



Lecturer of the Year 2026 Jay Smith

John E. Smith III—known to many simply as Jay—is a trained public historian, researcher, and archivist whose passion lies in making history both engaging and accessible. After earning his bachelor’s degree in history and political science from West Chester University in 2016, Jay continued his academic journey at Temple University, completing a master’s degree at the Center for Public History. He has since been celebrated as a dynamic communicator of the past, even earning comparisons to “the Steve Kornacki of local history” for his lively, data-driven storytelling. During his years as an archivist with the Chester County Archives (2018–2023), Jay introduced innovative public outreach strategies—from interactive GIS story maps to video features and educational programming—helping bring local historical narratives to life. Now working as an independent researcher, he remains committed to bridging academic scholarship with community curiosity and fostering public engagement with the past.



As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, Jay’s lecture topic could not be more timely or significant. He argues that few historical figures embody Finlandia Foundation National’s mission more profoundly than John Morton—the Finnish-descended signer of the Declaration of Independence whose decisive vote helped secure American independence. Despite Morton’s pivotal role in shaping the emerging republic, his story remains remarkably underrepresented in both scholarly discourse and public memory. Jay’s lecture seeks to illuminate Morton’s essential contributions while exploring the deeper influence of his Finnish ancestral roots, tracing his family’s migration to the colony of New Sweden in the mid-17th century. By highlighting how Morton’s Finnish heritage informed his political worldview and democratic convictions, Jay aims to elevate a remarkable chapter of Finnish-American history at a moment when Americans are reflecting more than ever on the origins and ideals of the nation.

For more about Jay: www.johnsmithiii.com

For information about FFN: FinlandiaFoundation.org