

2020 AND THE FUTURE OF ALABAMA HISTORY

ABOUT

2020 and the Future of Alabama History is a panel discussion held on Wednesday, July 15, 2020, featuring Steve Murray, [Alabama Department of Archives and History](#); Dr. Tara White, [Wallace State Community College](#); and Dr. Derryn Moten, [Alabama State University](#).

Sponsored by the [Alabama Historical Association](#) and the [Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University](#).

Visit aub.ie/2020alabamahistory to view a video recording of the program.

TRANSCRIPT

Mark Wilson:

Hello, and welcome to this online panel on 2020 And The Future Of Alabama History, sponsored by the Alabama Historical Association, and the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University. I am Mark Wilson, Secretary of the AHA, and Director of the Draughon Center.

Mark Wilson:

We begin our program today with a welcome from AHA president, Frazine Taylor.

Frazine Taylor:

Good afternoon. On behalf of the Alabama Historical Association family, I want to welcome you to our panel discussion, with panelists Steve Murray, Derryn Moten, and Tara White, on our 2020 And The Future Of Alabama History. The Alabama Historical Association was created in 1947, and it's the oldest and most statewide historical society in Alabama. It is a volunteer-led, membership-supported, and has provided opportunities for meaningful engagement with the story of our state, through its publications, meetings, historical markers, and other programs.

Frazine Taylor:

And now, we will be joined by our panelists. Thank you.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you, President Taylor. We are delighted to have our panelists today. Steve Murray is Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Dr. Tara White teaches history at Wallace State Community College in Selma. Dr. Derryn Moten teaches history at Alabama State University in Montgomery. Welcome, folks.

Dr. Tara White:

Hi.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

Thank you for having me.

Steve Murray:

Good to see you all.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

It's good to see you.

Mark Wilson:

And welcome everyone watching right now. 2020, what a year. And we are barely just halfway through. Just a few weeks ago, the trustees of the Alabama Department of Archives and History released a statement acknowledging the agency's contributions to systemic racism, and recommitting itself to documenting, and telling a fully inclusive history of the state, and to building a more diverse agency. I've asked our panelists to respond to that statement, which you can find online at the address you see now on your screen. You can read that statement for yourself. We'll go beyond that statement during this hour, and hear from our guests on their hopes for this study of Alabama history. And we'll take your questions for our panelists as well, which you can enter on Facebook.

Mark Wilson:

Steve, let's begin with you.

Steve Murray:

Thank you, Mark. It's good to be with you all. And I'm so grateful to AHA for putting together this program today in what will be, I think, one installation in an ongoing series of important conversations among the public history community, and the general public moving forward. As Mark said, the statement is available on our website. And I won't go through that in great detail, but I wanted to provide a little bit of context for how that statement came about.

Steve Murray:

Back in early June, when, like everyone else in the country, we were reflecting on the horrific murder of George Floyd in Minnesota, and thinking about what that meant for us as a country, with relation to our racial history, issues of policing, and then increasingly a widening discussion of American history, and the historical landscape in our country. We, as an organization, were reflecting on how we could be of help in that situation. Like every historical organization, the ADAH has had public service at the core of its mission since its beginning. And we wanted to be at the table for these important conversations about the issues confronting our country today. One logical way for us to think about doing that was to point to some online resources that we had created that could be of use to Americans, especially white Americans who were thinking about some of these issues seriously and deeply maybe for the first time, and trying to gain information about how the past brought us to the present and what we can all do as individuals to become more aware of the issues surrounding systemic racism.

Steve Murray:

And we had some resources like that available online. And they had recently been compiled in a new website called Alabama History at Home, that we stood up in quick response to the pandemic earlier in the late spring and summer. We knew, though, that presenting some of those digital resources as part of a solution without acknowledging our own agency's role in creating the problem 100 years ago, was just disingenuous. And it seemed important to us to preface those efforts with some frank acknowledgments about our own agency's history, and how it had created the situation where we were working with, for much of the last 120 years have been working with a distorted perspective of Alabama history that was created because of deficits in our

collections related to African American history, and contributions to our state and nation. But also because the Department of Archives and History early in its history, was an active contributor to the movement across the South during those years to create what we now know is the Lost Cause interpretation of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.

Steve Murray:

So in two ways, our agency had helped to create major symptoms of systemic racism; being a deficit in terms of the material records and artifacts that helped to tell the story of African American History, but also this mistaken interpretation now discredited by historians for explaining those important turning points in American history. Once we laid out those acknowledgments in writing, it seemed crystal clear that if we were going to proceed, if we were going to have a presence in these conversations, that there was a moral imperative for us to incorporate those acknowledgments in the statement. In the early 20th century, we knew that our agency had played a leading role in shaping the understanding of the past as it existed then, and in shaping decisions about our collections here. It seemed appropriate now in the early 21st century for our agency to have a leadership role again, this time in trying to facilitate a broader and more inclusive understanding of Alabama's past and the long simmering issues that have really come to the fore to us in the last couple of months.

Steve Murray:

That's how it took shape. When I've been asked, why did you feel it was important to make this statement, it really comes down to three points. One is, our desire to serve as an honest broker in these conversations about racial history and commemoration. That role requires honesty about the past. The second is that we know firsthand and anecdotally, that many African American Alabamians have still today, a deep distrust of Alabama governmental institutions. And that's for good reason because of the history of positions and actions taken by state government in the past, and that some African Americans today, do not feel that there's a place here for them, or they may not feel welcome in our agency. We are desirous of, and determined to move past that situation. We want all Alabamians to feel that this agency tells their story, represents their history responsibly, and is a place where people can come together in goodwill to talk about the past, and help to think about a better future ahead.

Steve Murray:

And then thirdly, the statement is part of an important process for us as an organization, and coming to terms with our own history as an institution. Thinking about those first two founders, Thomas and Marie Owen, who did so much of the work that is described in the statement, but also did tremendous work in building the capacity that we have today to serve as a collecting institution, as a cultural resource, as a state history museum, and a place that supports good history education in the classroom. All of those good things that we have today are also built on the work done by Tom and Marie Owen when in the early mid 20th century. So we have some work to do just reconciling ourselves to the history of our agency. Taking an honest look at the poor decisions that were made at the time, but taking also the benefit of what they did, and using both of those, together awareness and that capacity, to make better decisions about where we go in the future.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you Steve. Dr. White, love to hear from you.

Dr. Tara White:

Thank you. As a southerner, as a historian, and as an Alabamian of at least six generations, I was really pleased to see the statement of recommitment by the leadership of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The statement was long overdue. And it is unfortunate that it took the murder of George Floyd and the resulting protests around the world, to get the world, including Alabama, to reflect, into a position of

reflection, but also into the spirit of atonement. And so it's unfortunate that George Floyd's death, Breonna Taylor's death, Ahmaud Aubrey's death, and the deaths of so many others brought us to this historic place, but here we are. And so it's also unfortunate but refreshing that the Alabama archives chose this time to recognize the reality, to acknowledge the reality of systemic racism in the lives of Alabamians over the past 200 years.

Dr. Tara White:

And so, as a museum professional and public historian, I've long lamented some of those things that Steve talked about, the dearth of sources, the dearth of material culture collections in the state archives, and the unwillingness of people to include those voices. Because like I said, my family's been here for more than six generations. And so those sources and voices are necessary for telling a fuller history of the State of Alabama. And so I'm looking forward. I read the statement of recommitment, and I'm looking forward to solid actions on behalf of the Archives. And also not just the Archives because they are one institution, but also solid actions on behalf of the historical community. The AHA was very pleased to see that the AHA took this on, and was really serious about this, and it's serious about making a commitment to telling a broader story, and in encouraging historians to look at a broader story for the State of Alabama. So thank you.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you, Dr. White. Dr. Moten.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

I'm very pleased to be a part of this conversation this afternoon. And I've said this publicly, but I think it bears repeating it. I commend the Alabama Department of Archives and History's board as well as Steve for coming up with this recommitment statement. It's extremely important, it's much needed. And I am very heartened by what I have seen. And I just hope that this continues. This is not the, unfortunately, George Floyd's death is a combination of many such events that have happened in our country. And it seems like those moments present an opportunity for us to reflect on who we are as Americans, and what is this thing that we call American history. Because when we talk about Southern history, it's very much a part of American history.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

And I think about Mother Emanuel, and the church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the senseless murders of the parishioners of that church, and the young man who committed those murders, and conversations about the Confederate battle flag and the Confederacy. And that was another moment where we, as a nation, paused to have this conversation. But that conversation didn't take too long, or didn't last too long. Excuse me.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

So I hope there's something different about this conversation that we're having right now. And I think there are certainly something different about the next generations of persons who have demonstrated, and protested, and agitated for substantive changes in our society. I'm seeing things that I didn't think would happen so quickly, such as the Mississippi Legislature deciding to change its state flag. Alabama or excuse me, the Montgomery school board deciding to rename three high schools in Montgomery, namely, Jeff Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Sidney Lanier.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

And so there's a lot to talk about. There are a lot of demons to exorcise in this process. And so I hope we don't get weary, because there's just too much to do. When we talk about an all-inclusive history in this country, it is still true. And I believe Tara would vouch for this, that the archives at primarily historically black

colleges and universities have the vast deposits of historical records for African Americans in this country. Tuskegee have the lynchings files. I don't know that there's a white university or college anywhere in the USA that collected data on lynchings. And I'm thinking about the Moorland-Spingarn collection, the Amistad collection, the Schomburg collection. And so we need to do a lot to preserve this history, to discuss these artifacts. And so I'm happy we're having this conversation. I look forward to this afternoon.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you. And it's interesting to be a historian or a student of history, and to realize you're living in a really important moment of history. And what you're talking about related to the future of research and topics that, perhaps haven't been covered, or are ripe for continued uncovering, leads to a question that you'll see on the screen now, Jane DeNeefe, who would like to hear any plans to clarify the history of Black Reconstruction in Alabama, and possibly creating a database of collections that may exist in churches, HBCUs, or private collections.

Mark Wilson:

And so I wonder if you'd respond to that question. There are others out there now who are quite interested and think we really need to look at that period of time. So talk a little bit about that period, and what you hope may come out in the future in terms of research. Anyone want to jump into that?

Dr. Tara White:

I'll jump in. For Reconstruction, I found it interesting to be here during the sesquicentennial celebrations. And then the sesquicentennial celebrations ended. And of course, that would have been also of the Civil War, I mean. And of course, the at the end of the sesquicentennial Civil War, the beginning of the sesquicentennial for Reconstruction. And I found it really interesting that there weren't any celebrations anywhere, for Reconstruction. But I understood that history, and understood that Reconstruction was not a time that people celebrated. But I feel that it is because we're still in that period. We got about seven more years. And so it's still an opportunity for us to revisit. And dealing with the questions that we have now, these questions start there. And so I think this is still a wonderful opportunity to revisit Reconstruction 150 years later, and to start to delve into some of these questions about race, about the place of African Americans in not only the just ordinary everyday society in the South and in Alabama, but also the place of African Americans in the political process. Fortunately, the voting rights movement culminates here in Alabama in Selma. And you have Voting Rights Act of 1965. And unfortunately, you've had many reversals in the past few years, culminating in Alabama again, with Shelby County versus Holder.

Dr. Tara White:

So I think it's important for us to go back to that. But there have been some reinterpretations of Reconstruction in Alabama. And I encourage, I think it's DeNeefe, is the last name, to go back and look at some of those between Richard Bailey, if I'm not mistaken, Michael Fitzgerald, I think I saw his name over here. And he found some good work, reinterpreting the Reconstruction period in Alabama. And there have been a couple others who are doing really good work and so the work is happening there. One such work I really hope would also happen is the look at the US colored troops units that originated here in Alabama. I think that's something important, and I think that, that work in that area would be fruitful as well.

Dr. Tara White:

But there have been some to start already. So some people have already started plugging those holes in Reconstruction. But we can encourage students to do more.

Mark Wilson:

Right. Thank you. Steve, did you want to respond to that?

Steve Murray:

Well, I'll say yeah. I'm glad to see Mike Fisher online with us today. And his work is extremely important for understanding what was happening during those years. Another way that collecting institutions can help facilitate that is through improved access to the materials that we do have, and through exhibitions. I would point to last year's exhibition here at the archives called *We The People* on Alabama six state constitutions, and it was really a remarkable way to cast a light on very important chapters throughout Alabama's history. None more important than that ushered in by the 1868 State Constitution which guaranteed the civil rights of Alabamians, and incorporated at the state level the effects of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, created opportunities for African Americans in public life, created a true public education system in the state for the first time.

Steve Murray:

And one of the lessons to be taken away from the fantastic story of that constitution is that that kind of progress can be undone, and it was undone in the 1875 and the 1901 Constitutions. We're also steadily working to try to increase access not just for scholars, but for the general public, and for classroom teachers, educators. Just some examples of some things that we're doing now that touch on Reconstruction includes the digitization of our Civil War and Reconstruction Era newspapers that are now online, all those that we have available either have been scanned here, or a part of some national databases. We are currently scanning all of the governor's papers from the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. And those will be coming online soon. And then coming up in the fall, we're going to start a project to scan all of the Alabama Supreme Court case files from 1823 to Reconstruction.

Steve Murray

All of those open and provide immediate access then to extremely important records, and evidence of the experiences of African Americans in Alabama during that time. I think it's a combination of improved access of promoting scholarship and research by historians, and getting these materials into the classroom.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you. Dr. Moten, I'd love your thoughts on the Reconstruction question. But then beyond that, as well, what other topics are you hoping in the future students will take up as part of a more holistic effort?

Dr. Derryn Moten:

When I think about Reconstruction, I think of two books in particular, Dubois' *Black Reconstruction*. I also think of Rayford Logan's *The Betrayal Of The Negro*. And I really do think that Reconstruction was a betrayal. And I think it was a promise made but not a promise kept. And I think politics, basically sabotaged. And of course, Lincoln's assassination had a lot to do with the unfulfillment of Reconstruction. But it was perhaps an important moment where the commitment of the federal government of the United States was really put to a test, and it largely failed that test.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

And the other part about Reconstruction, and I think that is really important with the legacy of Reconstruction, is that what we see currently in American society. The economic disparities between black families and white families in America is mind boggling. That's the only way I can describe it in the wealthiest, most powerful country in the world. And it begs the question, what do you do when a federal government frames four-plus million people, are formerly enslaved persons, and then give them no means to take care of themselves? The loss of black farms in the South, the loss of black home ownership in the United States, the lack of affordable housing in the United States. These are the topics that I think we have to wrestle with, we have to wrangle with, because it's all connected to this history.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

And to the second part of your question Mark, I tell my students, in as much as the Civil Rights Movement, or a lot of people think that the Civil Rights Movement ended with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. We're still in a movement, because all Americans don't have equal opportunity. All Americans do not have equal justice. And so we're still striving to make this country the shining or the city on the hill. And it's going to take all of our efforts. It just can't be because a subset of Americans want this to happen. This has to be the goal of all Americans. And I say to my white friends that integration is their burden. It's not mine. Because if it's going to happen in this country, it's going to happen because there's a will within white Americans to make it happen. Because just demographically I can't be every place that I may need to be the one voice in the room that says, "Aha. You need to consider this person," or, "We need to think about our workforce in a different way."

Dr. Derryn Moten:

And so, we're challenged our thinking on many levels. And I think it was Daniel Patrick Moynihan that came up with expression, benign neglect. Well, if I'm the person being denied, excuse me. If I'm the person being neglected, then it's not benign. So we all have a role to play in the type of fair and just society and country that we want to have.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

I was talking to someone recently, and we were talking about Bryan Stevenson's book, Just Mercy. And I said to the person I was talking to, where else? I wouldn't even expect in Communist Russia that a person could be placed on death row before they go to trial. And yet that happened. And the persons who were responsible for that miscarriage were able to keep their jobs, and to serve in government positions as district attorney, as county sheriff. This goes back to what Steve said about people losing faith, or not having any faith in government. I mean, it's nonsensical. And these are the types of issues. And so if this conversation does not lead to a conversation about how we make our criminal justice system fair, then I think we're not taking full advantage of this moment.

Mark Wilson:

Then I wonder if you may all have comments on whether you are hopeful this moment will allow us, and encourage everyone to be more historically minded and to ask those difficult questions of the past. And so I'm wondering if you are hopeful that, or do you feel at this moment of a turn among the public to learn more history, understand more history? We have a question out here. I won't put it on the screen right now. Actually, I will, from Steve Davis. Is there a movement to actually teach history in Alabama schools? You can see the question. But are you hopeful that we are going to become more historically minded, or am I being too optimistic?

Dr. Tara White:

I'm sorry. I should not have done that. Let me tell you a story. So of course, I teach history in a community college, and it's an adventure every single day. And it's an adventure, more of an adventurous made more of an adventure, because what I'm realizing is that students don't get much in K-12. And so they come to me, actually, with knowledge that they, history that they might have learned on the street, or history that they learned in elementary school, or all these wonderful myths and fables. I shall not tell a lie. I chop down the cherry tree. And for those over certain age, we know who that references. And so I find it both disheartening, and in some instances terrifying that students have such a lack of historical knowledge, and don't really understand not only the context of history, not only the content of history and the context of history, but also that students really don't understand how historians do what they do. So that's part of it.

Dr. Tara White:

I think that, in this current climate of test and retest and making sure that we have the three R's right. Because that's pretty much what we focus on here, making sure that students can read, write, and do math. And it's unfortunate that history has gotten the short shrift. Just a point of disclosure, I was telling the panel about how I ended up... That it's funny that I'm here. Because I went to college to become a medical doctor, and actually majored in biology and minored in Chemistry and Spanish at UAB. Go Blazers. So I should not have been here, but I took history in high school. And it was my goal, not because the teacher was an especially poor teacher, but because I didn't see myself in the story of America. And I knew that we were here like I said, six generations, but nobody talked about us. Nobody's talking about me, and some men and my family, and the experiences of my family historically, and my people historically.

Dr. Tara White:

And so I went to high school, took AP and made sure that I passed AP tests so I would never have to take history again. God has a sense of humor. But it was understanding the connection between the past and the present as I was studying the Civil Rights Movement, and understanding the connection then between the past and the present, as I was studying Reconstruction, and looking at the past racial situation and current racial situation. And that was some years ago. I came to understand the importance of history, and decided to study more.

Dr. Tara White:

But I'm afraid that many of our students in our schools, and this is public and private, because I've taught them all, many of our students are encouraged to not engage with history, partly because career-wise anyway, because there's no money. Because of course all of us do this because we love it. We're not getting wealthy. But I also feel that it's unfortunate that history amongst all of the liberal arts are being really, people are discouraging people to major in the liberal arts. And that's unfortunate as well, because I think the part of us that makes, or the part that makes us human, the humanities we study those things that make us human. The literature, the thoughts, the dreams, the aspirations of all people. And history shows us some of that as well. And our students are not equipped. Many of them are not equipped to grapple with some of those questions, and not equipped to really articulate some of the things that...

Dr. Tara White:

And really some of those questions that ordinary citizens should be asking, should ask about how our society runs, how our society operates, and the responsibilities of government to its citizenry. But if you didn't understand that there was a responsibility in the way that that's evolved over time, then you don't know to ask the question. And I think that's what we're robbing our students. That's one of the ways we're robbing our students. I don't know. I think it's going to be a part of the job of the historical community to really make that case. And historians have started to make that case. I'm a board member, very proud board member of the AHA. And the AHA is really working. Archives and history, we had this wonderful Alabama History Institute plan for the summer before COVID. And we really have been working on helping students to work through some of those things. But there has to be a broader conversation in the education community in general about why these things are important, and what we are robbing our students of when they don't have the capacity, and they don't have the tools to ask these questions.

Mark Wilson:

We're thankful to your high school teacher who evidently had the opposite effect of what you thought was going to happen. And now you are affecting other students as a result. So kudos to that high school teacher. Steve?

Steve Murray:

Mark, I would say I am cautiously optimistic about where we are, and where we're headed. I think this moment feels different in many ways than previous episodes that we've seen even in 2015, and again in 2017.

I think there's an interesting surge of interest on the part of us. And I'm speaking mainly of white people who are newly identify themselves, white people who newly identify themselves as advocates and allies of African Americans in addressing this these issues. I think there's a couple of things for us to be careful about and watchful for. One is, what happens when the current debate over monuments and building names is largely resolved. And we have still remaining the very deep, and I would argue, more difficult issues to address related to economic disparity and access to education and healthcare and those other issues related to systemic racism, that are going to be more difficult to resolve than moving a monument.

Steve Murray:

There's going to be a lot more discussions, and history needs to be there as a resource for those conversations as well. I'm optimistic because we've got ahead of us in 2026, the 250th anniversary of the country. There've been a lot of discussions in the public history world about what our point of focus is going to be in that anniversary. What does the semiquincentennial look like? How does it compare to the bicentennial in 1976? And it seems to me that the past two months have answered most of those questions for us. This is not a 2020 episode. This is a 2020-moving-forward-years period of I think, reckoning with the past, and thinking about how we can make better decisions going forward. And it seems to me that there's a focus that has been brought to what the planning that needs to happen for 2026, and where that energy lies.

Steve Murray:

I would say two other things. One related to classroom instruction in history, and history and social studies and civics have been pushed to the sidelines in the classroom. We have to get those back to the center of the classroom experience of our young people. That will require policy at work. It requires historical organizations and concerned citizens being part of those discussions whenever the social studies course of study comes up for review. There's a place for the public in history organizations to contact colleges of education, and to express our concern about the lack of preparation of especially elementary school teachers who have minimal-required training in history of any field, world, U.S., state, whatever. And then are mandated to walk into a classroom, and teach a state course of study on topics that they themselves may not have been exposed to since they were in middle school or high school. That's a serious problem, and something that we need to continue working on. And thirdly, I think, as we...

Steve Murray:

It seems like this train is moving. With the energy that we're seeing this year, and some things that are going to be changing I am mindful that there are some Americans who are not enthusiastic about jumping on this train. And I think it's important as we continue this journey together toward a community that is mindful of our past and addresses that openly, and uses it constructively, to remember that there are people that we want to be sure we don't leave them behind on the path behind us as we continue that journey ahead.

Steve Murray:

This is a more difficult conversation for some people than others. And it's not to excuse it. It's just the reality of it. And I think that we need to find ways to... And there's a great role for the AHA here, and other groups as well. But to be a facilitator of those considerations, for the benefit of people who have a harder time with this, who have sometimes difficulty distinguishing honest assessment of the past from criticism or denigration of their family history and their ancestors. And we need to be able to have conversations that talk about how we can do that constructively without people feeling like they are personally attacked in the process. And history should be right at the heart of that conversation.

Mark Wilson:

As I knew you all would bring up deeper conversations that will take longer than our time to talk through, but you're identifying topics for future programs. Here's what I want to do now. I want to bring in a question from President Taylor, the AHA. And it's what I want to talk about just for a minute. Steve, I'll let you

respond first. But are there opportunities for partnerships with HBCUs where there could be a future that helps realize some of these things that we're talking about. And then Steve, after you respond, Dr. Moten, I want to come back to you related to some comments and questions that are out there, I want to get your advice as communities and entities are talking about changing names of buildings, and other things, what's going through your mind related to that. And then I suspect we'll end our program. But Steve, speak to this, if you will.

Steve Murray:

There's an interesting model right now underway across the South called Invisible Histories, that is a multi-agency collaboration to collect materials related to LGBTQ history. And it's one that it's an interesting model, where a nonprofit has stood up to be the clearinghouse for working with organization museums across the region and archives to try to get materials into appropriate repositories. We're always interested in working with our neighbors and our partners. And just to underscore a point that I think Derryn made earlier about the important role played by HBCU Special Collections and Archives in preserving material that wasn't being preserved in predominantly white institutions is crucial.

Steve Murray:

So, yes. I mean, the short answer to that is yes. We have to think about what that looks like, and how we go about setting goals for those. There's always so much more work to be done, just an understanding what's in our repositories across the state. There have been previous grant-funded efforts to try to build centralized databases of those collections. And it always poses a challenge to every institution, from the state Archives to the smallest community repository and college archives, that we all are looking for more resources to be able to staff those kinds of projects that can support that. We are absolutely desiring to be good collaborators.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you for that. Dr. Moten, and I'm sure this will be a topic of a future conversation. I hope that the AHA will convene. But thinking about some of the comments that have been made already and online related to this moment and a reimagining and renaming. And from your perspective, what questions do you ask, and what questions do you hope communities will ask that will be inclusive of many voices?

Dr. Derryn Moten:

Well, one of the questions that I think that we should consider when we think about the names of monuments, and buildings, and parks, and other places is the context in which these events happen. One of the things that still amuses and amazes me about the conversation about Confederate monuments and Confederate parks and so forth, is that no one ever asked the question, "Well, what did black folks think when these parks were being named, when these statues were being erected?" Nobody asked that question. And I guarantee you that black folks had opinions. And I guarantee you that some of them were unhappy that this was taking place.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

So I think the names of buildings, statues, monuments are important. I think they matter. I attended Benjamin Banneker Elementary School. So long before I ever set foot in Washington, DC, I knew about Benjamin Banneker's role in the design of that city. And so we're told that we should be proud, or that as a school kids, we were taught that we should be proud that we attended Benjamin Banneker school, and we did. I mean, I was in elementary school 100 years ago. So I think it's important. But these things are almost cyclical. I would remind folks that there were parents in New Orleans back in the 1990s that pushed to have the names of schools that bore the names of Confederate soldiers and so forth, renamed. And these schools were in their communities, and these are the schools that their daughters and sons attended.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

So I don't think it's really a small matter. But I want to agree. I agree with Steve that once these issues are resolved, and I think they will be resolved, what are we going to do next? Because the conversation cannot end once Jeff Davis is renamed, and once Robert E. Lee is renamed. It cannot end with that. And so for me, it goes back to how do we make the United States a country where all people have an opportunity to succeed, and that your zip code doesn't determine your life's chances. And one of the things, we all know this about public schools, is that it really didn't matter if your parents did not speak English. And it really didn't matter if your parents were not born in the United States. But you had, through those public schools an opportunity to receive an education, and an education that would provide for you, or give you an opportunity and chances in the society that your parents may not have had.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

And so I want these conversations to continue. But I don't want them to be reduced to just the names of athletic teams, and school buildings, and parks, and monuments. Because while that's important, the other important piece for me is how do we leave people a chance to succeed in a country that is very blessed in terms of industries, in terms of education, in terms of wealth? If poverty could be eliminated or eradicated anywhere in the world, it would seem to me, it should be eradicated or it could be eradicated in the United States.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you for that. Dr. White, would you like to respond to that as well?

Dr. Tara White:

Yes. I think that we are going to have to... Yes. Once the monuments have gone, once we rename or decide to redo Robert E Lee, and JD, and Lanier high schools, the real work is going to be in policy, the real work is going to be in making sure that regardless of where you are, and I'm speaking specifically in Montgomery where I live, where I'm from, where my family's been for four generations, where I was educated. The real work is going to be making sure that regardless of where you are in Montgomery, you have a quality education or work in the Black Belt. Regardless of where you are in the State of Alabama, you have access to a quality education.

Dr. Tara White:

I was very fortunate actually... Another story. I had two extremes. I went to schools in Montgomery, on the west side of Montgomery, and I attended some of the poorest schools in the City of Montgomery. But I got an amazing... I had teachers who were dedicated and devoted to us, and gave me an amazing foundation. So I ended up at the other end of the spectrum. I went to high school at Lanier High School in the LAMP program, which is the top program in the state. And so, again, best off and worst off. But at that time, this was the opportunity. And I've always wondered why my friends who went to Carver High School didn't have the same opportunities that I had at Lanier and at LAMP, some of who were as smart as or smarter, much smarter than I was, but they didn't have the resources.

Dr. Tara White:

And so I think it's imperative for us to start looking at these policies on education on the local and state level, and making these changes so that zip codes shouldn't matter. But not just education. We're talking health care. We are in the middle of a pandemic. People are dying, literally dying. I know two or three people who were very dear to me who've passed on. The access to quality health care. That's a whole other question. Not just that. We talk about neighborhoods. Neighborhood real estate is connected to schools, is connected to health outcomes, academic outcomes, life outcomes. Why does it matter? And so, I think there's a really big policy shift that needs to happen on the local, on the state, and on the national level.

Dr. Tara White:

I'm really hoping, and I'm saying this openly and publicly, that our officials are courageous enough. Because it does take courage, it's going to take political courage to do this. I'm hoping that our officials are courageous enough to want to tackle these problems so that every Alabamian have better opportunities and better outcomes. And it's not about where you were born. It's not about where you start out. It's about where you want to be.

Mark Wilson:

Thank you for that. I will close our program by reminding everyone that this video will remain on our Facebook page. And so if you'd like to share the thoughts from our panelists with friends, we invite you to do that. And I think I speak for all the organizations that are behind this and other historical efforts in the state, that we encourage these conversations to happen locally as well. Because it's going to, as you all have all illustrated, it's going to take everyone to help create the future of Alabama history that we want to see.

Mark Wilson:

And so we've been delighted to have so many folks online. As I suspected you can use the comment section as a bibliography in some cases, for future resources, and for future topics. And we hope that you will give us some comments on this program and on future programs. Steve, Tara, Derryn, we thank you for what you are doing in Alabama history, and allowing us to be on the journey with you.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

Thank you, Mark.

Steve Murray:

Thanks for bringing us together, Mark.

Mark Wilson:

Thanks, everyone.

Dr. Derryn Moten:

Good to see everybody.

Dr. Tara White:

Same here.

Steve Murray:

Take care.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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