

Panelist Bios | Event 3: For the Love of Our Grandfathers

Russel Balenger was born and raised in Saint Paul and has also lived in Chicago and Ann Arbor. He is the Founder and Director of the Circle of Peace Movement, whose mission is to end violence and promote racial healing. He has worked to create a safe space where people come together in Saint Paul communities. Through his life's work, Balenger has partnered with the Saint Paul Police, community organizations, and residents to build positive relationships and strengthen neighborhoods.

Ahmed Kaad is a Somali grandfather and cultural guardian. He will share his memories and wisdom about the traditional communal Somali family and the impact of displacement on parenting. He will also offer prayers and wisdom for the younger generation of fathers. Ahmed was a civil servant in Somalia before fleeing the country at the start of the war.

David Mura's most recent book is the *The Stories Whiteness Tells Itself: Racial Myths and Our American Narratives*. His previous book was on creative writing and race, *A Stranger's Journey: Race, Identity & Narrative Craft in Writing*. With Carolyn Holbrook, Mura is co-editor of the 2021 anthology of Minnesota BIPOC writers, *We Are Meant to Rise: Voices for Justice from Minneapolis to the World*. A Sansei or third generation Japanese American, Mura has written two award-winning memoirs: and four books of poetry. He's been board President of The Loft, and he initiated the Loft class for BIPOC writers.

Jim Rock has taught Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy for over forty years at reservation, urban and suburban high schools, colleges, tribal college and universities. He recently retired as the Director of Indigenous Programming for the Marshall W. Alworth Planetarium and as an instructor in the Physics and Astronomy department of Swenson College of Science and Engineering at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He is an Elder in Residence at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities COIN center and is a founding governing council member of the Makoche Ikikchupi Project to return exiled Ocheti Shakowin Oyate to their sacred homelands, and to live in sustainable earth lodge communities. But most importantly, he is a grandfather to two high school kids who are visiting college campuses and continuing the ways of their ancestors by making good choices, working hard, and learning from all their relatives, non-human and human alike.

Moderators:

Suleiman Adan is a writer, poet, and writing teacher whose work has been published in the anthology "We are Meant to Rise: Voices for Justice from Minneapolis to the World."

In addition to his creative pursuits, Suleiman is a dedicated systems builder, community advocate, and DEI trainer with over a decade of experience empowering teams and building capacity through grassroots trainings and organizing efforts. Passionate about youth education, he has operated a free tutoring company focused on increasing literacy and proficiency in BIPOC youth, while also serving on Education and Arts boards. As an experienced project manager and fundraiser, Suleiman has led diverse global initiatives across sectors. A skilled trainer, he has mobilized volunteers in 8 countries for social

justice causes and facilitates critical dialogues on diversity, equity and inclusion. Suleiman currently serves as the Deputy Executive Director at CAIR MN, the nation's largest civil rights organization.

Ben Weaver is a father, caregiver, songwriter, poet and hide tanner, who travels by bicycle. He uses music and poetry to strengthen relationships and culture between human and non-human entities. He has released nine studio albums of music and five books of poetry. Given the choice he will side with the animals, lakes, rivers and trees. Relationship is the repair.