUE SCHOOL

In 1951, the 9th Avenue School was created through consolidation. It served all Black students from Henderson County, as well as parts of Polk and Transylvania counties. The journey to and from school could be long and arduous—often requiring hours of travel—but students and families embraced the school as a vital institution. The teaching staff, entirely Black, not only provided education but also served as role models and community leaders.

When integration came in 1965, 9th Avenue was closed. While some celebrated integration as progress, others mourned the loss of a beloved and empowering institution. Weintraub notes, "Although most embraced integration of schools, they were saddened by the loss of precious institutions like the 9th Avenue school." Edward King, an alumnus of 9th Avenue who is interviewed in the film, says, "Growing up we knew that we had to out-perform, out-think and out-read the white community if we were to

succeed. We had a great pride in our black schools, and we felt like something was taken away from us."

Still, the legacy lives on. Alumni of the 9th Avenue School went on to become educators, doctors, attorneys—even professional athletes. Four of the five starting players on Hendersonville High School's 1972 state championship basketball team had been 9th Avenue students.

Lessons for Today

Weintraub doesn't shy away from the more painful elements of history, including the overt racism experienced by many Black residents in Hendersonville during the Jim Crow era. But his films are not polemics. They are acts of recovery and remembrance, intended to bridge the gaps in our collective memory.

"There's a thirst for that history," he says. "People really want to know. In this country, history is so much mythology. It's more about myth-making than it is about truth."

"So I have to focus on what we aren't learning," he adds. "And how do we put that back into context? How, by doing that, do we have a better understanding of how we're all connected? That this tapestry that may not be from our own personal ethnic group makes us all stronger."

"The more we illuminate the important contributions that our Black brethren offered us, the better we understand the value that we all play," he says. "They deserve the dignity and respect they are due as we better understand and grapple with this history."

Event Details

The world premiere of *Color Beyond the Lines* will take place at 7 p.m. on Saturday, June 21, at the Thomas Auditorium on the campus of Blue Ridge Community College. Tickets are available online through the [Center for Cultural Preservation's website](https://www.saveculture.org). Availability may be limited on the day of the event, so early reservations are recommended.

The evening will begin with a musical performance, followed by the film screening and a discussion with local Black leaders on progress and challenges ahead. Refreshments will be provided by the Black History Research Group.

For more information, visit www.saveculture.org.



MEMBERS OF THE 1972 HENDERSONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL STATE CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM

