



INTERNATIONAL  
STORYTELLING CENTER

## **Jim Crow Appalachia: Slavery by Another Name Transcript**

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

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Good afternoon, and welcome to our first Freedom Stories of the new year. I'm Alicestyne Turley, director of the International Storytelling Center's Freedom Stories Project. And today's discussion will be exploring the strange career of Jim Crow, a very timely topic for today's events. And as we talk, hopefully you will see many of the similarities or can relate to many of the stories that you see appearing in today's news as really not new news at all. So, the Freedom Stories Project, for those of you who have been following us, you realize it's a project sponsored by the International Storytelling Center, and the initiative is designed to eliminate the underappreciated and overlooked histories of African Americans in central Appalachia. The idea is to guide the public through a deeper appreciation of the role of African Americans in the creation of American culture, especially American culture we experience today. It was originally conceived to be a focus on central Appalachia. However, the tool kit, and the electronic media we developed is available and accessible to the entire country. We highlight the diversity of our Appalachian communities, the complexities of Appalachian history, and the role the region has played, all of which has been subject to misinformation and stereotypes. This project has been made available to you through funding through the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today's discussions are recorded as are all of our Freedom Stories, and they're available and will remain available on Youtube, the International Storytelling Center's Facebook page, and the International Storytelling Center website. I would encourage viewers, if you're viewing, listening, and if you have questions for our storyteller or panelists, please just text us on Facebook and we'll try our best to answer as many of your questions as possible and as time permits. So, our next Freedom Stories will be February 13th. We'll be watching the International Storytelling Center's website for the most updated information for what that will be like. We will start our discussion with a story. So, we're very happy to have with us one of America's premier storytellers, Mitch Capel. Mitch Capel's journey as a professional storyteller, motivation speaker, poet, playwright, and comedian began professionally in 1985, and he's now considered the national interpreter of the poet laureate of Paul Dunbar. Performing under the stage name of Granddaddy Junebug, a character he created for children, he calls his style of storytelling stoetry, because the majority of his stories are in rhyme. He has traveled nationally and internationally performing his one man shows from historical to inspirational storytelling at schools, libraries, festivals, and thousands of other venues. He has been featured at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the National Association of Black Storytelling Festival, the Kennedy Center, the National Storytelling Festival, and of course for the first inauguration of Barack Obama. He did his first comedy standup at Showtime at the Apollo, hosted by Steve Harvey. We're very fortunate to be joined today by Mitch Capel. Thank you.

>> MITCH CAPEL: Thank you very much, Dr. Turley for that very warm introduction. Pardon me. And who better to enlighten us about the times of Jim Crow other than the poets who actually lived during that time. I'll start off with Paul Dunbar, where he simply said we wear the mask that dies our eyes. This debt we pay to human guile with torn and bleeding hearts, we smile, and mouth with myriad subtleties. Why should the world be overwise in counting all our tears and sighs? Nay. Let them only see us while we wear the mask. (Chuckling) We smile. But oh, great God, our cries to thee from tortured souls arise. We sing lift every voice

and sing, but oh the clay is vile beneath our feet and long mired. But let the world dream otherwise. We wear the mask. (Chuckling).

His first book, he published a poem called, "Going Back." Where he said he stood beside the station rail, a Negro aged and bent and frail. His palsied hands like the Aspen shook. A mute appeal was in his look. His every move was pained and slow. His matted hair white as snow. He noticed our questioning looks and said with the shake, I know you're wondering, and where you may an old man like me is going today. (Coughing) I lived in this town for 30 years, known a life of joy and tears. Now I'm going back again. To the bluegrass meadows and the field of corn in the state where I was born. The same old state I has to tell, and knows, as well.

(Coughing) When first the flock was calm, I felt too free to stay at home. Freedom was a gift divine and it seemed the whole wide world was mine. Then I was frightened, my hair was black, and this troublesome crick wasn't in my back. My soul was always full of song because my heart was light and my limbs were strong. And I wasn't afraid to show my face to the who owned the place. (coughing) But I caught the fever that ruled the day and found it north and made my way. They said that things were better north, that a man was held to his honest worth. Well, that may be so, but I have some doubt. And 30 years ain't knocked it out. Oh, there's lots of things in the north to admire. All my life I have been used to seeing and thought belonged to a human being. And the one thing I did surely miss was that real old Southern heartiness. Well, year after year, I worried along, while deep in my heart the yearning strong, grew stronger and fierce, and those scenes of my native shore. But money was scarce. Time went on. Now, years have gone on and I turn my weary steps to Rome, back to my old Kentucky home. Back to the old Kentucky sites, back to the scenes of my youth delight. Back where my soul was filled with glee. Back where I first found liberty.

Now as I think the old times or the joy they hold in store. My heart swells out with honest pride. Bless the land that I shall see once more the land so dear to me. Don't mind an old man's tears, but sing its joy, he's going back today.

I'm on my way to Canonland, I'm on my way to Cano nland. And then we have the Reverend Walter Brooks who once said September 15, 1900, wrote a poem called the Jim Crow Car, where he says this too is done to crush me, but not can keep us back. My place for section smoker front and back. While others ride in coaches filled with light, and this our Southern Christians insist is just and right. There yellow men from China and red men from the plain are seated with the white man, but I could not remain. However clean my person, my linen, and my life, they snarl. Your car ahead, Jim, go there and take your wife. Shafts of scorn, here huddled like the tamed cattle from early nights of mourn. The golden rules rejected, who cares for such a thing. They whose prejudice or race inflict this bitter sting, this insult almost kills me. God help me bear the wrong. Well, mine is the story of the weak who falls before the strong. Who fall to rise and in triumph when God his sword showed gird and the proudest evildoer shall tremble at his word.

Fast forward to 1947. Great poet Langston Hughes talked about it in Freedom Train. I read in the papers about the Freedom Train. I heard on the radio about the Freedom Train. I've seen folks talking about the freedom. Lord, I've been waiting for the freedom train. Washington, Richmond, Durham, Chattanooga, across Georgia. Way down in Dixie, the only coaches I see are Jim Crow. I hope there are no back door entrance on the freedom train, no sign for coloreds on the freedom train, no white folks only on the freedom train. I'm going to check up on this freedom train. Who is the engineer on the freedom train? Can a coal black man drive a freedom train? Or am I still a porter on the freedom train? Is there a ballot box on the freedom train? When it stops in Mississippi will it be made plain everybody got a right to board the freedom train. I'm going to check up on this freedom train. The Birmingham station is marked colored and white. The white folks go left and the colored go right. They even got a segregated lane. Is that the way to get aboard the freedom train? I'm going to check up on this freedom train. If my children ask me daddy, please explain, why a Jim Crow station for the freedom train, what should I tell my children? You tell me because

freedom ain't freedom when a man ain't free. My brother Jimmy died and it wasn't no show. Is this here freedom on the freedom train really freedom or a show again? Now let the freedom train come zooming down the track,s gleaming in the sunlight for white and black, not stopping at no stations marked colored or white. Just stopping in the fields in the broad daylight, stopping in the country and the wide open air where there never was a Jim Crow sign nowhere. And no lily white committees and politicians to note or poll tax through which colored can't vote, and there won't be no kind of colored trains, the freedom train will be yours and mine. And then maybe from their grays, black men and white will say we want it so. They'll say ain't it fine. At home they got a freedom train, a freedom train that's yours and mine.

Fast forward to 1964. A student by the name of Florence Seymour, Gulfport, published in the Freedom School Poetry for SNIC. Why do they hate us? What has the Negro done? It's enough to make you wonder, it's enough to make you cry that every race hates the Negro. Good lord, I wonder why. You can travel and travel and you can travel this country through. You'll find every race hates the Negro no matter what they do. You can scrub and mop the kitchens from morning to night, but every race hates the Negro and there's no making right. You can make their meals, but what has the Negro done. They say monkeys are ancestors, but we have never killed a president. Not only in the south, but clear to the White House, though we are Jim Crow on the trains and in the restaurants when we want a meal. But they never Jim Crowed the Negro when he was on the battlefield. They won't allow us to have our business nowhere in the heart of town, and if we own too fine a home, they will come and burn it down. We have to live in rat dens and huts on the edge of town. It doesn't matter where we live, they mean to keep us down. They pay us the lowest salaries and work us almost for fun. Now tell me why they hate us lord. What has the Negro done? Raymond Garfield Dandridge, born in 1882 and transitioned in 1930. Wrote a piece called Brother Mine. Where he simply said prejudice with venom smoked in every word and snuffed was the light of knowledge from your view. Unbefriended martyr's sole object of attack, has your fair brother fairly met with you brother mire? On defenseless womanhood he preyed and then freely chatted blood one half his own, just punishment has only been delayed. It is written ye shall reap as ye has sewn, brother mine. Courts of law, barring facts, basing guilt on hue condemn you before the evidence is even heard, brother mine. Your constant prayer that you might prove your worth for equal rights of struggle live and die. So long unheard, unheeded here on earth found audience in one beyond the sky. Brother mine. Vengeance is mine. I will repay so sayeth the lord. Justly assured day and night to destiny. To righteous reward, and to the bondman, he promised liberty. Brother mine. And then we had Sterling Brown, who was born in 1903 and made transition in 1989. He talked about strong men. They dragged you from homeland. They change you in cuffles. They huddled you in filthy hatches. They sold you to give a few gentlemen ease. They broke you in like oxen. They scourged you. They branded you. They made your women breeders. They swelled your numbers with bastards. They taught you the religion they disgrace. You keep sing keep inching along like an inch worm. You sing by and buy I'm going to lay down this heavy load. You sing walk together children don't you get weary, strong men keep coming on, the strong men get stronger. They point with pride to the roads you built for them. They ride in comfort over the rails you laid for them. They put hammers in your hands and said drive so much before sundown. You sang ain't no hammer, huh, in this land, hah, strike like mine, hah. Strike like mine. They couped you in their kitchens. They pinned you in their factories. They gave you the jobs that they were too good for. They tried to guarantee happiness to themselves by shunting dirt and misery to you. You sang me and my baby going to shine, shine. Me and my baby going to shine. Strong men keep coming on. The strong men get stronger. They bought off some of your leaders. You stumbled as blind men will. They coaxed you unwantedly soft voiced. You followed away. Then laughed as usual. They heard the laugh and wondered, uncomfortable, unadmitting a deeper terror, the strong men keep a coming on, the strong men getting stronger. What from the slums where they have hemmed you, what from the tiny huts they could not keep from you? What reaches them making them ill at ease, fearful. Today they shout prohibitions at you. Thou shall not this, thou shall not that, reserved for whites only. You laugh. One thing they can't prohibit. The strong men keep coming on. The strong men keep getting stronger, the strong men, stronger.

Fast forward, November 4th, 2008 when Barack Hussein Obama was elected president of these United States. The poet in me came out. And I wrote a piece called the election slide, as opposed to the electric slide. And it went like this. The ancestors are dancing with the living. Even those whose decision it was to drown in the Atlantic or ecstatically sliding electrically on the ocean floor to an African drum beat, while Negro spirituals sing back, up on drums, up on piano. Miles is on horn. Chanting hypnotically as Geranimo. And uncle Ben. And even miss I ain't your mammy are smiling. The hoses and the whips have a new dip in their hip and a new glide in their stride as they slide and move with the audacity of a group realized while singing yes we can and yes we did with a new day dawned over pyramids with the prophesy fulfilled we are the ones we have been waiting for. Fast forward to November 7th, 2020, a few days after the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. I again went to pen. And I wasn't going to tell this, but in light of what's going on right now, I have to read this to you. (Coughing) Pardon me. It's called divide. When Barack Obama was selected, we thought we had elected to put all of our differences aside. In this united we stand states of America land, not forget but discuss what divides. But not all were ecstatic, some were doggedly emphatic to stay divided we fall. Because in 2016, America selected a mean, tyrannical, narcissistic screwball. This fraction could not stand for an American African presiding over the land of the free. So, for eight years they schemed and plighted to destroy the dream fulfilled by a hue man of destiny. Here we are four years later after this dictator divided these states united, we have cast our votes to correct our democracy blighted. It's a about time. Kamala broke some glass ceilings, a woman of color. Over 75 million people rejoice because she is now our Madam VP. But let's not forget this country is divided still yet. Its history gives away the suspense. There is pause to be elated because hope has been jaded by 70 million who voted against. Narratives must come from within to discuss and uncover the sin that causes this crater vast and wide. America's wound will never heal until it is opened and revealed to drain the pus and the poison inside. Let's pray future generations of all walks and all stations won't shed their ancestral tears and the tsunami of a tide with its ebb and flow divide narrows and completely disappears. Now, I'm going to backtrack because I don't want to leave with that last poem. I want this to be the last poem, again in light of what has happened over the last few days. It's Langston Hughs and how relevant it is. Let America be America again. Let America be America again. Let it be the dream it used to be the. Pioneer on the plain. America never was America to me. Let America be the dream, the dreamer's dream. Let it be that great, strong land of love where never kings canive and tyrants scream, it never was America to me. Let me land be a land where liberty is crowned with no false patriotic wreath where opportunity is real and life is free. Equality is in the air we breathe. There has never been equality for me, nor freedom in this homeland of the free. Say, who are you that mumbled in the dark? And who are you that draws your veil across the stars? I am the poor white fooled and pushed apart. I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. I am the red man driven from the land. I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek, and finally only the same old stupid plan of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak. I am the young man full of strength and hope, tangled in the ancient chain of profit, power, gain, of grab the land, grab the gold, of grab the way of satisfying need. The work, the men, of take the pay, of owning everything for one's own greed. I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil. I am the worker's soil to the machine. I am the Negro servant to you all. I am the people humbled, hungry, mean. Hungry yet today despite the dream, beaten yet today, oh pioneers, I am the man who never got ahead, the poorest worker bartered through the years. I am the one who dreamt the basic dream, who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true, that even yet it's mighty daring scenes, in every brick and stone, and every furrow turned that has made America the land it has become. I am the man who sailed those early seas in search of what I meant to be my home, for I am the one who left dark Ireland's shore, and Poland's plain and English's grassy lay. I came to build a homeland of the free. The free? Who said the free? Not me. Surely not me. The millions on relief today. The millions shot down when we strike. The millions who have nothing for our pay. For all the dreams we dreamed and all the songs we've sung, and all the hopes we've held, and all the flags we've hung. The millions who have nothing for our pay except the dream that's almost dead today. Oh let America be America again. The land that never has been yet and yet must be the land where every man is

free, the land that's mine, the poor man's, Indians, Negroes, me. Who made America, whose sweat and blood, whose fate and pain, whose hand on the foundry, whose plow in the rain must bring back our ugly hand again. We must take back our land again, oh America, oh yes, I say it plain. America never was America to me, and yet I swear this oath, America will be. Out of the wreck and ruin of our gangsters' death, the lies, we the people must redeem the land, the mines, the plants, the rivers, the mountains, and the endless plain, all the stretch of these great green states and make America again. Thank you.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Thank you, Mitch, for those wonderful words. I want to introduce our next commenter for today. We are fortunate to have joining in today's conversation Dr. Steven Nash, who is associate professor of history at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee. Dr. Nash earned his degree in history from Western Carolina University in 2001. And his Ph.D. from University of Georgia in 2009. He is the author of reconstruction's ragged edge, the politics of post war life in the mountain south, which was published in 2016, which received the award for nonfiction from Maria College, and the Appalachian Studies Association. He serves as president of the mountain history and culture group, and nonprofit group for the Vance State Historic Site in Weaverville, North Carolina. Well welcome to today's conversation, Steve and thank you for agreeing to join us today.

>> Thank you for having me and for the invitation. What an act to follow. That was incredible.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: I know. Following a storyteller is tough. And with someone like Mitch, it's even more difficult. But I want to start by just talking so much in his poetry, oh my god, working class discussions, the poor, and this idea of who deserves privileges of freedom. So, let me pose this question to you both. What's different now. This poetry, Mitch, is from the early 1900s and it's very relevant to what we see happening today. So, when you were developing and learning this poetry and looking at what's happening in society now, what thoughts came through your mind?

>> MITCH CAPEL: Well, first of all, as far as Dunbar is concerned, and probably the other poets, as well, is they lived through this. And they were actually giving us the history without it being sugar coated. Whereas, you know, it was straight from them. But what stands out most again is that it has not changed. I mean nothing has changed. I think William Faulkner said the past is not dead. In fact, the past is not even the past. We are still evolving as a human race. We have to understand that Jim Crow was only yesterday. It's not like it was a million years ago. This was only yesterday. I mean it was. And we're still feeling the ramification. We're still feeling, you know, what has happened to us then is still happening to us now. So, nothing has really changed.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Steve, as a scholar, you teach this topic. So, what was it about Paul Lawrence Dunbar's time and the way Mitch presented it and what you can tell us about central Appalachia today in today's times.

>> I would sort of echo what he just said. The past is not even the past yet. One of the things that sort of echos from the beginning is that America is an idea. And it's been imperfectly realized through its history, but that hasn't prevented the continued effort to realize it. And it has not been America to everybody. But,

you know, competing definitions over freedom and what freedom means. We listen to our political leaders and others sort of talk about freedom and liberty as if they're monolithic and singular and neglecting the fact that they are concepts that have been frequently competed over and that there have been different definitions of what freedom means at different times to different people. And that I think there's this sort of core tension that continues to exist even to the present over who gets access to power, who gets to define freedom, and what that means to everybody in the United States.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Well, based on what we're seeing, this argument, certainly from the Southern perspective under Reconstruction, there was a very definite idea about who freedoms belonged to and it definitely did not belong to people of color. So, this concept of America as a white man's country. Talk a little bit about how we see that playing out even now. Say with events that happened on Wednesday, for me, it was very clear that that was the statement that was being made when there were no boundaries that were beyond being breached. You know? The capitol, we hold that sacred. But if you feel that you own the capitol and the capitol has no meaning unless you happen to be a white male who is free to go about doing whatever they want, but restricted to everyone else. I mean how do we, how do you address that as an academic. How do you bring that to the forefront?

>> STEVEN NASH: I'm going to figure that out as the semester goes along. The landscape shifted. It's been building. You can't say it hasn't been building. It's been coming. In terms of parallels to reconstruction, they're abundant. You know, when I started the research that became my first book, when it became my book, it started as a master's thesis in 1998 1999. This long fruition on the project. The issues over equality and liberties and continued sort of struggles over political rights were very relevant, but the sort of steady escalation over the last decade, certainly over the last 5 6 years. I was giving a talk to a local radio station about Zebulan Vance and his place in history on the day the congressman was shot. And we've been seeing bombers and a steady resurgence of a white supremacist violence that has never been distant from America's history, but is certainly surging. In thinking about today, I also sort of wanted to caution against sort of leading with that. Like I feel like when we talk about reconstruction, it's easy to sort of view reconstruction where it's often depicted as this sort of break in American history. That, you know, this was the sort of heavy violent, sort of the early historians of the late 19th, early 20th century describe it as the crime against the South. The staff at the historic site works hard to tell a broad and inclusive history and they do a program every holiday, every December now called an Appalachian Christmas Carol, in which they sort of put people in a position of listening to the story of Venus, an enslaved woman owned by the Vance family, and following her path from slavery to freedom and into Jim Crow. And one of the things that struck me seeing the program again is not to lose sight of the effort and optimism and hope that came with emancipation. And it struck me this week the first part of Wednesday, prior to the storming of the capitol, Georgia, the efforts on the part of Stacy Abrams, and people who organize and mobilize and voters of color, and working class voters, in a way that shifted the landscape. Rafael Warnock, the first African American senator from the state of Georgia. It was a central part of the story of Reconstruction. It's part of the violence of Jim Crow and later is because they were so successful during Reconstruction. This was true in Appalachia, as well. We think of the African American population as a small part of population. But politically, they swung the region. In western North Carolina, where Asheville is located, swings to the Republicans because of Black male voters in 1868. That sort of transition, and to get back to the competing notions of freedom, Black Southerners had their own definition of freedom and what they wanted and they asserted it during Reconstruction. And they were successful. That's what brings the backlash, the counterrevolution.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Exactly. And I would say that that is what we're seeing today. Is a backlash to Stacey Abrams and the Congress, and Joe Biden's speech when he accepted said that he owed a debt to African American. I'm sure there were 70 million people in the country who did not wish to hear that. There is quite a bit that is very much reminiscent of Reconstruction in this idea of opening America up to many more people who before had been so well controlled. So, here we are now again in this century reliving some of our past, trying to understand and get to higher ground. And so Mitch, how was Dunbar's poetry received during this time. He is writing during this time period of Reconstruction.

>> MITCH CAPEL: Yes, he was very well received. He was friends with Frederick Douglas who called him the most promising young man in America. He wrote in standard English, but the publishers only wanted his dialect poetry. He wrote a song called the poet. With a deeper note from some high peak, not yet remote, he absorbed to the beat. The world has turned to praise a jingle and a broken tongue. But even in his dialect poetry, which I love, because the dialect is he took a language of American Africans. I don't say African Americans, I say American Africans. He took the language of our African ancestors and he says that DET, because there's no TH sound in the African dialect. It's like a different language. And a lot of people can't read the dialect. But even in his dialect writings, he was socially conscious. And he stood up for African Americans, for American Africans. It's hard for me to get back to on that. He stood up for us in several poems. Even in dialect, he still talked about how in Dealy, she pure colored, that's why I love her so, there ain't no mix about her. He was very prolific in his writing. He did write a minstrel show, Clarendy, with Marian Cook. It appeared in Broadway in 1898. That's where the term "who dat" came. It was popular in the play. There was controversy a few years ago with New Orleans Saints saying "Who dat." They traced it back to Dunbar's play back in the day.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: This idea, again, if you see the slide show, what struck me about this period is the whole concept of a minstrel show that has never really gone away. It became vaudeville. But this idea of white face becoming black face and making a fortune off imitating the black language and the black dance and the black patwah, and all of that. But it was surprising that we as African Americans believes that this somehow was a creation we became responsible for. That was the rap of the day. The minstrel show was the rap of that period. So, what about this idea of Dunbar? Did he profit as did the Christy Minstrels and all these others? Was his show a success?

>> MITCH CAPEL: His show was a success and he wore all Black actors, but there was no makeup. They were Black actors become Black actors.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: In Harlem?

>> MITCH CAPEL: He was on Broadway.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Broadway.

>> MITCH CAPEL: At the Rooftop Casino something theater in Broadway. Anyway, yeah. Dunbar was such a prolific writer. His ode to Ethiopia is one of my favorite poems where he defends our race of people because he had gone to, was invited to speak one night at I think it was called the West End Club and he was the only African American in the room. And there was a guy speaking who had just traveled to South. And he was up speaking to the group about the Negro in the South. And he was saying we were shiftless and lazy and talking about us like a dog. He doesn't know Dunbar was in the room. So, when the gentleman invited Dunbar to speak and introduced him, of course the other gentleman was very embarrassed but he got up and recited an ode to Ethiopia and defended everything about us. He could have been lynched and killed that night. He was the only African American there and he had to get on his mule and ride back home by himself. But he had courage. And that's really what gravitated me towards him even more when I read that story about Dunbar.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Right. And this idea of violence. We were talking about this Steve, on Wednesday, when we saw the violence in the capitol. And five people dead from this, I don't even really know what to call it, insurrection. I don't know how you're going to term this. But this is a very violent period in American history. How would you compare it to what we see happening today? Are we any better off at managing this? Should we turn the other cheek? Should Biden prosecute? What was happening in this violent period?

>> STEVEN NASH: I once heard a lecture by a noted civil war reconstruction scholar Steven Hahn. Reconstruction is always portrayed as this anomaly as this hiccup in American history. Where everything is compromised and political piece and then Reconstruction comes and it's violent and then we put it back. And his question to the audience is what if Reconstruction is the norm. What if that is the normal within American political history. And there is, I think validity, and certainly the question needs to be reckoned with with people with the level of political violence in American history. It's undeniable that it's one of the most violent political periods in American history. It was targeted and specifically cultivated and came about at a particular time for a particular reason, which was that African American men were sort of enabled to vote in 1867, even before the 15th Amendment. They voted in 1868 elections across the former Confederate states, winning a Republican majority for pretty much all of those states. And then sort of this notion that Ku Klux sort of believed that the new governments were illegitimate because they were elected by a composition of poor whites and unionists and disaffected white elites who drifted away from the confederacy and of course Black men so they turned toward counterrevolutionary violence and were incredibly effective at it. And one of the things that, you know, social media sort of makes this resonate to me in a profound way, which is one of the things that was so disturbing about the Reconstruction era Klan is the extent that they were able to disguise themselves. In the public imagination. Newspaper editors denied their existence. You have news stories coming out of a white Republican in North Carolina attacked multiple times. The most abused piece of human flesh I've ever seen. You have Black men being attacked in the middle of the night. An Ohio who was a Republican in North Carolina. He writes a book and culls from page after page of Senate testimony of people being tortured, intimidating, Black men being castrated, Alamance County, North Carolina is very much in the news these days. An African American was lynched on the town square. And it's where you have people rallying to defend a confederate monument. And you have this sort of effort to convince people that they didn't exist. Newspaper editors saying that the Republicans and Black people were doing this to themselves to try to garner sympathy in the North. Nowadays a certain segment of the population would call that fake news and people claiming that these groups don't exist, or the people that we plainly see photographed moving through the United States Capitol in what is being dubbed, I think accurately an insurrection, you see people being photographed who we can document who they are, but you still have people saying those are plants. This isn't true. What we can see and read and understand with our



own eyes we're being told is incorrect or untrue. There's a strong parallel between that and what happened during Reconstruction with the Ku Klux and their ability to topple some of these democratically elected at the time Republican state governments in the South.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Exactly. They were extremely successful and some would say still remain so. When we look at the exclusionary politics in Alabama, Georgia, the way to exclude voters, the fact that Congress lifted, said that they no longer needed to be controlled by federal government to make sure that voting rights are protected. This is exactly what happened under Johnson in Reconstruction. When I was putting that PowerPoint together, it was like wow. You know? This idea of voter suppression. What we call it now, voter suppression. But it's very much a part of the American agenda. And I don't want to just, Steve you made a good point. This was not just a Southern idea. I have to always, for each one of these conversations, I call it an American scheme, because the North was just as complicit as the South. The South couldn't have done this if the North weren't complicit. They feared the Black vote just as much. We see Kentucky born, Lexington born, Griff who becomes a hero because of Birth of a Nation. Just two years ago they wanted to give him a star on the walk of honor in Lexington. The community rose up against it and so many people didn't understand why. He pioneered the modern theater. They totally overlooked the aspect of racism and the Klan. What do we do? How do we respond to that as teachers?

>> STEVEN NASH: One of the things I always have to cling to and I fervently believe, and this is built out of a career now as an historian both in research and teaching and also having spent some time as a Park Service interpreter early on in my career and working with park history people. I believe people can handle complexity. I really do believe that. When you talk to people and listen to people and have conversations that they can handle complexity. And they can handle the idea that things are not as simple as you might get off of a meme or that you might get off of a quick sort of social media read. And I think that when you sort of start to explain to them the sort of challenges of recognizing, one of the things you might think about, and it's a refrain that is possible now is that they're erasing history. That some of the stuff is being done, some of the sort of backlash is coming around memorials and they're erasing history. But there's a whole history as we're discussing and sort of giving voice to in this series that you've all done such a great job with, is that there is a history that hasn't been told on the same level. You know? It's one of the things that people talk about with Reconstruction. Well, the people who joined the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction believed, and they believed fervently that the governments being created around them were illegitimate. That leading confederates, the best men of their society had been disenfranchised by the 14th Amendment. They had been barred from government. Their property was at the risk of being confiscated. Their single greatest property was \$4 billion of human, enslaved profit. They fervently believed, as Jefferson said, they have a right to rebel against governments. That's what they believed. Now, there is a whole segment of the population, poorer whites and African Americans who had been denied a voice in a democratic form of government until 1866, 1867, 1868, and they seized it. So, that's one of the things I sort of try to convey to people, which is, you know, that the idea is that again these sort of competing notions of freedom and competing elements of America is at the same time you have this sort of counterrevolutionary violent terrorist organization developing. You have people really pushing the country forward and seizing sort of freedom and rights. And I think the same thing is happening now.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Well, even to hear you say the word "illegitimate," I mean how much have you heard that word for the last four years. And that was part of Wednesday's discussion. The election was illegitimate, the vote count was illegitimate. What I saw was this underlying history that we don't hear much

about is very much what the Southern agenda was in 1867. Illegitimacy, federal interference in states' rights, the idea that southerners could better govern themselves, and all of these things that we've been hearing. These stories are a repeat. This is what happens when we don't do a good job of telling real American history, not just the glossy parts that we do for international favor, but to really get under the crust of how America got to where we are right now and really many of the rights that we all enjoy come from these working class people that Mitch was telling us about. Also this idea of in the COVID, who's on the front lines, who's dying, it's these very same people who are now considered essential, but we don't pay. We don't pay them anything. We don't even want to give them health coverage. So, that aspect of the chosen, those that have the rights and privilege to access health, welfare, wellbeing. Where do we go from here? This idea of Biden, do you think we're now in a position to have an honest dialogue. I like to think we can do it through programs like this, but I sometimes lose hope. I need some hope. Any one of you, give me some hope right here.

>> MITCH CAPEL: It's hard for me to give you hope after seeing what happened on Wednesday and people, you know, taking over the capitol building, one of the sacring buildings. I can't even go to my car without getting shot in the back seven times. We should have sat down and had this dialogue years ago. I do a play about this. And try to show where we came from and how we got where we are and hopefully open dialogue to where we can discuss this and be honest about it. That's the only way you're going to get it done. Is to be open and honest about what happened and why we're in the position we are and stop the lying and the sugarcoating of it. I mean, it is what it is. And also I think language has a lot to do with it. I hate the word "slave." My brother is a slave to chocolate, that means he can't go by a candy store without going in and getting some chocolate. We were captives. We were held against our will. Everything black is negative. Come on. Dr. King and Malcolm X talked about it. It's a color, not a culture. Everybody else it's culture. And then people come to this country, people look up the definition of black. Oh, we're black people.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Certainly that question, Langston Hughes, why do they hate us. I was trying to show through the PowerPoint that much of that negativity of blackness has been instilled in subtle ways that we're immune to it. Even Black people sometimes we're not aware that we're repeating a narrative that was given to us. It was really never ours to begin with, it was created for us. Trying to get to the bottom of that of what is authentic when you talk about Black culture is difficult. And so here we are now, 2021, trying to come up with a language. We can't even voice our own discontent. I'm looking at the Capitol, all my friends around me who were crying blue lives matter, but you have this same crowd killing blue lives in the capitol and being very happy about it. So, not all blue lives matter, just certain blue lives matter apparently. So, Steve, we're getting close to the end of our time. But I do want us to talk about the benefits of Reconstruction. What do you see came out better for America? I know we were trying to reimplement slavery, and we did to a certain extent, but what positives can we point to from this period in our history?

>> STEVNE NASH: History in general is always going to be complicate. It's always going to be complex. There's going to be this sort of benefit and sort of a flip side of the coin. The 13th, 14th, 15th amendments for instance abolishing slavery and essentially granting a national level of citizenship for all people in the United States born here, guaranteeing the right of black men, African American men to vote. That's a profound shift. It changes the relationship of Americans to their government, that prior to that citizenship was defined at a state level and that there is a general provision that citizens of one state would be generally equal and have equal rights in a different state. But Roger Tawney in the Dred Scott decision attempted to kneecap that in 1857. The Reconstruction amendments are a positive negation, to use a convoluted term,

but they define citizenship nationally. But even within that, there's cracks. The 13th Amendment outlaws slavery except in incidents of people being convicted of a crime. The 14th amendment doesn't include Native Americans. It excludes them from birthright citizenship, and the 15th amendment of course could be criticized because it inserts male into the United States constitution for the first time. It doesn't include suffrage for all Americans. I do see Reconstruction as a moment in time, a sort of opportunity where biracial, political action for a moment seized a sort of small democratic gain. It demonstrates that it's possible. And it demonstrates that when cooperation is possible that we can change the direction of the country in the positive. There are always going to be obstacles and there's always going to be opposition and pushback to that. But right, the classic quote, is that the great moral arc of history always bends toward justice. And I think Reconstruction suggests a big push forward. And then obviously not as much as perhaps could have been achieved. But it's a big push forward.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: It's a big push forward. And I always like to point out given the right to vote, but not really achieving the right to vote until what? 1965. You know. The Voting Rights Act is passed. So, the Klan never went away. Even though people are saying the Klan has died, I would like to let our audience know the Klan is very much alive and growing. Their numbers are actually getting larger during this, actually beginning under the election of Barack Obama through today where people are really joining up in huge numbers with this idea of illegitimacy. The American government is being taken over by people who were undeserving, un American. So, it would behoove all of us to pay close attention to see what is happening in our environment right now. No one can afford to sit it out. Hats off to women who have been at the forefront of this. And the fact that we can use stories. We can use what we're doing today to reach out to people. I think storytelling is very non threatening and everyone has a story. So, listening to those stories to heal and reconnect us is a good way to beginning. This is why I love the work of the International Storytelling Center and what this project does for us. So, concluding thoughts. Mitch, I'll go to you first and then you, Steve.

>> MITCH CAPEL: Well, I think as far as hope is concerned, now that we have January the 20th we'll have someone in office who will listen to the problems that we have, I think we can start with the sweeping criminal justice and voting reforms. We can transform this United States into the world's leading, from the world's leading carceral state into a truly multiracial democracy. We also need to have direct investments to ensure stable housing, universal healthcare, high quality education, necessities for creating a more inclusive economy and greater wealth parity. We need to try to understand each other and work together. As far as I go every day in my life, I try to esenuate the positive. I get on social media every now and then and I look at it. Too much negative information coming my way and it was making me sick. Hopefully we can get onto the positive and maybe change some people's attitudes about life. The sad part about all of this and the division we have in this country, if there's a catastrophe, it takes us a catastrophe to pull us together. You could be bickering with your neighbors for years, and an earthquake comes through, you're going to be the first one pulling them out. We're humans. We want the same for our families and our kids. Everybody wants the same thing to be treated fairly. That's all we want. If everybody could do that, we would be a much better world.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Thank you. Steve, a question from the audience. And then I'll add this in your wrap up thoughts. A questioner wants to know how do we talk to people who still believe the lies? How do you talk to someone?

>> STEVEN NASH: It's an excellent question and it's something that I wrestle with quite frequently. Having worked with and support people who do public history, I hear and see this a lot. Of people who still continue to cling to, you know, misinformation or distorted information. I think one of the most important things, and it gets to kind of what Mitch was just saying, which is, you know, you can have a change at the top and I think you know we can all sort of talk about the change at the top. But I think it's the community level that really these conversations and programs like what we're doing here, right, where you're engaging people at the local level, and on a personal level. Often people that you know. The people that will come running during a time where there's an earthquake or a disaster and we can, you know, I live in an area near Asheville, North Carolina, an area that is having a tremendous amount of sort of trouble due to the pandemic economically. And crime and homelessness are on the rise.

And you can look and you can see local organizations that are doing good work. And you can kind of engage people that way, which is find the sort of commonality. You can listen. But you also have to find that sort of moment where you can connect them and say remember, look, this is what we have in common. And I've never experienced from my work as a teacher, as a public historian any sort of success in having a successful conversation with somebody who disagrees with me when I yell at them and when I just try to tell them and shut them off and not attempt to listen to them. So, that would be my advice. Just talk, listen, remain calm, but sort of continue to correct and push the correct information in a way that they can understand and listen.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Exactly. So, maybe they won't hear it the moment you're saying it, but at some point it might resonate. Well, I want to thank both of you.

>> I hope so.

>> ALICESTYNE TURLEY: Well, that's all we have. All we can do is keep holding the truth out and hoping at some point if it's not today, maybe tomorrow it finds fertile ground. As I hope today's conversation did.

Thank you both for joining us. We're coming to the end of our time. But I want to encourage everyone to join us February 13th for our next, it's Black History Month. We get that one small month. But we're doing this for the rest of the next five conversations on Appalachian Black History. So, please check the International Storytelling Center website for the details and times. But it will be the same format that you see today. Have your questions ready. And if we didn't get to your question today, please feel free to continue to post it on Facebook. We'll try to get back with you that way. So, on behalf of the International Storytelling Center, thank you Mitch, thank you Dr. Nash for joining today. And we look forward to seeing you in February. Keep the peace. Keep the truth out there.

>> MITCH CAPEL: Thank you. Good job.

>> STEVEN NASH: Thank you.