



INTERNATIONAL
STORYTELLING CENTER

Stories of the Underground Railroad Transcript

(Please note: This transcript was created from live closed captions and as such may have errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics.)

DR ALICESTYNE TURLEY >> Good afternoon. And welcome to our freedom stories project, our public discussion, on the Underground railroad and Appalachia. I am Alicestyne, the director for the international story telling story. Freedom stories is an international story telling center initiative that illuminates the underappreciated, ignored, and neglected aspects of African-American Appalachian history. The Freedom Story brings together the folk arts and the storytelling of the humanities scholarship with the intent of guiding the public through a deeper appreciation of the roll of African-American stories in the American lexicon of struggles for freedom, equality, and social justice. This project is designed to trails the history of African-Americans in Appalachia over time, showing how the past has shaped and informed the world we know today.

While this project was conceived as a regional program based primarily in central Appalachia, the project's multimedia toolkit and presentations that be developed from our work will serve as a resource for the nation and the world. We're eager to highlight the diversity of our communities, the complexities of the histories and the role the region has played in U.S. history, all of which has been subject to misunderstanding and stereotypes.

Today's discussion is of course recorded and will be available on the international story telling website and Facebook pages as part of our ongoing freedom stories toolkit for public use and reference in the future. If you, the viewing audience, have any questions for our storyteller, Reverend Robert Jones or me during the discussion, please send comments to or Facebook page and we'll try to get to as many of those questions and answers as we can in time permits. If you wish to know the latest information of our upcoming freedom stories public discussions, you can always check the international story telling website that will have the latest information and topic.

Today our story of the underground railroad will be presented in true storyteller fashion by our noted storyteller Reverend Robert B Jones. Reverend Jones is a native Detroit, a noted song writer, a story teller, a multi-instrumentalist, an award winning educator, and a international storytelling festival favorite, so you'll be familiar with him. As a inspirational story teller and musician who enjoys celebrating the history, human, and power of American roots music, Reverend Jones has a deep love for African-American and American traditional music which is often shared in live performance that is inter we've timeless stories with original and traditional songs.

Reverend Jones has been performing for more than 30 years, entertaining, and educating audiences of all ages from colleges and schools, libraries, union halls, prisons, churches, civil rights organizations across the nation. At the heart of his message is the belief that our cultural diversity tells a story that should celebrate, not just tolerate. Reverend Jones and his wife Bernice who is also a highly respected vocalist in her own right work together primarily in the performance of sacred music, a couple -- as a couple they released two recordings together, and have toured nationally as a performance group. So presenting today's true story of the Underground Railroad, the Lucy and ton Blackburn story is our story teller, Reverend Robert B Jones.

REV ROBERT JONES >> Thank you, Alicestyne. It is a great pleasure and a joy to be here and to be involved in this amazing project, to tell these stories that have hither to not been told.

When I was a young blues guy, I fell in love with the sound of the guitar, and the guitar, for me, was the window in to African-American music as far as I was concerned. But a little bit later I found out that a lot of southern musicians said that the guitar had sort of ruined the music and I didn't exactly understand what they meant until oh, maybe about 15 years ago, I got to spend some time with a young man by the name of Mike Seeger. Mike Seeger is Pete's younger brother. And Mike was playing all of this bizarre music that was just thrilling and amazing me. And at one point he played a song called stole and sold from Africa. And he didn't play it on a guitar, nor on a banjo, but he played it on a fiddle and a harmonica. And I kind of understand what they meant by the idea that the guitar had changed the music. The guitar is usually one note or thing. It is one thing or another. But the fiddle is kind of a sliding instrument. It is ambiguous. And so you're touching those notes that are in between. And that has something to say about this story that we all the story of American history. It is in between. So this is a song that I heard Mike Seeger performing and it was at that point that I knew I had to start playing the fit dell.

(Singing)

We are stolen soul from Africa, transported to America, stolen sheets, stolen. We are almost making as you see and mother here web.
So the snows, wind and rain, to the land endure the pain.

See how they take us from our wives, small children from their mother's side.
They take us to some foreign land, a to a gentleman.
Lord have mercy and look down, on the bride of the African.
And being for our grief, we pray to God for some relief.

It was July 3rd, 1831. When a young good-looking light complected, light eyed somewhat heavy set black man and his wife, a beautiful almond skinned ma lat toe woman stood on the shore waiting for a boat. The man had on a blue broadcloth coat that gave him the appearance of dignity as if he even -- as if he was a servant, he was a servant who was employed by a family that cared about his appearance. But the woman, she was about nine years older than he was. He was maybe 21, that made her about 30. The wife was beautiful, an absolutely gorgeous woman, light complexioned. And if you looked at her quickly, you might have even thought she was white.

The two of them stood on that shore and grasped some papers. These papers were forged. They were papers that allowed folks to travel in those days, even folks of color. Toke for business and to come back. And these papers had folks thinking that well, we're looking at some folks, maybe even a Judges young lady and her man servant or even if they were a couple, they were obviously given permission to travel along this boat called the Versey. And as they were about to get on it, their heart must have been jumping out of their chest because they couldn't read the papers that they cared. The papers that they relied on for their freedom. So somebody in Kentucky, around the town, that the town known as Mainville had forged those papers and since either Thornton Blackburn or his wife Ruthie Blackburn could read they depended on the forgeries for their very freedom.

You see action one of the things that we discovered is that our understanding of that time of the time of slavery, of the time of before the emancipation is kind of clouded with our assumptions about what it was like. There were all kinds of jobs and all kinds of folks who were employed, whether being paid or unpaid, whether slave or free.

And one of the things that we discovered is that Thornton was a man who was skilled working in the household. He was also skilled with horses. And he was a man that you could depend but he actually worked in the store and probably would have lived out his life in Mayfield if not for something that had happened a couple of weeks prior.

See, they belonged to a different master, a different man, and he had died, and he had died leaving his estate in disarray. And that meant that you had to sell all the assets to pay the debt and Ruthie was an asset. If somebody had bought Ruthie and taken her down in to the deep south, she might have ended up in one of those brothels in New Orleans or she might have been ended up being cruelly treated by somebody who just saw her beauty and wanted her for exploitation. So all of a sudden from zero to nothing, from absolute good life to a crisis, they had to come up with plan. So the plan was to get these forged papers to get on to the Versay and to somehow make it north. And the place they decided they had to make it to was a place called Detroit. See, that's the place where I was born. Detroit has always been a gateway to freedom. It is the one city, the one major city in the United States where you can actually go south and get in to Canada. Now, the town is now called Windsor but back in the day, it was called Sandwich. So if you could get to Detroit, especially even in the wintertime, you could walk across the river, the Detroit river to make it into Canada. Now, that was not necessarily a guarantee that you were free or that you were safe. Because there was slavery in Detroit. There was slavery in Michigan. There was slavery in different spots throughout the upper midwest and in fact there was no safe place but you were protected by the community that you lived in. And so it was that when they got on that Versay and they managed to make it to the Indiana divide and somebody extended a hand to this young attractive woman to help her out the boat that well, they and Thornton realized that they had made it a little ways. Well, they kept on going. They made it eventually to the city of Detroit. And we're not sure whether they knew the famous name of Lightfoot before they got there or it was after they made it. But you see there was some Lightfoots all throughout the south. There was a man by the name of Robin Lightfoot. I got a chance to preach at his church in Florence, Alabama. Robin Lightfoot was a slave preacher an organization or a church called the St. Paul AME church. Now that's what it is called but back in the day, it didn't even have much of a name. It was just the black church and Robin Lightfoot was the first pastor and he got up and declared that the day would come when black folks and white folks would worship God together under the roof of that church and when the Confederate soldiers heard Robin Lightfoot say that, they immediately took him out and lynched him.

I got a chance to preach at the 125th anniversary of that church and I sought fulfillment of Reverend Lightfoot's dream. So the name Lightfoot was known in various parts of the country. It must have been a family, maybe they would distantly related, but somehow when the Blackburns made it to Detroit, they made acquaintances with Madison Lightfoot.

Now, deacon Lightfoot and brother George French were members of the second Baptist church. You might wonder how come Baptist churches have such long names. I have a thing where you say I'm a member of the first greater new Zion holiness temple of the divine Christian hearing missionary Baptist church temple No. 12 and everybody laughs. I say, you know why that name is so long? Because we're Baptists, we can't agree on anything. Well you know what, every time the church is split, the name would get longer. Well, the reason the second Baptist church is the second Baptist church is because for the first Baptist church in Detroit did not want to give the black worshippers their due. So the worshippers got together and decided to form the second and it is still in downtown Detroit. It was not the magnificent building it is now but back in the days you had the folks, the porters and the folks who worked in the restaurants and they got together and two members of that church were Madison Lightfoot and George French and they befriended the Blackburns when they got to Detroit and Libby decided -- well, actually her name was Ruthie but decided she didn't want a slave name anymore so she decided not to call herself Lucy. So now Lucy Blackburn went about making a living, went about doing something, I tell you, Thornton was an enterprising young man. He was a barber and he was a laborer and he knew how to do all kinds of things and life looked like it was pretty good. Life looked like they had finally made it. They finally made it over. They had this thing when you wanted to get to freedom, you had to go across a river. It wasn't the Jordan river although at the we talked about the Jordan because we found that in the old testament, if you crossed the Jordan, you would be free. But if you could cross the Ohio, you'd be free. So all of that when Thornton and Libby were trying to get across on that River.

(Singing)

Wade in the water, wade in the water, children.

God is in the water.
 Call, called in red, God is going to trouble the water.
 God is going to trouble the water.
 Wade if the water.
 Wade if the water.
 Wade in the water, children, wade in the water.
 God going to trouble the water.
 God is going o trouble the water.
 Lay those children in the land, God is going to trouble the water.
 The require is dope and cold, God is going to trouble the water.
 Chill my body but not my soul, God is going to trouble the water.
 Yeah, wade in the water.
 Wade in the water.

Well the water got trouble. In 1933. They've been living in Detroit for a couple of years now. And one day, Thornton walked into a store and was recognized, he didn't recognize the man who recognized him. But that man was from Kentucky and represented the family that had owned Thornton. And they went back to Kentucky, got a writ and decided to come back and demand that Thornton be arrested by the sheriff of Wayne County. Which was based in Detroit, we don't want trouble with the neighbors to the south and after all, they're slaves in Detroit and they're slaves in Michigan and we don't want to set a new precedent so they arrested him and threw him in jail. There's Thornton and Ruthie in jail.

Well, the folks at the second Baptist church who all had a, their opinions about the idea of slavery, who all had their opinions that a man should be free, that the idea is that God made all men free, and that all men and all women deserved to be free, they decided they had to go visit sister Ruth at that church and comfort her and so it was Mrs. French, Georgia's wife, and Mrs. Blackburn, Madison's wife, and Mrs. Lightfoot, Madison's wife, who decided they needed to go and have prayer with sister Blackburn.

Now, you may not know what Baptist prayer is like. Now, Baptist we take a long time. And sometimes when those women came in with those hoods up over the heads and they had the heads bowed down and they began to moan, oh, freedom. Oh, freedom. And after about two hours of that intense prayer, that intense moment, those two sisters got up and put their hoods and put their bonnets back on their head and proceeded to walk out of the jail. It was the next morning before the jailer walked in, ready to give Mrs. Blackburn her breakfast. Only to realize that he was not looking at Mrs. Being Blackburn. He was looking at Mrs. French. Because those hoods had allowed Mrs. Blackburn to leave with Mrs. Lightfoot. He did not know what to do. He was flabbergasted. By the time he realized what had happened, Mrs. Blackburn was on her way to Canada to that place called sandwich that we now call Windsor and had about secreted away. But now the problem was what to do about Thornton. Thornton was under heavy guard. Thornton had chains around his wrists and around his ankles.

But Thornton had acquitted him so well as a citizen of Detroit that people had come to like him and love him. Not only, not only African-American folks but white folks. And for whatever reason, some folks resented the idea that a man could be sent back to slavery someone else he had escaped. Some about the politics of the, regardless of why you do it right thing, sometimes it is important we do the right thick. So as they were preparing to bring Thornton out of the jailhouse and to give him over to the authors that come up from Kentucky, a crowd started to form. Some say it was five hundred, some say it was 300, some say it was just 40. But they were mixed race, they were black and white and some of them had axe handles and some of them had clubs and some of them had holes and some of them had pistols and the sheriffs and his den tease didn't know exactly what was going to happen so the deputies ran back in the jail, leaving Thornton and the sheriff outside to deal with this crowd and they demanded that they let Thornton go. And the more they demanded, the more tense the situation became, the sheriff began to cower and realized he was in a situation he was not prepared for and sure enough, someone stepped out of that crowd and gave Thornton a pistol.

In those days approximates pistols only shot one time so you had to have the intention afloat us using that pistol.

He thought about that, putting it to the sheriff's head, instead, he fired in the air. And that created a enough room for them to overpower the sheriff. And the sheriff was beaten and pummeled and left bloody in the street and Thornton was taken and really literally carried to a wagon that was waiting. You can't make up this stuff. This is a wagon that was pulled by a blind horse and driven by an old man named daddy Grace. Now, daddy Grace was not known for high rates of speed or driving, I mean, the horse was blind, right? So somehow a man jumped on the back of the wagon on with a sword and twirling it around and encouraging him to go forward and just when Thornton looked like he was about to hesitate to jump on the wagon, a woman named sleepy Polly who had never done anything that initially remembered but just sitting around sleeping, all of a sudden sleep peep Polly jumped up and bodily threw Thornton up on that wagon and he left with seven black men headed down the road.

Now GrassShitsz Avenue is now one of the major thorough fairs of Detroit, but even then it followed the Detroit river. So as they were speeding down the road, down Grashitz road with a blind horse, with a man twirling a sword, being driven by a old man by the name of daddy Grace, it was crazy. If it wasn't so real. And somehow those seven compatriots got Thornton off the wagon as folks were trailing this blind horse, they felt that they could catch it, they felt they had a good chance of catching you up with this old man and this blind horse but by the time they caught the old man and the blind horse, Thornton had taken to the woods with his seven compatriots and they took ration and wrapped them around the chain so this they couldn't hear the rattling of the chains as they made the way to the boat that was waiting for them. When they got to the boat, they had obviously paid somebody to ache him across the river. But then the men decided well, I'm going to get a little bit more profit and he refused to leave until somebody surrendered his gold watch. And so those men, along with Thornton Blackburn, sailed across the Detroit River. In to sandwich and eventually ended up in Hammersberg.

There are songs that we find in the old spirituals that make us wonder what the songs were really about. I remember hearing a recording that was done by the great Paul Robison that went like this. Deep in the river, across the campground, deep river is over Jordan, oh, deep river, I want to cross over in the campground. Don't you want to go, to that gospel. To that promise land, where there is peace. Oh. Deep river, my home is Jordan, deep river, I want to cross over in to Cannes are campgrounds. And so that deep river that one river across may have been the Detroit river as it crossed into Canada. Now, Canada, remember, was still not necessarily a safe place to go, and so the governor of Kentucky started to write to the governor of Michigan and the governor of Michigan started to write to the Lieutenant Governor of upper Canada demanding that Thornton and his wife who had, after all, started a riot in 1831, they had riot that had happened and as a result of this riot, the first riot, race riot in Detroit, had you people hurt and the sheriff was hurt and somebody one of the compatriots had been shot and was in critical condition and the whole idea was that this was all caused because a man had stolen away in to slavery.

And it went through the Canadian courts and it was probably sir John Coborn who said, two things. That changed the philosophy of Canada. One was that there should be no crime short of murder for which the sentence should be a lifetime of slavery. And two he said you can steel a hog, you can steal a horse, but a man could not steal himself. And so the Canadian government dug in its heels against the pressure of the United States government and determined that they would not extradite someone who was escaping from the institute of slavery, the institution of slavery, short of being extradited for murder.

All of a sudden Canada was a safe place to come. And all of a sudden those routes that we talk about in that PowerPoint became established routes and the folks who worked along the underground railroad started to establish those stations and those strategies for getting folks in to Canada and Canadian communities started to spring up. Folks like Joe on and I saw a man named Tuly started to work to get fugitives from the south

into the north. One man named Henry Box Brown decided to mail himself to freedom and put himself in a big box, had somebody pay it shop, paid postage and found himself arriving, I believe, in Philadelphia. There are all kinds of genius ways to get to that place that in that song we call campground Canada, the promise land. I want to cross over in to campground.

One final note. I've been to Kentucky and I've been to Tennessee. And I'm about four hours from Toronto. Toronto is where the Blackburns decided to settle. When they finally got to Toronto, I told you Thornton was a enterprising young man, had a of had he a carriage built because he saw that folks just weren't able to get around like they should. And he founded what was the first taxi cab company in Toronto. And when they asked him what color he wanted it to be, he said, it needed to be something catchy so folks could see it. So he painted it yellow and red. And you know if you go to Toronto this day and you hail a taxi, the taxies are yellow and red. And they may not know why, it is because of Thornton. And now Lucy Blackburn. Thank you.

AT >> Thank you, Reverend Jones for that story. You know, it's a great Kentucky story, and we don't tell it enough here in Kentucky.

So I'm so thankful for you sharing that in Detroit, and that's one of the questions I wanted for this part, we're just going to take some time to talk to you and how you developed this story and I'm really interested in knowing how Detroit sees itself. Does it recognize itself as a major underground railroad exit? It's one of the major ones on the Great Lakes.

RJ >> You know, it is amazing having been born an raised in Detroit I had not the slightest awareness of the Blackburn story until I went to Canada to Nova Scotia for a festival in Lunenburg and when I was performing, and I often perform spirituals and blues and things like that, a woman came up to me and said I wrote a book and I want to give it to you. And that woman's name is Carlin Caroline Frost and the name of the book is I've got a home in Glory land. And she handed me this amazing butyl hard cover book and I started to read -- I'm going to read the first fuse pages, I'm going to read a quarter of it, I'm going to get halfway through it. And by the time I finished this book, I recognized as a life long Detrouiter, I knew nothing about the Blackburns, even though many of the streets, Grashit Avenue, Rivard, Woodward avenue, all of those streets are streets that I grew up in, with, and did not realize that this story, which took place, basically on the lower east side of Detroit, was my story and then you discover, it is not only my story but it is also Toronto's story and it is also Louisville's story. So yeah, it is amazing once you start to dig into this story about these amazing people you start to realize how ingenious these folks were and how dedicated they were to fighting this battle for freedom.

AT >> And wonderful book. Some of our viewers are asking about a reading list. I would highly recommend Caroline Smart's book. Good friend, Caroline is, of mine, and stay with me while she was researching the Thornton story, the Blackburn story, that ends up in tor rant toe, and there's an archeological dig in Toronto trying to uncomp the Blackburn's business and neighborhood. So wonderful international story.

So how does Detroit, do you do many performance there is in Detroit action where they understand the importance of the black community there in Detroit? And helping people to get to freedom across to Canada?

RJ >> Certainly not enough. I mean, we have a wonderful must museum called the Charles Wright museum which I remember knowing Dr. Wright and he was an amazing man around he collected these artifacts and it was basically housed in a small building when and then they got a major grant and it became a beautiful facility but I really wonder if the energy that was in that little building transferred to that museum. There was something about this Underground railroad, A, the fact that it was a secret, is it not lend itself necessarily to open study.

Also I think people in Detroit and outside of Detroit have this mythology about what slavery was and what the underground railroad represented, so when we see movies, with he see frequently folks running from station to station, cowering, looking for safe haven and you have folks that hide them. So of course that the

that was an element of it. But when you see the idea that a young couple could get forged papers and ride a boat that could take them to a freedom, that a man would mail himself to freedom, that someone would, you would have a group of Quakers who would intentionally buy slaves with the idea of letting them go once they got them in to a northern state, in a safe place, so all of these are amazing examples of a story that which don't well enough. We don't know it well enough to appreciate it fully and even the second Baptist church that is a room that has been reconstructed or preserved that talk about how they would hide fugitives but it is not a thing that is well-known enough. I would bet that every student, black, white, or otherwise, would appreciate the ingenuity and the energy and the dedication that our ancestors showed to create an act of civil disobedience because God's law superceded man's law.

AT >> Exactly and the fact that if you were try to aid a slave, you could lose your property, you could be jailed, just for providing assistance. So not as simple as we make it sound sometimes.

RJ >> Not at all.

AT >> So for the viewing audience, how did you develop your songs? You do this performance, I know, but can you share with our audience how you go about deciding which songs are associated with the underground railroad?

RJ >> Yeah, well, Alicestyne, one of the things, again, being secretive, you have to sort of become fascinated, I guess with the idea of the spiritual, the idea that something says one thing but really means another. So when you run across a song that does not really make they logical sense like oh, Mary don't you wait until than not to moan, farrows Army got drowned in the Red Sea makes no sense.

New Testament, Old Testament, welded together. Then you start to ask, okay, well if it doesn't make they logic sense, could it make historic sense. And then you realize, you're -- or the water being troubled comes from the New Testament, God is going to trouble the water. Well, when the trouble -- when the water is troubled in the New Testament, the layman is healed from the thing that's afflicting them. So as you start to realize that these spirituals were not just half arrest arrested because of someone's theological ignorance but actually carried a message, then you start to, you know, hear those spirituals with a new ear.

AT >> Right. Going up, wading in the water was a baptismal song.

RJ >> Exactly.

AT >> When I was little, that's what people sang when you were being baptized and I know I had to be an atilt before I realized what the song was.

RJ >> Exactly. Folks took these songs and repurposed them and, you know, so that was one thing. Another aspect and the reason I sort of started off with that story about Mike Seeger who was really an amazing and fascinating man, is the idea that music has also changed. As we listen to a song, as we listen to a song on the guitar, a fret, which is that piece of wire, makes the note one thing or the other. But a fretless instrument like the banjo before it became the banjo we know or the fit dell has a ambiguity to it and so when we start to understand that this music was all mixed up, just like the people and the culture was all mixed up, it sort of gives you insight a that the first song I sang was really a white be a holistic hymn, from Africa, which probably could not probably be song by a black person because it is just too overtly insulting to the people around them. But a white person could take on the pain of a person who was having to deal with the degradations of slavery and that song is preserved by an old white Caroline -- I'm sorry, old white Kentucky singer by the name of Addie Graham. So Ms. Addie heard this music coming out of reconstruction, remembered these songs, sang them, folk singers like Mike Seeger picked up on them and certain instrumentation and then so all of this amazing catalog of music is there for us in the 21st Century but largely he ignore it because we want to reinvent the wheel when the wheel is perfectly fine. And we go back and start using it.

AT >> So musical is powerful. We've got someone who says we need to turn your mic up just a little bit on Zoom because they, of it was great for the music but not good for your voice.

RJ >> Okay. I think that should be a little bit better.

AT>> Wonderful --

RJ >> Always having to compromise, right?

AT >> Hey, modern technology. So this idea of the abolitionist movement I think it is very appropriate that you are tell the story because the abolitionist movement was primarily a religious movement, I think also people forget that aspect of it that the church on many levels sanctioned the idea of slavery and that it took a group of people to step outside the church and say that no, God, this is not what God intended and my religious belief says that men are not slaves.

RJ >> Right.

AT >> So how, you talk about the Baptist church in Detroit and I heard you mention the AME church which in kennel ken would have been illegal, AME churches below the Mason Dixon line, mainly because they preached a antislavery message. And there's another Kentucky in Lewis Hayden who helped build the church there in Detroit. So this idea of African Americans using religion as their clear message about how they should live their life, do you see that now among young people? Are we sharing how African Americans use religion as my grandmother would say to get over how we got over using that religion?

RJ >> Unfortunately we don't. I mean, I'm an ordained minister. I'm a pastor of a church in Detroit. And often what you see is this sort of abandonment of a lot of the institutions that helped to quote-unquote bring us over because they're viewed as irrelevant, you know, when the church stops being radical, when it stops being purposeful in its mission, it starts to lose its savor, you know, what good is salt if it loses its savor, right? And so when you end up with this ideal that it is just about, you know, coming together and worshipping and worshipping, of course, is the greatest part, but the idea is faith without works is dead, says the book of James, you have this, on the part of many young people, I certainly can't say all, on the part of many young people, the idea is that we've got to march and we've got to protest but not necessarily under the banner of religion or under the banner of our spirit as an extension of our spirituality. Where I think our ancestors hit it on the head is that they understood that songs and sermons and script tour go to the heart, if you can change the heart, the heart will change the head, right?

AT >> Right.

RJ >> And soar with talking earlier this month about someone like John Lewis and the strategy of people who protested walking across the bridge in Selma where they told people, wear your Sunday best and don't resist. And when the cameras are rolling and you see people being brutalized and beaten by the police, they will see folks in their Sunday best who are obviously not rabble-rousers, obviously are not radical in the sense of being an activities and America will see this and they will address this is not the America I know and we have to do something about the situation. Now, that was strategic. The idea had you groups like the deacons for defense who were armed, who protected the marchers before they got to that site. And protected them after they left that site bud idea was that when we see those who are to go back to the ideals, the religious ideals that hopefully most of us share. I think one of the things we see now is that because we don't embrace a lot of those strategies of how you dress, how you behave, the songs you sing, the attitudes that you exhibit, it allows people to co-opt the protest and pretend that it is something else, to say that, you know, these folks are tearing up our city, they're throwing bricks, that kind of thing. So one of the things that we see that our church heritage gives us, is that idea of how to be meek but, at the same time, be strong.

I would regarding that today trying to get a young person to agree to be beaten by police is probably not where they say they'd see themes these days. I think it would be extremely, I don't know of any young person who would be willing to do what John Lewis did. I shouldn't generalize maybe like that but I think with our modern society and what we see happening today with yuck protesters, considering all of what is happening with police killings and all of that, the markings, for the most have been peaceful. And music plays a big part in it. I'm noticing how many of these songs are being revived.

AT >> Absolutely. I've got a question from one of our viewers who wants to know what spiritual heritage about slaves bring with them from Africa?

RJ >> That is a good question. And it's hard to really go and try to dig at you guess West African religious traditions and make a comparison between that and Christianity. One of the things I do know, and, again, I'm a minister, so I believe in the power of the holy Spirit. So I believe that when the great enlightenment happened, the great awakening happened and those preachers, whether they were preaching freedom or whether they had disguised the gospel into a harm to encourage slavery, regardless, they were playing with fire and so what happened is I believe the enslaved person saw two things in western religion that they could identify with. One was the children of Israel slaves in Egypt and God delivered them through leaders and through the crowing of a body of water. When you crossed the Red Sea or when you crossed in to Jordan in to Canan, you were free and you were a child of the promise. I think they identified with that even more strongly than some more sophisticated theological concept about heaven or redemption or fairness because they didn't see fairness around them. Fredrick Douglas made a distinction between the religion that was preached on Sunday and the way it was practiced on Monday.

AT >> Exactly.

RJ >> I'm not sure that they necessarily embraced the religion that they were being given but I think that they got it on a level that was deeper than intellectual. And the second thing is Christ. Jesus being the lam, sacrifice, the idea that died on the cross for every one of us and Jesus was always about two things encouraging the one who was down trodden or bringing the one who thought he or she was hot stuff down a peg. And so that created this kind of liberation theology, even before it was called liberation theology, so I think the preacher who preached was not, the black preacher was not preaching the same message as the white people -- as the white preacher even though he was using the same scripture.

AT >> And one of the ways for our viewers if you read the Turner, the Nat Turner story, Nat Turner was the Baptist preacher in South Hampton, Virginia, and he talks about how he was permitted to preach on plantations because the slave owner wanted him to preach about slave obey your masters. And so he would definitely preach that message but he would preach other messages too that only the slaves understood. And the slave hour that they were given at South Hampton became the organizing theory for the revolt because he was able to preach to them in way that is Africans understood, it's a double that double language you're talking about. You hear one thing but I really mean something else.

RJ >> Exactly.

AT >> So another song that people have sort of recently acknowledged as one of the slaves, John Newton as amazing grace which is, of course, one of the songs that you hear constantly came about because he was a slave, he was a captain of a slave ship and he actually heard the slaves in the pit of the ship, she were not singing songs, they were basically moaning in a particular way. And it is the melody of amazing grace that we put English words to. That is now one of America's most possible spiritual songs. So yes, African Americans, Africans, did have their own form of communication music was a large, large part of it. And it became the common language within the slave quarters. So still, still today, we are continuing that tradition within African-American music.

RJ >> Absolutely. And you know, I was fascinated by the PowerPoint that came on before, you know, I got started to see how many of those station masters and conductors were white American. I mean, we had this Quaker tradition that, you know, fought vehemently against the idea of enslavement and fought to get folks to freedom. And you have John Brown and there's a man that I just experience something of his something of his situation, in northern Michigan, I think it was in Muskegon, and this man had transported so many slaves to freedom that any branded the letter A in his hand and he carried that for the rest of his life. But for him it was a religion outside calling to help these folks to get to freedom.

Now, one of the things too that I'm fascinated by is something that you said, most people you know, just went about their lives and it was, you know, it was a reality of the time and really didn't have that fire lit and I would say that's true of most white Americans and most African Americans but it was like that. Little hard core that was willing to risk the law, list I can imprisonment, list rumination, risk death, risk all of that to bring about God's beloved kingdom.

AT >> Well, and of you're absolutely right. 20% of all Americans were antislavery. Only 20%. And out of that, 10% believed in colonization. Which meant we don't believe in slavery, we need to ship them to another country. This is how we ended up with Sierra Leone, and Liberia and some of the other countries in west Africa and then there were 5% who said they were emancipations meaning over time, when conditions are right, you can have your freedom. So out of that, three to five% were actually the hard core abolitionists who actually said no, we've got to end slavery right now, that would have been John who himself was a minister, you know, sometimes we forget that it was Reverend John Brown, and you had many Quakers, Methodists, Presbyterians, the secrecy method of the underground railroad came out of the Quaker tradition because we forget Quakers were not welcomed in England and Europe so they came to America seeking freedom. So in order to even gain entry in to their religious meetings you had to have a code word. So this idea of using coded language is definitely a Quaker tradition that was employed and that Marietta escape route, there were quite a few Quakers that were involved in helping their way to Canada. Quakers and shakers, I should say.

RJ >> I got ask you, Alicestyne, I saw among those station masters, somebody who named Turley. Who was that?

AT >> That's my great-grandfather, Moses Turley, who was a conductor, he gained his freedom, he escaped from slavery in Virginia while he was working as clearing forests we think either for a mining operation or for a railroad operation and he got in to a fight with the overseer and because the overseer was beating his sister. And so he thought he had killed the overseer and he ran. He ran for his freedom and ended up in eastern Kentucky where he met an abolitionist by the name of James Turley. So this is how we ended up with the Turley name because that abolitionist helped him stay in Kentucky and be a conductor here in eastern Kentucky. So he no doubt was a friend. You saw the other name Arnold Braxton. I think he and Arnold Braxton were friends, great, great story that we don't know enough about and we're still researching. We found him as a United States color troop, he enlisted in Camp Nelson at the beginning of the Civil War so we're still waiting to pull his records to see if we can find out what his real name was because we know his name wasn't Moses Turley but we don't know his real-time. And so we're on that path. So I'm thinking -- we know about him because of family traditions because we passed that story along orally but it wasn't until I became a college student that I was I believe a to prove it in writing which is America recognizes as the written tradition as opposed to the oral tradition so I'm sure there are a lots of other folks like me who have these wonderful stories in their background but they just don't know them.

RJ >> That is absolutely amazing, and so, again, it goes back to what we started talking about at the beginning of our little session is that these are stories that if we, as we uncover them, they give us a sense not only of pride but a sense of appreciation for this amazingly complex time that, you know, where we were in slavery and coming out of slavery and reconstruction and all of that you know, all of those gooey and messy stories which help us to deal with the messy times we're in now.

AT >> Correct. Correct.

RJ >> So that's one of the reasons. I just want to make it perfectly clear, young people, I'm not advocating that folks get beaten out on the street. What I'm saying was or is that that was a strategy that allowed America to see itself.

AT >> Exactly.

RJ >> And we're going to have to use strategy again in order to breakthrough that sort of complacency that most people have, even today. Most people just want to watch the football game, I don't want to see anybody kneeling, I don't want to hear about police brutality, I just want to see, you know, catch the ball and run. So we need appreciation for how those folks dealt strategically with those situations in a very dangerous and very surreal time to dream with this somewhat equally surreal and dangerous time.

AT >> We have so many questions, so I'm going to start taking questions from our audience and would I figure out the ones we can answer. It says all black slave plantain owners in South Carolina and Louisiana, how many black slave owners functioned if the Appalachian region, that was their impact on the development of American culture?

Well Appalachia really was not known for plantations. Appalachian slavery was more industrial so they had a system called lease labor where you could own a great many slaves but they weren't necessarily housed with you. They were either leased to a coal company, salt company, eye on Orr company, people who needed large numbers of slaves and these are industries from the eastern seaboard or the north, people who whether are building the lay Ray roared who need labor. So they would actually enter into a contract with the slave owner for X number of slaves that they would be paid to are that slave's labor. So we in terminology call those iron plantations because the slaves are not in the field. They're actually working, laying track, mining, doing those sorts of things. And so of all of the places in the nation, Appalachia probably had the lowest number but we can't give you an exact number because a lot of those slaves were leased out. They were not physically counted as being part of the area.

Louisiana and South Carolina, of course, Louisiana is known for its sugar cane. Most of, should we name names, Domino sugar, one of the major sugar producers in Louisiana, slave labor, a lot of it out of the Caribbean, so to be sold to a sugar cane field or to be sold to a cotton field in Mississippi or Louisiana was certain, as I said before, seven years, because you're literally worked to death in those fields.

Another question about how many slaves escaped Canada. That number is in question. Most historians say anywhere from 200 to 300,000. Escaped slaves made it to Canada. But I should also say that we focus on Canada but no one has counted the number of slaves that escaped to Mexico or the number of slaves who escaped to Cuba or the Caribbean, Santa Domingo and places like that because if you were enslaved in Florida it makes much more sense for you to go into the ocean than it would be for you to try to fight your way through slave territory to Canada. So the Appalachian trail pretty much ended in Atlanta. So if you were in northern Georgia or northern Alabama, chances you are you could make it to freedom in Canada just by following the trail. But if you're in Florida or any of those lower southern flag hold holding states, catching a boat to Cuba is better or even to Mexico, if you sailed across the ocean to Mexico. So right now that story is being uncovered. So exact numbers of how many people used the underground railroad, I don't know if we'll ever have an exact number.

RJ >> That interesting also because you think about music, if you follow music into the Bahamas, you start to hear this blues influenced music as if, or spiritual influenced music as if the folks when they left, they took their music with them and helped to influence the music that we find in the islands and so that's one of the

reasons that you find people from supposedly different cultures who share songs. It has a different inflection or a different beat or rhythm but it's like all part of the same diaspora.

AT >> It is all part of the same diaspora. And a question about Native Americans and slave plantations. First of all, there are many, many different tribes between Canada and the United States. And the Native peoples, the Winodots, Shawnee, Iroquois, they were all part of conducting African Americans from slavery to freedom. There are also Indian tribes, Cherokee being one of the major ones, that were slave holders and did support the concept of enslaved Africans. So what is now considered central Appalachia was predominantly Cherokee country even though my ancestry, Choctaw is northern Alabama, my grandmother was a Choctaw. So have you rates mixing on the frontier, just like you would anywhere else. So you have many natives who were married to enslaved Africans or freed blacks who knew the country well and many of those people did help in establishing routes of freedom that took people from the United States in to Canada, Toronto, Ontario, Saint Kathryn which of course was a big Harriet Tubman was her haven in Canada for escaping slaves.

So we have a question about quilts. I heard that quilts were used for navigation north also. Do you have the stories about how quilts were used in the underground railroad? Well of course the book that was written that everyone uses is Doborg's hidden in plain view but I would encourage you, quilt codes, I've had a chance to travel to Africa. I went to Ghana. And many of the quilt codes that I see that people are using, they are part of the culture. If are you anywhere in Ghana, you will see the bow tie, you will see many of the symbols. So since a lot of these quilt codes came out of South Carolina which was very much import location Charleston, import location for slaves from Africa, there are many books that talk about this, are it, is I have to say, it is a controversial topic. It is something I'm researching more right now. But I can honestly say I have seen, having gone to Africa and come back to the United States, I have seen these same symbols, many of them are religious symbols that are know part of what we doll the underground railroad myth and I have to find out, if someone is viewing, if you can tell me how many slaves in South Carolina came from west Ghana, or the coast of Ghana, I could pretty much tell you those codes not only represent symbols of information but also spiritual strengthening. So many times just seeing the symbols would let you know that someone from your tribe or your community was in that community with you and sometimes just having that information was more than enough.

RJ >> It is amazing, Alicestyne, when you start to become fascinated by any aspect of African-American culture how it relates to other aspect of African-American culture like, you know, when I was playing this banjo, this banjo is basically a replica of a banjo you find in painting by William Sidney melt called the banjo player and it is one of those beautiful, it is not caricature, it is like a really well painted European type of picture. But then when you start to get in to what a banjo is, a banjo comes over as a homemade instrument which is basically anything you can stretch a skin across and strings plead out of gut and the idea that when you play it you play it like a drum.

AT >> Right.

RJ >> So you know, and then that takes you back to an instrument called the iconing which was participates on the a slave ship were the slaves were forced to dance so the muscles wouldn't atrophy and that takes you back to an instrument called the Angola, I'm sorry, In -- I'm sorry, I'm waiting for one right now. But it takes you back to an instrument like mandolin.

AT >> Right.

RJ >> So it is played by the folks in Ghana and in Mali who are the Griots who keep a lot of the history in Gone, that's it. It is played by the folks who played this so you've got all of this mixing and matching and did somebody see something and borrow something and try to make something out of you according to what they saw and it's like it is amazing that you can start with quilts, there's an old painting called the old plantation where they've got a guy playing a banjo, they've got another guy dancing with a stick and they've

got folks who look like they're getting married and it is like all of this information in that painting, each element of that painting could give you a way to dive in to some different aspect of African-American history and culture.

AT >> Right. And unfortunately we have just not done a very good job, it hasn't been taught in our schools, we don't know I mean have you to wait to graduate school practically to be able to independently investigate these connections and thence once you weave it together, it tells a wonderful story of culture that people were hanging on to their culture in any way that that they could. If you go to New York, African-American ironworkers, you can see how any carved African symbols in to this greeting that became part of homes and part of fences and so the culture is all around you. But if you don't know what you're looking for which is, again, the beauty of the underground railroad. If you don't know what symbols to look for, they mean nothing to you. They're just decorative art. And so having that ability to communicate without using words has become very much a part of African-American culture. How do you say something without saying it, you know? That's an art form in and of itself.

And so a question about wading in the water, the question is, do the colors red and white specific meaning that you know of?

RJ >> Not that I know of. Other than the alliteration it gives you to come up with the following lines, look over yonder dressed in white, it is the Israel lite part is like the children of Israel who are escaping from slavery. Look other yonder dressed in red, it must be the children that Moses led, you know.

AT >> Parting of the Red Sea, maybe?

RJ >> Could be. Could be. I mean, who knows, I've heard it even the old children song she'll be coming around the mountain is one of those songs that, A, derived from a black spiritual of Jesus he'll be coming on the chariot.

AT >> Right.

RJ >> And the coming around the mountain among coal miners started to understand that it was about unionizing, you know? It was like and even the key you sang it in.

AT >> Right.

RJ >> Was supposedly, if you sang it in G, it was like go because it's trouble. And if you sang it in C, it was like come, it's safe to have a meeting. So we start this like really understand how our ancestors use music in a way that just goes right over our heads. Both black and white. Preserving it, saving it, teaching it from mouth to ear, it is a lot different than popping in a CD and having –

AT >> Right. Because music has to come from the person and I understand with Harriet Tubman, one of the major ways she communicated with the folks who were getting on her train to freedom was through music. And we have to keep in mind that and on Mississippi or southern plantations -- the plantation owners love to hear African-American singing and I love it when I watch these old movies where you see the scene is focused on the plantation owners in the house but you hear this black music in the background. There's always this beautiful mousse of music in the backgrounds of African-Americans singing and when they're really doing that, they're communicating with each other, as you say, whether it is the tone they sing it, whether it is past, whether it is slow, whether it is a woman, whether it is a man. All of those things have meaning and that's the part that we have somehow not been able to hang on to, those little nuances, that really allow you to communicate words in a way that everyone understand needs to.

RJ >> I love Eileen Southern's book that talks about the history of an American music and she reprints a letter from a man named James Hungerford who was the nephew of a white plantation owner so he's living in Baltimore, he goes to this plantation to escape some kind of Malaria outbreak or whatever and he experiences slaves singing for the first time in his life because, you know, he's in Baltimore. So he experiences these folks and they're crossing the water, and they're singing a song that is so sad and depressing that the women on the boats start to cry. And he says, couldn't we have something more lively? And the guy who is, you know, rowing, said, I'm sorry, all of them boat songs are like that, they are all sad like that because they are giving the rhythm of the row. But then one of the young woman says to her uncle, she says I rather like those songs, they give us things luxury of row. And I thought wow. It allows you to experience somebody else's pain without having to experience it.

AT >> Exactly. It get into your soul. So therefore soul music. I was asked to hold the book up again. It is cold home in glory land by Caroline Smart Frosts. You can find it most bookstores, Amazon. It is readily available to you. Believe it or not, we are coming, we are running out of time, Reverend Jones, thank you so much for such a beautiful presentation. I hope our listeners and viewers had a chance to really appreciate this story and can do so am research on their own that can share in their area. The more the better. I encourage our listeners to join us in November, November 7th, we will be talking about race mixing in Appalachia, a group of folks call them the Melungeons. So we'll be joined by those who have written on the subject and who can hopefully shed some light on the subject. We hope you enjoy the remainder of the festival. And if you want to contact you, Reverend Jones, what's the best way? If people want to book you or hear more from you?

RJ >> Yeah. If they want to book me, I have an agency, great guy, his name is David Tamulevich, that's T, T-A-M-U-L-E-V-I-C-H. Or you can just hit my website which is RevRobertJones.com a little bit easier to maybe on sob then the Tamulevich and it will send to you a link. Before we leave, I want to thank you for asking me to be a part of this. What a privilege it has been and I'm just so excited, I've learned so much in part of hour or so that we've been together and I'm hoping that people will continue to dig more and appreciate just the power of the stories and the music that come out of this experience.

AT >> Power of a story. You can't beat it.