



Remarks and Community Panel Questions for “Why This Matters”

Main Introduction:

The telling of history is dynamic and how we remember history changes as we hear different perspectives and voices. Growing up, the stories I was told of European settlement, the American Revolution, and the establishment of the republic was not the full story. When stories of the black experience were included, it only focused on the heroes. I have learned that omissions speak as loudly as what we choose to include.

The title of this workshop came from people asking, “Why does it matter?” Why should we relive the bad parts of our history? What good does it do? Can’t we just focus on the positive?” This workshop is in response to that. It is vital that we revisit the stories we thought we knew through another lens and today, that lens is slavery. And, through that lens we begin to see that where there was oppression, there was resilience, where people tried to strip others of their humanity, they maintained traditions and built culture.

Historic sites, academic institutions, museums, and communities are all grappling with the memories we construct about the history of slavery, its abolition, and its legacies. The tension between what we thought we knew and what scholars like our guest, Jared Ross Hardesty, reveal, leave us with choices to make in our museums, at our sites, and in our classrooms. Telling the often-untold story of slavery in New England will change how we teach and interpret.

Today we begin with the history of slavery in New England, which you will be able to continue to sit with, as we have provided each of you with a copy of Dr. Hardesty’s most recent work, *Black Lives*. . .Dr. Hardesty will walk us through historical concepts, raise questions for discussion, and suggest useful source materials.

In our breakout sessions, we will explore how this history makes its way from scholars to teachers and interpreters and on to students and the public. Finally, we will hear from a community panel of people and organizations that inspire positive action in addressing long-standing and harmful racial disparities.

Thank you for being here so that together we can consider “why this matters.”

Introduction to Breakouts:

Helping students and our audiences understand the history of slavery in New England many times begins with us, the educators that students encounter in the classroom and on field trips. Learners need to be inoculated against the myths that perpetuate falsehoods about the past and the present. This is no easy task, but it is being done by the people presenting here today.

Community Panel: (2-minute Introduction from Moderator)

It often seems as though black and white Americans and more locally, New Englanders, live in separate worlds of experience and understanding. Unless we can bridge those gaps, it will be hard for us to work together to build a better region, a better country, and a better world. As a white woman, I am still and will be forever working on building my awareness and understanding on issues of slavery, race, and its legacies. It might appear as if I, a white woman, and the many other white people in this room are "seeking advice" from this panel for the purpose of building our racial awareness.

It is the responsibility for all white people to do the work. To read, listen, and engage in building your own awareness of the issues surrounding race in our society. Our purpose with this panel is to center the work of these community organizations; to understand how the black experience has shaped the world we all live in; and for us white people to consider ways we can learn to fight against privilege, power, and oppression.

Question #1: (2 minutes each x 4 = 8 minutes)

Tell us about you, your work, and/or the work of your organization.

Question #2: (4 minutes each X 4 = 16 minutes)

American culture minimizes the legacy and impact of 250 years of chattel slavery or reinforces the impression that it all happened in the ancient past. How could our schools, museums, and historic sites tell a truer story about the history of slavery and its effects on people alive today?

Question #3: (4 minutes each X 4 = 16 minutes)

There are events in our region's history that have been suppressed because they do not reflect well on this place or the people that dominate it. Intentional mythmaking has been employed to highlight the uplifting stories while minimizing or ignoring the hard history. Through both suppression and mythmaking, racism takes on a more subtle but perhaps a more-pervasive form. What can we gain, as communities and as a larger society, from talking more honestly about the past?

15 minutes Questions from the Audience