



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Confronting Hard History at Montpelier

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

I have always been fascinated by historic sites. Mesmerized by the thought of standing in the very same place where history happened. As a kid growing up in New York, I enjoyed field trips to places that commemorated the American Revolution in nearby Massachusetts, even more than I did getaways to Great Adventure Amusement Park in neighboring New Jersey. History, of course, happens everywhere, but pivotal moments in history happen only in specific places, and only a handful of those places have been preserved. So, a year or so ago, when I was invited to be a part of small, focused think tank about race, and the legacy of American slavery at Montpelier, the Virginia estate of James Madison, the nation's fourth president, I immediately said yes.

James Madison was the father of the United States Constitution. He was also an enslaver. He held more than 100 people in bondage at his plantation, and never freed a single soul. Not even upon his death. So, while the historian in me, as well as the kid in me, was enthusiastic and eager about being a part of this dialogue at Madison's home, the African American in me, the brother in me, had serious reservations.

As a descendant of enslaved African Americans, I hold no affection for those who kept my people in bondage, nor fondness for the forced labor camps where they toiled. This is a part of that double consciousness that DuBois talked about: the inescapable way black people see America, because of the harsh way America treats black people. These thoughts are not easily set aside, which is part of the cost of being black and woke, so I carry these thoughts with me to the think tank.

The Montpelier workshop took place on a weekend in January 2017, and since I was already scheduled to deliver a MLK Day address in College Park, Maryland, that Friday, I decided just to drive the two hours to Montpelier. It turned out to be a relaxing ride. My lecture on making Dr. King matter again had been very well received, so I was in good spirits. And the traffic gods shined favor on me, getting me in and out of D.C. ahead of the rush-hour crush. Montpelier is tucked away in the rolling hills of the central Virginia countryside; the restored mansion, Madison's home, sits on high ground, offering sweeping views of hundreds of acres of verdant fields, and lush old-growth forest. Far from the hustle and bustle of urban life, Montpelier's remoteness and natural beauty is calming. But as I drew near, I felt a real uneasiness. This was, after all, a site of black enslavement. I remember thinking as the mansion first came into my view, "Bruh, you need to keep on driving, and go home." But once again, historical curiosity got the best of me, so I pressed on.

I pulled up just in time for a behind-the-scenes tour of Montpelier's exhibition on slavery, called "The Mere Distinction of Colour," which was then still six months away from opening to the public. Christian

Cotz, Montpelier's director of education and visitor engagement, who led the tour, explained in vivid detail the exhibit's purpose, themes and features, making clear that they were crafting a narrative that recognized black humanity, that celebrated black resilience and resistance, that acknowledged the yawning gulf between Madison's beliefs and behaviors, and explained the importance of slavery to the nation's founding.

The staff's commitment to telling the unvarnished truth about American slavery, and engagement with the descendants of Montpelier's enslaved community, was refreshing to see, and it eased my anxiety considerably. But that night, all of my spidey senses were working overtime. Somehow, I had overlooked the fact that we were actually all staying on-site. In well-appointed farmhouses, but still, on-site. On a former slave plantation, in the middle of rural Virginia. I kid you not, that night, I made sure my door was securely locked. I hadn't seen the movie *Get Out* yet, but I was ready to bounce at the first sight and sound of white weirdness. No, I didn't ask for any tea, thank you very much.

But, morning came, as it always does, and I was still free, so I set about the task at hand—working with the other scholars and filmmakers to develop ideas for a film treatment on the legacies of slavery. It was a thoughtful, thought-provoking, productive and engaging full day of work. One that eventually gave rise to a fantastic film short that is featured in the permanent exhibition that connects America's past to America's present in a soul-stirring way.

James Madison's Montpelier explores American slavery at a historic site, exactly the way it ought to be done: accurately and honestly. And although I do not consider Madison's home a personal pilgrimage site, as do many of the white visitors who journey there to pay homage to the father of the Constitution—you see, it's that whole double-consciousness thing again—I do very much consider it the place to go, the historic site to visit to see, to feel and to understand, the depth and breadth of American slavery, and the experiences of enslaved African Americans.

I'm Hasan Kwame Jeffries, and this is *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery*, a special series from Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. This podcast provides a detailed look at how to teach important aspects of the history of American slavery. In each episode, we explore a different topic, walking you through historical concepts, raising questions for discussion, suggesting useful source material and offering practical classroom exercises.

Talking with students about slavery can be emotional and complex. This podcast is a resource for navigating those challenges, so teachers and students can develop a deeper understanding of the history, and legacy, of American slavery.

In June 2017, the Montpelier Foundation unveiled an exhibition called “The Mere Distinction of Colour,” that examines the great American paradox of slavery and freedom. In this special episode, I talk with three people who helped develop the exhibit and promote it. We discuss the genesis of the project, and the kinds of educational programs they have created for integrating slavery, and its legacy, into the story of the founding of America and the drafting of the Constitution. I'll see you on the other side. Enjoy.

I am really excited to welcome to the *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* podcast, three special guests with connections to James Madison's Montpelier in central Virginia. We have Christian Cotz, who is the director of education and visitor engagement at James Madison's Montpelier; Mr. Price Thomas,

who is the director of marketing and communications at Montpelier; and Dr. Patrice Preston Grimes, who is an associate professor of social studies education and associate dean in the office of African-American affairs at the University of Virginia. She has been involved in the African-American Descendants Project at Montpelier as an educational consultant. Thanks so much for taking the time out to share some thoughts and observations with the podcast.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Delighted to be here.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Yeah, man, we're excited.

PRICE THOMAS

Absolutely.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. Christian, let me begin with you. Could you share with us just a little bit of the historical background of James Madison, and the history of Montpelier?

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Sure. Montpelier is a plantation about 30 miles north of Charlottesville, Virginia. Today it's 2,650 acres; in Madison's time, it was well over 5,000. It contains lots of open fields and wooded lots. It was first built by Madison's parents in 1765. The plantation itself was started by his grandparents in the 1720s. Madison was born in 1751, he attends Princeton in the late 1760s-early 1770s, and then gets involved in the American Revolution on the political end of things. He becomes the champion of religious freedom in Virginia, passes Jefferson's statute for religious freedom, pushes that through the state legislature. He becomes the father of the Constitution in 1787, the architect of the Bill of Rights, helps Hamilton write *The Federalist Papers*, getting ratification in New York for the Constitution, and then makes a campaign promise when he's running as representative in the house, to include a Bill of Rights in the Constitution, and thereby gets Virginia's vote for ratification.

He will be Secretary of State for Thomas Jefferson and the fourth president of the United States, from 1808 to 1817, and then spends his retirement years here at Montpelier from 1817 until he dies in 1836. He's married to Dolley Madison for 42 years; they have a great relationship. They never have any children, but Dolley had a child from her first marriage named Payne Todd who will grow up here. Madison will abhor slavery his entire life, he writes about it all the time, from the time he's a young man in college, until the time he dies—and yet he'll be a slave owner his entire life and will never free a single individual. And he'll own well over 100.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

When did Montpelier become a visitor site? A site where people from around the country, and around the world, could actually come and explore the life and legacy of James Madison?

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Montpelier is unique amongst founding fathers' homes because Montpelier was a private residence until

1984, so we're very young as far as presidential sites go, and historic house museums go. We opened as a museum in 1987, but there really wasn't much of a museum here then—it was just a great big open house without much furniture in it. It wasn't until we completed the architectural restoration in 2008, that the house really transformed, and let visitors really envision the president's home.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Price, if I could bring you into the conversation a little bit, could you share with us what the overall mission of James Madison's Montpelier is today?

PRICE THOMAS

Yeah, our mission is really to connect the past to the present using the institutional knowledge that we have, which is the Constitution and the lens of the Constitution, and how that fits and weaves into the American founding era, and how that era has influenced our American DNA and a lot of what we're contending with in modern times. What we don't want to be is a period piece, or a period site, right? We don't want to explore history for history's sake; we want to explore it for the sake of relevance and to help contextualize the life that we're all living today.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

How has the mission—connecting the past to the present—changed and evolved since Montpelier came online as a public site?

PRICE THOMAS

I think the beauty of a site like this is that history is additive. And I think it's important for sites like ours to be agile, and to also be forward-thinking. The present is obviously not always the present, right, because that's a moving target, so it's been extremely important over the past two or three years to do all the work that we've done around slavery, around difficult history, and around our continued descendant engagement. That has been a project that has been very important to Montpelier for the last 19 or 20 years. Being able to connect, again, to the present as a time period, but also to the people, and to the stories, and to the voices of those who have the lived experiences, who have the connections to the site and the history, is vitally important to accurate, authentic and holistic interpretation.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

If I can just add to that: Madison has always been at the forefront of our interpretation. I've been here for almost 20 years now, and as the house has been restored, more of Madison and his world has become visible. But as we've restored the Madison house, we've recognized that we needed to also restore the landscape, and the lives of the enslaved community that lived here. There were a half dozen Madisons that lived here over the course of 150 years, but there were over 300 enslaved people here. So, over the last two decades, we've slowly been rebuilding that landscape as well, starting with the Gilmore cabin back in 2005, then moving into the south-yard area in 2008, '09, '10. We restored the segregated train depot in 2011, and then we did the final restoration of the south yard just in these last few years.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

So, it really has been additive, Price, as you were saying. One of the things that has been missing from so many of the historic sites, presidential sites, that deal with slavery, that has needed to be added, and included, and interpreted, has been the history of the enslaved people who were a part of these households.

Dr. Grimes, if I could ask you this, what have you seen? Could you share with us just some general observations about this sort of marginalized history of enslaved people at these historic sites—Montpelier, Mount Vernon, Monticello—if you will?

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Sure. For the majority of the presidential sites—quite frankly all of them until very recently—it was one story. It was the narrative of the privileged, it was the narrative of the people who owned the land, who bought the slaves. Because that history was so intertwined with the founding fathers, there was a narrative that was told that supported, glorified, rationalized, many of the things that occurred throughout our history. The challenge of that is, when there's a dominant narrative, it can be very difficult for people who have other voices and other stories and other perspectives that are just as valid, and just as real, and empirically have been proven to exist, to have a voice.

What I think has made Montpelier so unique is that while some may see its journey evolving on this path as being relatively new, compared to Mount Vernon, or Monticello, for example, that's the very thing that has really enabled the voice of descendants and people in community to be heard and to come to the fore. Another thing, too, that I think really influenced Montpelier evolving in the way that it did was the fact that the lands and the grounds were held by very few people over generations, and so within the Orange County, Virginia, communities, you have descendants who are still living in the area. You have ties that the community has had. Christian mentioned, specifically, Rebecca Gilmore Coleman. She was the granddaughter of George Gilmore, who was enslaved. When he was free, he purchased the land across the road from Montpelier, and the fact that she's still living in this community, and she has descendants in this community, was a really big impetus for people to say, "We want to see a more physical representation and interpretation."

Then, finally, I think there's something about the land itself, and because of the tremendous archeological work, versus historical documentation that's done at many sites, literally the earth and the ground tell the story. Because, you know, we know so often from a Eurocentric standpoint, if it hasn't been written, people would say it didn't happen. We're not only relying, now, on historical archives, letters, diaries, things of that sort, that people have left, we literally are using the earth that's being excavated to find the places and spaces where people lived, and worked and co-habited.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Christian, Dr. Grimes just noted that the recapturing and retelling the story of the enslaved who are part of the history of Montpelier, who make Montpelier go, and who make it possible, that it's been necessary to grab different threads, different—sort of historical threads, evidentiary threads, that can be woven together to create a tapestry that re-creates, replicates to a certain extent, the history of their lives. One of those, certainly, is archeology. Could you say a little bit about the archeological work that is going on at Montpelier?

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Dr. Matt Reeves is the director of archeology here, and he's had a great public archeology program going for almost two decades. Matt and I started in the spring of 2000, and one of the first things that Matt did was really open up Montpelier to be a place where other people could come and learn about archeology. He didn't want to be a scientist hiding in a bubble, or behind the scenes. He wanted other people

to understand what archeology was, and what it was capable of, and that it was more than just digging in the soil and examining artifacts. Over the last couple years, he's developed a program where not only field school students from universities, but the public at large, can come and participate in archeological digs, learn how to be an archeologist. Go through lectures and seminars, and understand the history, and spend time digging in the units, finding artifacts, washing artifacts, cataloging artifacts.

He's also created programs where people are learning how to rebuild the structures that were here, historically, that they're finding the architectural evidence of. They dig in the ground, they find the evidence of the building, and then people can come and actually learn how to timber frame or build a log cabin and rebuild the structure. As these programs have grown and developed, Matt's also been at the forefront of engaging with the descendant community, and by that, I mean the descendants of the enslaved community here. People in that community have come in and participated in the archeological digs, and in the rebuilding programs. You have the descendants of people who were enslaved here unearthing artifacts that were last held, potentially, by their ancestors, and then rebuilding their ancestor's homes so that they can be an educational venue for visitors to Montpelier to learn through.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

I tell you, that really is amazing, and that really does not only make the past come alive, it makes that connection, that Price that you were talking about, between the past and the present. In a way, it sort of shrinks time, by having folk who have blood ties to that land, to that place, to that soil, be a part of the retrieval process. Christian, if I could ask you, could you say a little bit about how the engagement with the descendant community began?

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Well, it started back in 1999, when Rebecca Gilmore Coleman came knocking on the front door of Montpelier. Literally. She talked with our director at the time, and said, "Hey, do you know what that fallen-down log cabin is over there, across the street from the main gate?" And, at the time, Montpelier was pretty new—10 years old as a historic site. There were 160 structures on the 2,600 acres, and really the only ones that we were really concerned with were the mansion and the temple, at the time. Both Madison structures. The other 158 structures were various buildings that were built over the 19th and 20th centuries by different owners of Montpelier, as far as we knew. So, we didn't know what that falling-down structure tucked in the woods across from the main gate was, and she informed us that it was the home of her great-grandfather, who was enslaved in Montpelier, who built that house after emancipation. Her father was born in that house, and she thought it would be a good idea if Montpelier restored it, so that we could tell the story of Emancipation and Reconstruction.

We agreed with her, and we thought it would be a good idea, too, and we announced the restoration in 2000, or 2001, and it took a few years to get the job done because it had very limited funding, but we opened the Gilmore Cabin in 2005. Over the years, Rebecca's really opened doors for Montpelier into the African-American community in Orange, and elsewhere. As we met new people and learned new stories, we were able to come to a completely new, fuller and different understanding of the enslaved community and their experiences here at Montpelier. Those relationships grew, and we met more and more people, and more and more people got involved, and people began to come on Matt's archeology programs, and on the rebuilding programs, and people came to descendant reunions.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

I think it's really important to note: Nothing happens this way without vision and without leadership. The thing that made Montpelier, and the people, different at the time—was they were willing not to dig into and retain a master narrative. Everything was not secondary to the master narrative about James Madison, and that when Rebecca Gilmore Coleman was able to articulate her ownership, and her legacy, and her representation as one of many people, there were people on the other side of that table who were open to listening. I think that's really, really key. So, from the very beginning, descendants who were skeptical, who maybe had never paid attention and driven by that rundown cabin and didn't know, as well, were much more open to engaging because they thought they had a chance to be heard. I think that's really important. And, for many years, there was that distinction; we call it Town-Gown, we call it, you know, in universities, just in terms of plantation, community.

This is not to say that the relationships with the African-American community, and people within the Montpelier Foundation, have always been good, have always been rosy. Quite the contrary. For many people, for many generations, Montpelier and Orange County was the place where black people worked. They didn't even see it as being a historical site. So, it definitely took some openness and a frame of mind on both parts to begin to have these difficult conversations, to see what could come from it. And then having the physical entity of the cabin, I think, was so important because again, we tend to be people who will believe more of what we can see, and touch, and feel, as opposed to what we're told.

Once people in the community realized “No, there is something very concrete here that we can look at, that gives us a sense of ownership.” Not in the traditional sense that Madison had, but we have a stake in the game. These are lands that we definitely helped to create, to fuel the economy, and lifestyle, and so on, that happened in the community. I think that was a key turning point, and that was when people from the community were willing to come through the gates of Montpelier, as people from Montpelier became much more willing, then, to work with the Orange County African-American Historical Society; of which I was a board member for four years, in those early years, when we were trying to bring people to the table to have these discussions before we could even do a lot of the planning.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

If I could just say a little bit more about that, I mean, people have come to be part of the descendant community through just a multitude of ways. Patrice, you started out interacting with us by bringing your students here, didn't you?

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Yes, yes. I teach classes in social studies education at the University of Virginia, and I came to Orange County for a black history program that was in the community, and I met Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, and anyone who's met her knows that she's really dynamic, and as soon as she was telling me about Montpelier, I realized it was a place where I had to bring my students. So, every semester for several years, I brought a group of students to Montpelier, and I'm literally able to teach a certain form of history that spans three centuries, from the mansion to the Gilmore cabin to the train station that was repurposed and done, and I can't think of anywhere in the United States where I've taught where I can give students an arc of history in the same way. Not only over the course of time but also the multiple perspectives.

I've got 20- and 21-year-old students who want to be social studies teachers, in elementary and high schools, who seem to be pretty knowledgeable about the content, but whenever they see the cabin, whenever they see the train station that has the “white” and “colored” signs vividly outside with the artifacts inside, they've written some phenomenal blogs and essays on how it's really begun to change their thinking about their own sense of knowing, and how they teach students.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

What I'm hearing is that the key, really, to engaging the descendant community is building relationships that are mutual, that are two-way. In other words, it's not just a give or a take, but it's a give and a take. It's respecting people's histories, and people's experiences, including fraught and tense contemporary experiences with place. Price, I'm wondering if you could say a little bit about how you go about, how Montpelier has gone about, developing and cultivating relationships based on trust and mutual respect with the descendant community?

PRICE THOMAS

Part of it comes from a clarity of mission, and you know, another part of it comes from honesty. When we talk about our American DNA, when we talk about the evolution of this country, it's not really rainbows and sunshine. And black history is not hardly, in any case, rainbows and sunshine for a lot of people. And for a lot of these descendants, this is a real, lived experience for them. They remember those stories passed down from their parents or grandparents or great-grandparents, which is extremely important to us. The other thing, I think, is an openness to more than just what we can find in the historical record. A large portion of our descendant community doesn't come with DNA evidence, or documentary evidence for a multitude of reasons—but that doesn't devalue their stories; that doesn't devalue their oral histories, or the impact that this history has on them and their families. For a lot of the folks that come through, it's merely a connection to the history, a connection to our mission, a connection to our work.

Part of the reason that we have such an active and engaging descendant community is that we are excited and respectful, and overwhelmingly appreciative that they're willing to share those stories with us. A lot of that's tough to talk about. It's tough to rehash, and sometimes uncomfortable, but this is sort of the courage, and the wisdom, that filters through them from their side, has really helped us to be more open, to be more honest and has shaped our interpretation over the past 15 years here at the site.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

If I could tag onto that, one of the things that I've heard Kat Imhoff, the president, say: “You don't have to spit into a test tube for us to check your DNA for you to be engaged with Montpelier.” There are people who are engaged who are biological descendants; there are people who are engaged because they may have lived in this area all their lives, but not necessarily know their ancestry. There are people who realized they may have just cultural connections to the experience of enslaved Africans coming to Virginia, you know, right down the road, you know, in Jamestown, in 1619. I think it's an openness, and a welcome spirit, that Montpelier has had to just to learn, to learn the different stories, to learn the different perspectives. And honestly to be able to say, “We don't know.” It's an empowering, so to speak, that comes from mutual respect of being willing to listen, and also being willing to take the hits when decisions are made, when things are done, and people within the descendant community go, “You know, you might want to think about that.”

But, when you think that it's genuine in terms of people asking, and people understand that I don't have the same kind of understandings that you do, and let us sit at the table and see if we can mutually engage where we have similarities, but also respecting those differences. As you know, we've been in different settings where there have been some tough conversations, and some things have been thrown out, and people have had to have some pretty thick skin, and, yet, I think it's the courageous kind of conversations that we've been able to begin here on a smaller scale, that we could use a lot more of in society today, in other realms, in terms of people who may seem to be different, but we find that we have much more in common, in some ways, than we think we do.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Dr. Grimes, I wonder to what extent the absence of a white, organized descendant community of James Madison, that has been deeply invested in perpetuating that master narrative that you have talked about, creates space for the participation, inclusion, incorporation of an African-American descendant community?

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Oh, I definitely think it's made all the difference in the world, that not having, as I refer to, that dominant narrative with descendants, who, for their own reasons, were invested in the story, and the history, and the culture of being retold in certain ways.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Obviously, James and Dolley Madison don't have any biological children, so you don't have a white descendant community like you have at Monticello with (Thomas) Jefferson, or Mount Vernon with George Washington.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

There was a space that was there, and, I guess, good fortune for the African-American community that it was a space that was waiting to be filled. And because, again, people within the community were willing to have their story told, I don't think descendants ever looked at it in terms of an either/or, or a counter-narrative; it was just our story. And the fact that there wasn't another story that had to constantly be challenged, or to have the debates going back and forth. I think it's definitely helped the ... I don't want to say the speed in which things have happened, because, you know, that's a very relative term. But when you look at where Montpelier was in 2005 when I came to Virginia, for example, and look at what we've accomplished over this period of time, there's still much more to be done, and yet when you look at where other historical sites are still in time and space, I think we have been able to do some things that we might not have been able to do otherwise.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

You mention this idea of our story, African Americans, descendants of the enslaved community at Montpelier, wanting to share their story, wanting to share our story. Collective story of the experience of being enslaved, but then also the experience of fighting slavery, transitioning to freedom and giving meaning to freedom. Christian, Montpelier very easily could have said, "That's great—we're so happy to hear your stories, and thank you very much." And moved right on. But Montpelier didn't do that; you didn't do that. In fact, you wound up creating an entire exhibit, "The Mere Distinction of Color," that really explored this part of the Madison household, if you will, of this community of Montpelier that just wasn't white

with a few black folks sprinkled around, but that had black folks central to the entire Montpelier experience. Could you give us an overview of, first, how the exhibit came about, and the thinking behind it, and then also sort of what could visitors expect to see when they come to see the exhibit?

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Montpelier's been open to telling the other side of the story, I think, for as long as I can remember. We've always valued the African-American experience—and the African-American journey here, and because of Madison, and because of his connection with the Constitution, you have this sort of arc of citizenship that you can track, here, through the historic sites. Patrice was talking about this a little bit. We have sites here going back to the 1720s and '30s of enslavement, all the way through the 20th century. There was a Civil War camp here; the Confederate army camped here over the winter between Gettysburg and Wilderness, and so there are these archeological remains of Confederate sites. And then you have the Reconstruction era, George Gilmore cabin, that's built right on top of that Confederate encampment, and then you have the 1910 segregated train depot, talking about Jim Crow and the segregation era.

So, we've had, for a long time, we've had this story of the arc of citizenship, and really the descendant community is the part of the story that brings it to the present day, because if you have the segregation leading into the civil rights era, and then the descendant community is the present tense. Over the last several years—the exhibit project that you're talking about started in 2015, just a year before that, we had had a meeting with the descendant community, and we brought them in for a three-day weekend. Patrice, remember this? Where we talked about interpretation.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

I do. And I think it's no coincidence, as I sit here and think, that if any site were to be the site for this, it would be Montpelier because of Madison being the father of the Constitution. And what immediately came up in that meeting was just the contradiction. How can someone who has written these precepts that we've had for 200-plus years, done that, and still been the slaveholder? And I think these questions, which are more in academic circles—and we're hearing more about them now—were not even on people's lips 10, 15 years ago. And so, again, with a strong educational program at Montpelier related to the Constitution, and having Constitutional scholars, and educators, and people coming from all over the world to learn, it really seems that now had to be the time to continue to do that work and move forward. You can't not include the role of the African folks who were here and did that.

Again, I look at the arc of, you know, with the Obama presidency, you know, for the eight years, how that is overlaid with this. There were some things, I think, that were very unique that kind of came together to make more and more people realize “No, this is my country. The stories need to be told. The history needs to be uncovered.” It's very much interwoven, and we're never going to move forward if we don't acknowledge, and teach, and deal with what has happened in the past. Because if we don't, we continue to be stuck, and we never will be able to move ahead.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

I think that really came out in that meeting that we had in 2014 when the descendant community came and we spent three days examining the different kinds of interpretation we do about African-American

history at Montpelier at the time. We walked through every different program that we offer; we spent a whole day doing that, and we brought in outside scholars from the new Museum of African-American History and Culture, which hadn't opened yet, but they had a staff, and a few people came down to give talks and tell us what was going on in the world of African-American interpretation around the world. And then we spent a whole day asking the community, "What would you like to see us do? What else needs to be here? What aren't we doing?" And of course, the big resounding thing that came back was that we had to put the African-American presence, the enslaved presence, back on the landscape. We couldn't allow visitors to leave here without realizing that there were over 100 people enslaved here at any one time.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And I think that that was a key ah-ha moment in the room because I think so often museums and historical sites think of themselves as being local, and they think and work from the inside out. And I think because of the way everything was evolving, we realized that Montpelier, and the experiences that we were having, were perhaps not unique, but they were an example of a larger world. And so then, to have scholars and people come in, and give us a sense of the diaspora, and how that then played into the Americas, and how Montpelier was an example of that, at that moment, I think, everyone looked at one another and we realized that what we were doing was so much bigger, even than recounting the stories of the enslaved families and people who were here. But, it truly was a representation of the experiences of many people—even if they had never physically been connected, or been to, Montpelier. So that's when the potential of an exhibit became very exciting because we just hadn't seen anywhere where a national site was willing to make the international and worldwide connection of enslaved people and slavery, bringing it through the present day. In addition to the personal connection, and the personal stories that people had.

That's why I think "The Mere Distinction of Color" has become an exhibit that people really want to see because it tells the two stories simultaneously. They exist in tandem. It's not an "either/or"; It clearly brings out the personal stories of people, and how their lives were affected, but it also places those people in a bigger societal institutional realm, which we as a society very often don't want to do because we don't want to look at the structures that create the inequality. It's much easier to talk about the individual stories.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Yeah, and that's—exactly what Patrice is talking about is exactly what came out of our next meeting with the descendant community advisory council, right? Which is after we had created a rough conceptual plan of the exhibit, we shared it with a group of about 30 people and let them tear it to pieces, and that was a hard day.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Yeah.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

What came out of that meeting, and meetings before as well, was that, as the home of the father of the Constitution, we needed to own the fact that the Constitution protected the institution of slavery in about a half dozen different ways, and our guy is the guy who created that thing. So, we needed to own that and unpack that for people. We needed to help them explore how slavery fit into the economy of the

young nation, and for Madison in particular, how it fit into the ideology of the young nation. Our exhibit does that. It looks at economy. It looks at ideology. It unpacks the ways that the Constitution protected the institution of slavery.

But, then, we also needed to own the fact that because the Constitution protected slavery, even though the Constitution also ended slavery in 1865, there are repercussions to that institution. Right? There are reverberations. There's a legacy of that institution that we live with every day in our society. We needed to own that, and unpack that for people, and to put it out there. Which I think is probably one of the most provocative parts of our exhibit. We made about a 12-minute-long video piece, that's a multiscreen video experience, that looks at the legacy of slavery and takes it right up to the present day, which is something that a lot of museums heretofore have not been willing to do. But our leadership went there, and I'm glad they did. We've won a couple of national awards for that piece in particular.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

It's much easier to keep people frozen in time because then you don't have to be inclusive.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Right.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And you can just continue to do what you've always done, and there's people who will be receptive to that. But, if you're really about being more inclusive, telling a more complete history, engaging people in ways that they have not been engaged before, and more importantly, trying to make these past-to-present connections so we can move forward, and not stay on rewind, I think that's another way that Montpelier is showing other museums and educators and people in the area that it's possible. And as Christian alluded to, it's not easy work. We definitely did have to have a facilitator, and we had to take some breaks, but people were still willing to come back to the table. Again, because we shared the common vision of wanting that story to be as representative as it could be in today's time. And that again is another thing that I think makes it different from other sites.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Yeah, and another way that past-present connection works, the connecting of the dots, is part of the exhibit talks about the national story of slavery, as we just discussed, but the other part of the exhibit looks at the lived experience of slavery here at Montpelier. So many museums have talked about slavery before, but most museums focus on the daily work, the poor living conditions and the hard work that the enslaved had to do, or go through.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Or there may be one or two people who are identified in the narrative, and they become the focal point, or the example, and you know, that's one of the issues that I do have with some sites in this area—that you can talk about one person, but completely forget about all of the people, in many realms, who made that life possible, and that their lives were not only the day-to-day existence, but just the resilience, the strength. Just so many characteristics and features which we talk about in other realms, but have never been intertwined in telling those narratives as well.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Yeah, you know, in most museums, you either have the celebrity enslaved person, or you treat all of the enslaved as a monolithic group that all share the same experience. I think when we study slavery, we think about this monolith, right, of 12 million people who are enslaved all have the same experience, and it's easy for that experience to be diluted that way because you're spreading it out over 12 million people. But, when you start to think about slavery happening to one person at a time, when you think about the enslaved grandmother, or the enslaved 6-year-old, or the enslaved father who loses his child, then it becomes more heartfelt. It's harder to process that. Which is probably why a lot of museums have steered away from that: because it's not a happy museum experience—it's a painful museum experience. But we wanted people to empathize with the lives of the enslaved, so we designed one whole part of the exhibit to really be more of an emotional exploration of slavery than an academic one.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And it's very well done, in that it helps you understand the familial relationships, and that when people are being bought and sold, people are literally being severed from their families involuntarily. Perhaps never to be seen again. And just the emotional toll that that takes on people, and yet, we still rise. So, I think, again, the exhibit, because of the way in which it was designed, captures both of those.

Another area that we haven't mentioned yet that's on the property is the African-American Slave Cemetery. Again, as remains are uncovered throughout the site, there's a specific and very deliberate effort to memorialize, to commemorate, those sites—to mark them. When Juneteenth celebration occurs this year, co-sponsored with community organizations, one of the very first things that's done in any major program like that is that there's a libation ceremony or some sort of commemoration that is done to honor the ancestors who were a part of that. There are other historical sites where the remains have not been treated, or cared for, as considerately. It's things of that sort that I think say things to people when they come on the site without a guide, or without a specific direction: the way in which the care has been taken to honor those things that are an important part of the community.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

I think, too, your point about the ancestors and the descendant community is important, and it's something we took advantage of in the exhibit, because we thought, "Why tell this story through an institutional voice, or through an academic voice, when we have this wonderful community of descendants here?" So, for many parts of the exhibit, the narrative is told through the voices of the descendants. You have descendants telling their ancestors' story.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

I think, even if I'm not a descendant from Montpelier, because of my experience as a black American, I can come and I can have a connection, and I can relate, and it can perhaps give me an understanding. And that's what I think an important contribution is of what is happening here. And that as new family members are discovered, as new artifacts are discovered, as various things are happening, there's an elasticity, or a flexibility of what is here, so those things can be incorporated, as opposed to something being very stagnant, or static, and having to wait until someone else donates money to build a building, to then put things inside a building. So, there are multiple spaces and parts of the way this is designed that make it much more flexible. It's constantly a work in progress. Never would I think that Montpelier would be

finished. I mean, it's only as far as the next discovery. Whether it's archeological, whether it's familial, whether it's through historical records, whether it's through the academic work that's being done in the constitutional village. Again, there are many inroads, and many ways that people can contribute, and I think that makes it important, too.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

I'm so glad you touched upon the way in which the exhibition personalizes the enslaved experience. Christian, I remember when you were taking a group of us through for the first time, one of the first things you said was, "This isn't a re-enactment of the daily toils of an enslaved woman in a kitchen. That's not what we're after. We're about, certainly, explaining the hardship of the labor, and how labor was a part of the daily life, but that work in the kitchen was not the sum total of the experience of an enslaved person. That they lived full lives, that they had rich lives. That it was multigenerational. And, in a way, that slavery is not something as an institution." This really comes across throughout the entire exhibit, that is just local. Dr. Grimes, as you were pointing out, this isn't just a central Virginia, or Orange County story, or just a Montpelier story. This really is a national story, and in many ways, an international story.

I like that. If our listeners get to this episode, and they've listened to 1-11, then everything that they have been listening to, slavery and the Constitution, slavery and the Supreme Court, slavery and the Northern economy and those connections, the wonderful exhibit on trade, and the trade routes that were in and out of Montpelier, all of that is really brought out in very physical ways, represented in the exhibit. I think that's really a part of the power of what you have created.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

I realize, too, that because I have been involved with the descendant community for over 10 years, my lens is more focused than others, and yet, in bringing students here, in my own personal experiences, in talking with colleagues, I don't have a sense, when I leave Montpelier, of being heavy. I've been to certain exhibits where I leave, and there's a sense of either depression, or I feel downtrodden, or I feel pessimistic. On the contrary, whenever I come to Montpelier and I leave, there's always a sense of resilience. There's always a sense of uplift. There's always a sense that getting that more complete story gives me a sense of ownership, it gives me a sense of pride—but it also makes me want to act. It makes me want to do. It's not just enough to come here and say, "Oh, this is nice." It really brings it to today in terms of "How can I take all of this that's here, and how can I continue to push it and move it forward?"

It is physically beautiful. I mean, I tell people that this part of central Virginia is one of the most beautiful places that I've ever visited. And I've been fortunate to be in many. Just the awe of all of that. And yet, as one of the descendants at Montpelier told some students in my class, "You see the Blue Ridge Mountains, and it looks beautiful, and yet you have to remember that for the people who were enslaved, that mountain was a barrier. They weren't thinking about what was beyond that for the westward expansion. It was a barrier that they were never able to cross." So, there are all these dichotomies that are just constantly going on when you're here. I leave here just so much more stimulated. It's reflective, but yet I also want to put things into action, as well.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

I think that notion of action is really important to comment on because I think that's what differentiates

Montpelier's work from other historic sites, is that a lot of plantation homes have tracked the descendants of enslaved people, but for the most part, those other sites have looked at them as, almost like a scientific set of data. They want to know who's descended from whom, and where those people live.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Or a social club.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Yeah, to some extent, that's exclusive.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CHRISTIAN COTZ

But, for the most part, other sites have not tried to turn the descendant community into stakeholders, right?

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And I think that's the big difference. It's the descendant community, and also people within the broader community as well because there were people within Orange, Virginia, who were a part of making Montpelier happen. There was the enslaved community, and yet there were the tradespeople and farmers, and other people, as well. And so, it was a very interactive group of people at that time, and so there are no clear lines that are drawn in terms of "You're a descendant, but you're not." You know? "You were involved to this extent, but you weren't." Again, I think that's the case where, not having the baggage, I'll say, of having the dominant family, or the descendants, not having a narrative that you want to protect, or maintain for various reasons. That was freeing, in many ways, to kind of take that and turn it on its head, to give Montpelier... What could have been a liability, or people could have said, "You're too young. You don't have all these things; you don't have the depth." That really did become an advantage to say, "And with that, then, we are open to taking this where it goes."

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Mm-hmm. The point of walking through the exhibit, and coming out on the other side, and not feeling, Dr. Grimes, as you had pointed out, depressed and down, but, rather, hopeful, is a point that we have been trying to emphasize with this podcast. That if you teach, and talk about, and tell, the history of American slavery accurately, and honestly—meaning that you recognize and restore the humanity of enslaved people—that that is still a hard history, slavery will always be hard to talk about and teach, but it is very much a hopeful history for the very reason that you talked about. The resilience of a people to endure the worst that man had to offer, and still retain their humanity, and build upon that over the generations. Price, I'm wondering if you could share some of the reactions to the exhibit. It's been open for, coming up on a year now. Reactions from the public, just visitors coming through, but then also from professionals—professional historians, public history organizations, other museums, other historic sites and the like.

PRICE THOMAS

You've got a little bit of everything, to be honest. I mean, from all of our colleges, the reception has been

almost exclusively praiseworthy. I mean, the work that Christian and the team did putting it together, that the research group did, with the foundation, and Matt, Kat and the descendant community, and I mean, it really was the work of many hands, and it was exciting to see that all coalesce and come to fruition in a couple of physical spaces. So, the museum community has been “over the moon.” We’ve had people out here to tour it, and they’ve all loved it, and they’ve said how wonderful and brave—I think part of what’s interesting is that, you know, in talking to the folks around here, you know, we never really saw it as that. We just saw it as the right thing to do. You know? It is validating, right? But at the end of the day, we did what we did because it was right, and we have a responsibility when interacting with the public to tell an honest and complete story.

But, you know, obviously receiving applause from your peers is also great. Obviously, we won a couple of awards recently for some of the multimedia pieces. The public has been overwhelmingly positive as well, but I think part of the interest is that this exhibition was meant to have people feel some kind of way when they left, right? I think that it’s meant to be emotional, to a degree, and it’s meant to challenge people, and it’s meant to be unique and to offer everyone who comes through there something a little bit different. We’ve had tears, we’ve had anger, we’ve had curiosity. We’ve had people who want to have deeper discussions. That spans age, ethnicity, background, right?

It’s been really interesting to interact with folks as they come out, or to sort of walk around and watch how people are interacting with the different pieces or the quotes and comments that they leave in some of the ports where you can actually write and leave things there.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And yet, I think part of what’s interesting, too, is kind of the lens that people are coming in because we can navigate through places and spaces that we choose, and so it would still be possible, in some respects, if someone came and they wanted a more 1950s textbook history of Madison, to go to the house, to look at certain exhibits and so on, and you cannot physically skirt the exhibit, which I think is a brilliance of Montpelier—that you may try to avoid it in some ways, you know, you may have a guide that may emphasize one thing over another—but it’s the physical presence of the exhibit that’s here that’s just undeniable. And yet, I have had students who’ve come, and I’ve gotten comments from them where they weren’t necessarily ready for what they were going to hear, and they were expecting a more generalist perspective, and so when they did hear the descendants talk about the enslaved community, and see certain things, it was disturbing. These are 20- and 21-year-old students at the University of Virginia who are thought to be well versed and have studied.

I have observed even younger students, and I think the word “disturbed” is accurate because they then wrote essays and blogs about it. And yet, I’ve had the benefit of engaging with those students over time, and invariably, given three months, or six months, or definitely no more than an academic year, I’ve had a couple students come back and go, “You know, I think I’m going to go to Montpelier again.” I can’t think of too many college students, for all the things that they could do, that might say they’re going to visit a historical site on their own time, you know, before they graduate. I think it’s most profound because it’s making people think. And if people may not be ready to do that, they still have to see what they see, and that in and of itself is enough to begin to move people in a way that they might not have been moved otherwise.

PRICE THOMAS

Yeah, and then there's an element, like Patrice said, an element of confrontation to it. In all places in our lives, we self-select as much as we want to, and as much as we can, but there is an element of coming here where you are faced head-on with a part of this history. The depth with which you choose to interact with that, right, is up to you. We hope you'll come and experience it in its fullest form, but whether or not you do that, it is a part of the landscape; it is a part of the vernacular. It is a large part of our mission and what we want to do. And that is, bring that forward to the public.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And part of the restoration that's really been important, is that it's happening throughout the grounds, and throughout the area. Fifteen years ago, if you drove into Montpelier, you wouldn't have seen the cabins where the enslaved people lived next to the house. You cannot miss it. You physically drive down a long view, and you can see them there, and yet that's not the only place where they are. Because, you know, I've been to some other historical houses in parts of the South, and you'll see the cabins close to the front of the house where the people who worked in the house are, but there's never any mention of any people who worked in the field, or did any other duties.

One thing that I think is represented and important here is that as you walk through the grounds of Montpelier, there are various sites that are noted throughout the grounds of where the presence of the lives of those folk were. I think there's subtle things like that, but I think they're very important distinctions that are made, in terms of having that presence be around people as soon as they set sight on the grounds.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

I think it's that cognitive dissonance that we were after, right? I mean, when you said, "challenge people," and I think that that's one of the things that we wanted to do, is challenge people's perspectives—or perceptions, I should say—of their history. Everybody wants to remember the rosy version and not the real version. For us to challenge those perceptions, and make people stop, and reconsider, and think, and start a conversation on the way home, or come back three months later, is exactly what we were hoping for.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And, so, I think this kind of segues, in some ways, into just the educational part, which I've been involved. Not only was there the physical restoration, and not only has there been the exhibits, but also the work that's been done at Montpelier with the docents, with the people conducting tours. With the people that Matt Reeves has worked with in-depth with the archeology. The language in which people are using, as facts are verified, as new archeological discoveries occur, how that is interwoven into the narrative. That there is an effort made that it's a more inclusive narrative for anyone who comes with any particular group. It's not an à la carte where you kind of pick and choose what you include and what you don't. Because at the end of the day, it's that teaching that occurs, and the follow-up from that, that then gets the story beyond Montpelier, in addition [to] the technology that can really make a difference and have that transfer from generation to generation.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

That's a great point, and I'm glad you brought it up because one of the things that I think many of our listeners would be interested in are ways to incorporate something like historic sites like Montpelier into a

curriculum—whether it’s through a physical visit, or from a distance virtually. Dr. Grimes, do you have any thoughts about the best ways to incorporate into curriculum historic sites such as Madison’s Montpelier?

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Yeah. As a matter of fact, every semester that I’ve taught my social studies course to students who are going into their field for their initial teaching positions, I’ve incorporated what I call the field trip, or the road trip. I think for professors, for educators, it has to be deliberate, it has to be specific—it can’t be “the food, folks and fun.” It really has to be grounded in terms of helping people understand this is a part of the narrative and the content that’s really important. For my fellow educators out there, I would recommend plan the trip, and for many semesters, I would do it with students. The last two semesters, I have not been able to have them physically be together; they’ve gone on their own. I’m getting feedback from that to see the differences between a group experience versus an individual experience. But yet, it must be scaffolded, and it must be built into what you’re doing. Sites like Montpelier become an exemplar. They’re a case study for how we can teach social issues using historical sites. How we can teach history—I know with the Teaching Tolerance work, this has been done, teaching the hard history. What better way to have an example that people can see this, either by physically visiting the site, or this is where we benefit from technology, where you can do this in a virtual sort of way.

Again, when students can do the inquiry, and they have the evidence that they can look at themselves, it’s not me telling them what happened, it’s them having the tools to be able to discover, and inquire, to examine the documents, to ask the questions. For them to tussle with it, and them to then get the insights that come from it. I mean, that’s really authentic learning in that way. The feedback that I’ve gotten from my student-teachers in the field is, they’ve taken classes from as young as fifth grade, all the way to 11th grade, and brought them here. One of the reasons they were able to come was having had that experience in their own preservice teaching and training. It made it easier for them to think about considering doing it when they’re in the field, particularly at a time when sometimes funds in school districts have limited the degree the students can travel and do field trips and things like that outside of school.

Then finally, the curriculum. It really is important that we have the proper curriculum. Having the work that Teaching Tolerance has done, having workshops with teachers to specifically engage with that material, all of it works together, and yet the curriculum is important because many people will never be able to come to this site, and yet, with that material, and with technology, they can still engage their students in a way to make it relevant and important.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

I think, too, when you think about primary sources that students interact with, so often, it’s the master narrative, right? It’s the dominant narrative, and the primary sources you see are the Constitution, the Declaration. You don’t see, maybe it’s a letter between Madison and Jefferson, but it’s certainly not a letter between Madison’s enslaved field worker and his wife, or between Paul Jennings, Madison’s enslaved manservant, and Dolley, who’s requesting time away from Dolley because his own wife is dying, and he wants to be at her side. And those sorts of primary sources open your eyes to the other side of history.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

They do. Particularly for elementary students, just the concreteness of it all—that if they can’t come to Montpelier, they can look online and they can see, these are the tools that people used, these are the nails

that were made that built the buildings that are here. Again, that tactile sense for younger children is so important, and that's an initial connection that they don't forget, so when they get into other places and spaces, they can make connections that way, too.

PRICE THOMAS

And there's also this relevance and context side of it, which, I think when it comes to schools and education, it's vitally important. We talk about how we were all acculturated. Obviously, we have Patrice from working at UVA; Christian, who's an alumnus at JMU; myself at William and Mary, and we sort of forget the bubbles in which we live and influence our views of the world. I think that understanding history, and understanding why two black dudes can't sit in Starbucks, but a white girl can carry an AR-15 on a college campus—why is that the way it is? Why do those things matter? I think part of the way we educate kids now, it's so content-focused. Do you know names? Do you know dates? But we can talk more about the how and the why, and why these things manifest themselves the way that they do, and what's the historical context for a lot of the modern issues that we're dealing with today that are popping up in the news, and that really hit our area of Virginia a year ago. Again, starting to put all of these pieces together, you know, has become very important to us.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

You should talk about the Let 'Em Shine program and the tandem programs that we put together because that's a whole different kind of education that we turn this exhibit that's primarily about the past to the present day.

PRICE THOMAS

Yeah. We had the opportunity to run two programs earlier this year for the Albemarle County Public Schools, and for a local private school, and we did exactly that. It was a combined effort site wide—and also some great friends of ours from various sites, and also some of our exhibition fabricators—where we were able to bring students out here to have those more in-depth, a little more esoteric conversations, about how history maps to today, and trying to bring it forth for this younger generation. How is it relevant to 17-, 18-, 19-year-olds today? How do we use history to have modern conversations? Do we understand how slavery and Reconstruction and Jim Crow influences a lot of the issues we see today when we talk about the achievement gap or wage discrimination or mass incarceration? All these things matter, and all these things are connected. I think an important part of being a cultural institution in our evolution, to be able to engage the public on a more real level, is to be able to talk about these things. To talk about, and to deconstruct, what white privilege means. Why don't people understand what that means? How do we branch that out across history? How do we talk to people in a very realistic way about that? Again, always grounded in what we know, and what we have. Which is history, and which is this Constitutional framework of America.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

That's a great way to sort of wrap it up and bring us to the present, connecting—Price, as you had mentioned earlier—the past to the present, and keeping in mind this idea of the power of a place like Montpelier because of the work that it's doing as a site where authentic history—I really like that term, authentic learning—can take place. I think that's really powerful, and what we want to get at in the end. That's the kinds of experiences, both in the classroom, and taking the classroom outside of the school building—

outside of the schoolhouse, the college, the high school, the middle school—where that kind of learning that is most impactful and powerful can take place.

Christian, one last question: Where do we go from here? Where does Montpelier go from here? Where does the exhibit go from here? Dr. Grimes had pointed out that, and I think she’s absolutely right, this isn’t, it’s not a static exhibit; as new material, new interpretation, literally, as the archival work, as building reconstruction takes place, new interpretations, new descendants become a part of the conversation, this history is still evolving and being told in a way. I just wonder, where do you envision? Where do you see Montpelier going from here?

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Well, I think, like so much of my experience at Montpelier, it’s sort of “We’ll figure it out as we go,” and then do a good job at getting there. A couple of things have shaken out recently that are really interesting and surprising and were not foreseen. One, this past February we hosted an event that we called the National Summit on Teaching Slavery, through which we invited academics and other museum professionals, and descendants from plantations all across the South to come join us at Montpelier—there were 50 people in total—to talk about the best practices that museums can engage in when they engage descendant communities. We talked about different practices and research, and relationship building, and relationship maintaining. And education. And interpretation. What are the best ways to go about doing this?

Out of those 50 people, we had stories of success, we had stories of failure, mistakes. We had people who hadn’t done any of it before, people who were there to learn. We had voices, again, from the descendant community, and from the academic side of things. That was a really useful three-day weekend, and the results will be published, hopefully, in the near future, in a small pamphlet that we’re putting together that will be sort of a rubric for other sites to follow. Sort of a guidebook. Because when Montpelier engaged in this work, it hadn’t been written about in the academy. There was no scholarship that said, “This is what you should do if you’re going about this kind of work.” It was really sort of groundbreaking.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

And probably good that it hadn’t because it then helped it be from the bottom-up. It helped it germinate and take the life that it took. Because in the academy, if somebody gives you the blueprint, people tend to follow that. I think, again, it was good that that did not exist because we didn’t have any limits. There were no boundaries on where we would take it, and what we could do. And also, too—I was fortunate to be at that session, and there are varying academic viewpoints as well. There are people who think that the envelope needs to be pushed much farther and much harder. There are people who are looking on a global level. There are people who want the local interpretations to go deeper. I think it was important for all of us to see that there is no one way; that there’s a range in which this is being done, and trying to find the places and the spaces that would be inclusive of all of that. I think that was important for us to see, too.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

And then, the other thing that’s come up is we opened the exhibit last June, and literally two months later, we had the events of August 12th happen in Charlottesville, right down the road. I mean, most of the people who work at Montpelier live in and around Charlottesville. It’s our urban center. It’s our home city.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

For me, I had the Klan literally march two blocks from my house in Charlottesville, and so to have done all that work last summer, and then to have experienced the violent riots in Charlottesville within a matter of a couple months, it was quite a year.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

And since then, we've had teachers, and we've had leaders of nonprofits and leaders of museums, different corporate groups, come to us and say, "We want to do something with our class, our group, our staff, about race and identity." Most of the people who are calling us don't know what they want to do—they just know that we have this exhibit, and they want to come and use the exhibit as a vehicle to talk with their group, their community, about all of this stuff that's going on. We've had to respond to that in the best way we can, but we're historians. We're really good at talking about stuff that's happened up to about, I don't know, 30, 40, 50 years ago. But, get us to start talking about current events and it gets a lot more challenging. It's not what we're trained to do. That's one of the things that we're doing now: we're going through some facilitated dialogue training with our staff, and trying to get people geared up to talk to our visitors about how the history of slavery really does have a legacy that's very present in our society today, and how we come to terms with that. And what we can do about it.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

All right. I don't know how y'all feel about that, but I thought that was fantastic.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Good.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Christian Cotz, Price Thomas, Dr. Patrice Grimes, thank you so much for sharing your expertise, your insights and your experiences with how to tell this hard history of American slavery accurately, honestly and effectively. Thank you so much.

CHRISTIAN COTZ

Thank you.

PRICE THOMAS

Thanks, man.

PATRICE PRESTON GRIMES

Thank you, our pleasure.

HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES

Christian Cotz is the director of education and visitor engagement at James Madison's Montpelier. Price Thomas is the director of marketing and communications. And Dr. Patrice Preston Grimes has been involved in the African-American Descendants Project at Montpelier as an educational consultant. She is an associate professor of social studies education and an associate dean in the office of African-American Affairs at the University of Virginia.

Teaching Hard History is a podcast from Teaching Tolerance, with special thanks to the University of Wisconsin Press. They're the publishers of a valuable collection of essays called *Understanding and Teaching American Slavery*. In each episode, we're featuring a different scholar to talk about material from a chapter they authored in that collection. We've also adapted their recommendations into a set of teaching materials, which are available at [Tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org). These materials include over 100 primary sources, sample units and a detailed framework for teaching about the history of American slavery. Teaching Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, providing free resources to educators who work with children from kindergarten through high school. You can also find these online at [Tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org).

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