



AAHGS

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 73067, Washington, DC 20056-3067, www.aahgs.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 16, 2019

BREAKING NEWS!

*AS AMERICA COMMEMORATES ARRIVAL OF FIRST AFRICANS,
AFRO-AMERICAN HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGY SOCIETY CONDEMNS
RACIALLY INSENSITIVE COMMENT AS JAMESTOWN LEADERS DOUBLE DOWN*

Several Afro-America Historical and Genealogy Society (AAHGS) members recently saw and heard a presentation at the Jamestown Discovery project where they were told that the first Africans to arrive in Virginia were slaves because their skin color was black and therefore “dark, dirty, and ugly.”

As stated by Ric Murphy, *AAHGS National Vice President for History*, I’ve had several pleasant visits at Jamestown in the past. However on May 31, I accommodated a colleague’s request to get a historical context of Jamestown, I was shocked to hear racially charged comments from a staff member of Jamestown Rediscovery. The presentation was with approximately 30 persons in attendance, including Dr. Evelyn McDowell, National President of the Sons and Daughters of the United States Passage. That staff member, a Jamestown Rediscovery Manager of Public Relations, said “they” – meaning Jamestown Rediscovery-knew that the first Africans were slaves because “their skin was black in color and black represented dark, dirty, and ugly.” In the same breath, he said the English were not slaves because “their skin represented white, purity and beauty.” The Jamestown Rediscovery Manager, in an attempt to prove this point, then gave an example of how “five African Princesses noticed how the skin of the English was white, so they wanted to become beautiful and pure and wanted to move north to become white and beautiful.” In disbelief Murphy asked the Jamestown Rediscovery Manager how he had come to this understanding, and said manager responded that what he had learned in school in Virginia, which was that the first Africans were indentured, but that he was simply sharing what he later learned-once he began working at Jamestown Rediscovery-that the first Africans “were slaves because their skin was black, dark, dirty and ugly.”

Upon hearing about this, AAHGS National President Gene Stephenson wrote to several Virginia state dignitaries, including Jamestown Rediscovery’s Board Chair Elizabeth S. Kostelny of Preservation Virginia.

Believing that Preservation Virginia and its staff would follow their Crisis Management Plan, Stephenson commented, “I thought they would reply with an innocuous letter stating that it was a misunderstanding, that they would do better in the future, and that they would take steps to work with us and others to make this a better world. Instead, I was shocked when they doubled down on the initial comment and attempted to justify it with a fictitious 1605 play, *The Masque of Blackness*, as the purported rationale for present day highly charged and racially insensitive comments.

AAHGS respectfully requests a public apology since there were those in attendance and others who were personally offended. The immediate ceasing and desisting of such racially charged and misleading presentations, and the immediate creation and implementation of a historical accurate presentation.

Attachments provided with further details and personal reactions.

#

ABOUT AAHGS: The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. is a non-profit membership organization that strives to preserve African ancestral family history, genealogy, and cultural diversity by teaching research techniques and disseminating information throughout the community. Our primary goals are to promote scholarly research, provide resources for historical and genealogical studies, create a network of persons with similar interests, and assist members in documenting their family histories.

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AAHGS

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

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P.O. Box 73067 Washington, D.C. 20056-3067 www.aahgs.org

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July 4, 2019

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Honorable Ralph Northam
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Richmond, Virginia 23218

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VACANT

Re: Racial Incident at State Funded Program – Jamestown Discovery

At-Large Members

Robert Wimberly

Dear Governor Northam:

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The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. is a member based non-profit corporation dedicated to advancing the study of African American history and family genealogy. Established in 1977 in Washington, DC, the mission of the organization, and its affiliated chapters, is to preserve African-ancestored family history, genealogy, and cultural diversity by promoting scholarly research, providing resources for historical and genealogical studies, creating a network of persons with similar interests, and assisting members in documenting their histories.

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Paula Matabane

On this July Fourth weekend as we reflect upon the important role that the great state of Virginia played in the American struggle for independence, we as an organization also embrace the historical significance of state's 400th Commemoration of the First Documented Africans in English America.

Public Relations Director

Toni Byrd-Vann

Special Projects Director

Marilyn Campbell

As Americans of African descent, our struggles are ongoing and diverse. We continue to strive for justice, dignity and economic prosperity. We seek out programing that embraces African American history and culture, and applaud those efforts that build a collective nation, not those that divide us. We congratulate the Jamestown Rediscovery for their recent marketing efforts to the African American community with the launch of the *Angela Project*. It is in this regard that I write to you this day to bring to your attention incidents that have occurred over the past several months at the state funded Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation at Historic Jamestown.

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Robert Burch

Past President

Sherri Camp

President Emeritus

Barbara Walker

Several members from one of our chapters were on the Historic Jamestown *Angela Project* tour when the guide made inaccurate, inappropriate, and insensitive remarks. Initially we believed the situation to be isolated to that particular tour. However, that is not the case. Our National Vice President for History also had the same experience, as did our National President of the Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage. Both witnessed first-hand, the vile comments made by a Jamestown Rediscovery Manager of Public Relations that were deeply troubling, racially insensitive, offensive, and in violation of state law and executive orders.

Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia
RE: Racial Incident at State Funded Program – Jamestown Discovery
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Specifically, during the presentation on the *Angela Project*, the guide stated that the reason “we know that the first Africans that arrived at Jamestown were slaves, was because their skin was black.” He further explained that “the English and other Europeans viewed the black skin of Africans, as dark, ugly and represented evil.” He further volunteered that the English who worked at Jamestown were indentured servants because their skin “was white, representing purity and beauty.” To further prove his point, he offered a tale of “five African princesses who noticed the beauty of the European colonizers in Africa and wanted to move north so that their skin would become white, and they too would become beautiful.”

Our National Vice President for History (who was also present) asked the tour guide where he learn this, and was told that when he “went to school in Virginia he learned that the first documented Africans who came [to Virginia] were indentured servants, but upon working at Jamestown [Rediscovery], that he learned they were slaves because of their skin color and that is how the English looked at them when they arrived.” At this point said staff member realized that his words were being carefully scrutinized attempted to walk back his initial comments.

When the tour group walked over to the archeological site, our National Vice President stood apart from the larger group, whereby the tour guide approached him and attempted once again to clarify his statements. Our National Vice President politely asked for his business card, at which time it was provided. It was then that the two men were joined by a man and woman who witnessed the comments and stated that they were foreign tourists. The gentleman stated that he was an African who came to learn about Virginia history and came upon the tour, and stated that he “was so happy that the tour guide was challenged by his comments by our National Vice President, for he personally felt sicken and felt like crawling under the chair [bench] he was sitting on,” his wife who was English, and more verbal, “told the tour guide that he had just ruined their entire trip to America, and that she and her husband who lived and traveled all across Europe and Africa had never heard such insulting remarks.”

We believe that this incident was not an isolated one. We further believe that these demeaning comments heard over a period of time, both erodes the institutions integrity as it perceptively represents a systemic problem in the overall philosophy of the educational training at a state funded facility; that the problem starts at the very top of the institution, and possibly with its board of directors, and cannot be minimized/swept beneath the rug by a few marketing campaigns and/or a series of well-designed public outreach programs.

As the Commonwealth of Virginia and its Tourism Bureau prepares to roll out the red carpet for the thousands of Americans of African and European descent expected at the 400th Commemoration of the First Documented Africans in English America, it is most important that all tour guides and staff be properly trained. Particularly those serving the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation at Jamestown *Angela Project*.

I look forward to opening up a dialogue with you to discuss this particular incident and remedial steps to prevent recurrence of this problem going forward. I can be reached directly at 404-557-6792.

Respectfully,

Gene R. Stephenson II, National President
Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia
RE: Racial Incident at State Funded Program – Jamestown Discovery
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cc: Honorable Congressman Bobby Scott
Honorable Congressman A. Donald McEachin
Honorable State Senator Mamie Locke
Honorable State Senator Yvonne B. Miller
Honorable State Delegate Kenneth Cooper Alexander
Honorable State Delegate Marcia Price
Honorable State Delegate Algie Howell
Honorable State Delegate Matthew James
Honorable State Delegate Delores McQuinn
Honorable State Delegate Lionell Spruill, Sr.
Honorable State Delegate Luke Torian
Honorable State Delegate Jeion Ward
Honorable State Delegate Onzlee Ware
Reverend Kevin Chandler, NAACP, Virginia State Conference
AAHGS - Board of Directors
AAHGS - Chapter Presidents
Elizabeth S. Kostelny, Chair, Preservation Virginia
James Horn, President of Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation and COO Historic Jamestowne



PRESERVATION VIRGINIA

15 July 2019

Mr. Gene R. Stephenson II
National President
Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

Dear Mr. Stephenson,

Thank you for your letter dated 4 July 2019. I deeply regret the historical information conveyed on the First Africans Tour of the Angela site was misinterpreted and misunderstood as personal or organizational opinion. That is not our intention. Our goal is to share an honest story of the origins of racism that still afflicts this country today. If that was not clear on the tour your colleagues experienced, we apologize.

Our interpreters employ quotes from period documents and plays to graphically illustrate how the Europeans rationalized the transatlantic trafficking of human lives. In the seventeenth century, the words were intended to dehumanize Africans and justify their enslavement. They are offensive, difficult to hear and a powerful way to illustrate that words can be employed to defend inhumane practices.

I want to acknowledge a foundational principle of our interpretation on site. There has been significant debate among historians about the legal status of the Africans in 1619. While some historians argue that the Africans were indentured servants, due to the fact that some early Africans were eventually freed, it is our position that the first Africans were enslaved despite the absence of clearly defined slave laws in early Virginia until half a century later. To make this case, the First Africans tour was designed to provide the framework on how race-based slavery was established. The tour discusses the economic development of the colony: notably the rise of tobacco husbandry and consequent demand for labor, white and black, to work on the plantations being established along the James River Valley in these years.

As Virginia's leading nonprofit historic preservation advocate and the nation's oldest statewide preservation organization, Preservation Virginia believes that stories and resources of our past offer vital lessons to present and future generations about all facets of our complex history. Such lessons may be sobering, inspiring, and troubling, and preservation efforts must strive to capture, and not gloss over, the complexities of our history.

Our work across the Commonwealth, at our historic sites, and with our advocacy and programs has engaged communities and scholars to provide honest, research-based and community generated opportunities to expand the narrative and attempt to address the race-based inequities associated with Virginia's history. Working with members of local descendant communities, African American and tribal partner groups, advisors, consultants, colleges and universities, we actively engage with local, state and

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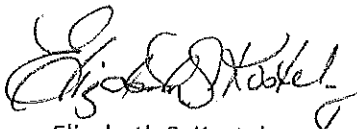
national partners including the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, National Park Service, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, Virginia African American Cultural Resources Task Force, Virginia Humanities and many more. Our work in collaboration with these advocates has raised awareness for the preservation of Shockoe Bottom, historic African American Schools including the survey and documentation of more than 380 Virginia Rosenwald Schools, supported preservation and funding of African American cemeteries and partnered with local communities to save resources related to African American history statewide.

As I shared with Mr. Murphy when we spoke prior to your letter being mailed, Preservation Virginia and our subsidiary the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation are private nonprofit organizations. While we work closely with a number of state agencies, we are not state funded. The responsibility for accepting this criticism and taking action are solely ours.

Thank you for sharing this experience on the First African Tour. Your observations about how the period quotes and fables were misconstrued is instructive and is being considered as we continue to refine our presentation. I am enclosing a statement from the team at Historic Jamestowne that specifically outlines the goals in the First Africans Tour. Links to several news stories featuring the program are provided as well.

We invite you to visit Historic Jamestowne to experience the First Africans Tour for yourself. I believe you will find it a powerful experience that offers the opportunity for thoughtful examination of the history and an engaged dialogue about the impact today.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth S. Kostelny
Chief Executive Officer

Enclosures

Cc: The Honorable Ralph Northam, Governor of Virginia
The Honorable Bobby Scott, U. S. House of Representatives
The Honorable A. Donald McEachin, U. S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Mamie E. Locke, Senate of Virginia
The Honorable Lionell Spruill, Sr., Senate of Virginia
The Honorable Delores L. McQuinn, Virginia House of Delegates
The Honorable Marcia S. Price, Virginia House of Delegates
The Honorable Jeion A. Ward, Virginia House of Delegates
The Honorable Kenneth Cooper Alexander, Mayor, City of Norfolk
The Honorable Mathew James, Deputy Director Department of General Services

The Honorable Onzlee Ware, Chief Judge Roanoke County

The Honorable Algie Howell

The Reverend Kevin Chandler, NAACP, Virginia State Conference

AAHGS—Board of Directors

AAGHS—Chapter Presidents

Dr. James P. Horn, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation, President and Historic Jamestowne,
COO

Historic Jamestown—Media Coverage of Research Program an Interpretation of the Angela Site

Meet Angela—One of the First Slaves to Arrive in America

DeNeen Brown, Washington Post, April 30, 2019

https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/04/29/she-was-captured-enslaved-years-ago-now-angela-symbolizes-brutal-history/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c043fc106a94

In Jamestown, a reckoning over American slavery's beginnings

Ben Finley AP August 28, 2018

<https://apnews.com/fcee9b41757045d3b15ce28e246e3f2f>

Probing for Signs of the First Africans

Mark St. John Erickson, Daily Press, May 10, 2018

<https://www.dailypress.com/features/history/dp-nws-jamestown-african-dig-20180430-story.html>

Jamestown Unearthed: Archaeologists study arrival of first Africans in English New World

Andrew Harris, WY Daily March 18, 2018

<https://wydaily.com/local-news/2018/03/05/jamestown-unearthed-archaeologists-study-arrival-of-first-africans-in-new-world/>

Jamestown Rediscovery

HISTORIC JAMESTOWNE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 12, 2019

Mr. Gene R. Stephenson, II

Dear Mr. Stephenson,

The "First Africans" tour at Historic Jamestowne is a one-hour presentation that was written to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Africans in 1619. This walking tour is offered to the public three times a week throughout the year. The tour provides a "big picture" look at the events of 1619 and ends at the "Angela Site," an archaeological excavation that seeks to learn more about the daily life of Angela, one of the first enslaved Africans at Jamestown, who lived in the household of a wealthy planter-merchant.

While the "Angela Project" is an archaeological partnership between the Colonial National Historical Park (NPS) and Preservation Virginia (PV), the "First Africans Tour" was written and is conducted by Preservation Virginia education staff members who work at Historic Jamestowne. Although Preservation Virginia does not rely on any state or federal funds, we do rely on the goodwill of our partners and seek to provide educational and engaging programs for all people.

There has been much debate and disagreement among historians about the legal status of the Africans in 1619. While some historians argue that the Africans were indentured servants, due to the fact that some early Africans were eventually freed, it is our position that the first Africans were enslaved despite the absence of clearly defined slave laws in early Virginia until half a century later. To make this case, the First



OFFICIAL
PRESERVATION VIRGINIA
HISTORIC SITE

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Jamestown
Rediscovery
Foundation

Africans tour was designed to provide the framework on how race-based slavery was established. The tour discusses the economic development of the colony: notably the rise of tobacco husbandry and consequent demand for labor, white and black, to work on the plantations being established along the James River Valley in these years.

Early English involvement in the transatlantic slave trade dating from the mid-16th century is also explored along with a consideration of the extremely influential precedents set by Portuguese and Spanish merchants and mariners who dominated the trade across the 16th and early 17th centuries. A most important point emphasized on the walking tour is that concepts of race, the emergence of racialized language, and color prejudice in Europe occurred simultaneously with the growth of the slave trade. The Africans in Virginia arrived in a colony already familiar with the association of African ethnicities, particularly sub-Saharan, and enslavement.

Mr. Stephenson writes in his recent letter that one of our tour guides spoke in a highly negative and offensive way about African peoples, telling a tale of African princesses who sought a means to become white. I cannot emphasize enough that these were not the opinions of the tour guide but a direct reference to a 1605 play *The Masque of Blackness* sponsored by Anne of Denmark, queen of James I of England. Extracts from the play are quoted to illustrate that racialized thinking and negative stereotypes of Africans already existed in early 17th century English society, even before the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in English America. Other plays, "scientific" writings, and government correspondence of the time reveal the range and prevalence of racist European stereotypes associating Africans with profoundly negative characteristics.

Those words are difficult to hear. They were (and are) ugly and degrading; symptomatic of a form of racism that became pervasive in Europe to justify the inhuman trafficking of African peoples on a massive scale. These beliefs crossed the Atlantic with colonists and fueled a culture that condemned fellow human beings to the status of a commodity. Racism and discrimination took shape 500 years ago and yet remains a potent challenge to the wellbeing of our society today.

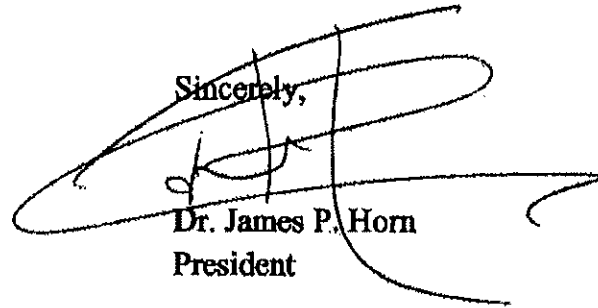
To be clear, the staff at Historic Jamestowne does not endorse the attitudes of 17th-century English colonists, but they are attitudes we believe should be confronted if we are to be honest about the role racism played in the founding of our society.

It is our hope that you or anyone from your office might be able to take the time to see

this tour for yourself. It has had an impact on our visitors and we have included reviews and letters of community support to make that case. I regret that in offering examples of the early evolution of European racist thinking anyone on the tour thought that we at Historic Jamestowne were expressing our own opinions. We will certainly be mindful in future to make the distinction clearer.

We invite people of all backgrounds to participate in this tour. We wish to provide a forum for honest thought and reflection and welcome candid debate. We study the past, we debate the past, we are sometimes repulsed by actions or beliefs in the past, but we do not live in the past.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. James P. Horn
President



National Society Sons & Daughters of the United States Middle Passage

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info@sdu SMP.org • www.sdu SMP.org • Phone: 520-485-8767

August 6, 2019

2019-2020
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Johnathon Sellers
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* Founding Board Members

Ms. Elizabeth Kostelny, CEO
Preservation Virginia
204 West Franklin
Richmond, Virginia 23220
Via email: ekostelny@preservationvirginia.org

Dear Ms. Kostelny,

I want to thank you so very much for allowing Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage, a lineage society for descendants of enslaved people of African descent, to participate in the American Evolution 400-year commemoration on July 30, 2019. It was a great honor for the organization to represent our enslaved ancestors. However, as I sat in the Memorial Church on that eventful morning, I was afraid of hearing comments similar to the ones I heard on a recent "First Africans" tour of the Island. I am writing to give you my perspective on the comments in light of the recent response to AAHGS (see your letter dated July 15, 2019). I am hoping it will lead to a heightened sensitivity and a change in how this history is presented to visitors, especially the visitors of African heritage.

I was in attendance with the National Vice President of History for the Afro American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) on May 31, 2019, when a tour guide on the Jamestown Island attempted to explain why Africans were "slaves" when they first arrived in 1619. He said since Africans had "black" skin, Englishmen viewed them as "evil, dirty, and ugly." He also said there were Africans who wanted to be white and believed, by traveling north, they could whiten their skin. While I was generally impressed with the information presented on the tour, I was shocked to hear these "facts" from someone who was informing the public about the critical history of slavery in the early

English colony. Furthermore, the tour guide did not repudiate those racist ideas upon saying them or provide any counterviews.

I recently learned that AAHGS notified the foundation and others of the comments made. Unfortunately, Preservation Virginia, through the Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation, countered with a vague reference to a European play to explain the thoughts of 4 million Englishmen. Very similar offensive and questionable information can be found in the recent book, *Virginia 1619: Slavery & Freedom in the Making of English America*, edited by James Horn and others. The essay, "Virginia Slavery in Atlantic Context, 1550-1650", written by Philip D. Morgan, appears to heavily paraphrase and quote from the work of Winthrop Jordan, specifically his book, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, published in 1968, which has been criticized in more recent scholarly work. However, in answering the question, why did "racial" or African slavery develop on the Virginia colony, even Jordan concludes:

"We do not know. The available data will not bear all the weight that the crucial questions impose."

Furthermore, Morgan concludes:

"an intense demand was the prime sine qua non, the indispensable precondition for the plantation slavery that arose in the Chesapeake."

Morgan notes Jordan's label for the enslavement process as an "unthinking decision"—void of the reasons mentioned by the tour guide.

Also, we know the "20 and odd" Angolans were stolen from the slave ship, *São João Bautista*, and brought to the colony. There is no evidence that the color of their skin was the reason the Englishmen purchased and continued to enslave them.

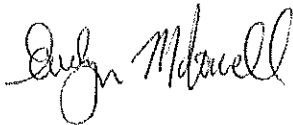
Since there are no clear answers to when and why racial slavery began in the early English colony, what purpose is it to mention the weak speculations mentioned by the tour guide?

Given the uncertainty of the reasons other than the need for labor, a widely available market for African bodies, greed, and the evil desires of man, it is disconcerting why the foundation is comfortable incorporating unfounded, controversial theories into a presentation for public consumption, which may include impressionable children, descendants of enslaved Africans, and others with "black" skin.

I believe retaining and presenting these theories, especially without the proper context, is highly racially insensitive. Without the context, the remarks perpetuate the ideas of white supremacy. If the tour guides continue to include these ideas in subsequent presentations, against our pleas, their comments must include references to the vast uncertainty surrounding these theories and strong condemnation of those ideas.

I hope the foundation will reconsider its initial stance and rewrite its presentation to address our concerns and include more inclusive scholarly work. In addition, I would like for it to include more personal stories of the Angolans, including what their lives were like before they were taken from their homeland and the horrors of their extended voyage. I also hope it will issue an apology to all who were offended by the remarks.

Sincerely,



Dr. Evelyn A. McDowell, Ph.D.
President and Founder of Sons & Daughters of the
United States Middle Passage

Cc: Baba Gene R. Stephens II, President of AAHGS
Dr. James P. Horn, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation (via email:
jhorn@preservationvirginia.org)
SDUSMP Board Members (via sdusmp@gmail.com)



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Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 73067, Washington, DC 20056-3067, www.aahgs.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 16, 2019

BREAKING NEWS!

AAHGS OFFICIALS OFFER INSIGHT INTO RACIALLY INSENSITIVE COMMENTS AS JAMESTOWN LEADERS DOUBLE DOWN

Ric Murphy, AAHGS National Vice President for History:

"I've had several pleasant visits at Jamestown in the past and each time had positive discussions with several of the staff. However on May 31st, I was shocked to hear the racially charged comments from a staff member of Jamestown Rediscovery that black skin represented dark, dirty and ugly."

"I was stunned when the Jamestown Rediscovery Manager to prove his point about black skin representing that there were five African Princesses who wanted to become beautiful and pure and wanted to move North to become white and beautiful, and that he learned all of this from working at Jamestown Rediscovery, and that officials from Jamestown Rediscovery subsequently confirming this and that its part of the basis for their overall programing ...simply astounded."

Dr. Evelyn McDowell, National President of the Sons and Daughters of the United States Passage:

"I was in attendance when this incident happened, and I was shocked to hear these "facts" from someone who was informing the public about the critical history of slavery in the early English colony. Furthermore, the tour guide did not repudiate those racist ideas upon saying them or provide any counterviews."

"Retaining and presenting these theories, especially without the proper context, is highly racially insensitive. Without the context, the remarks perpetuate the ideas of white supremacy."

Gene Stephenson, National President of AAHGS:

"I was shocked that Jamestown, an organization that purports to promote scholarly research was relying on a racially insensitive 1605 play to justify a present day narrative that Americans of African descent are not a pure and beautiful as Americans of European decent because one was born with black skin and the other was born with white skin. And, to make matters worse, to hide behind a fictitious play as an excuse to promote racially insensitive beliefs as a foundation to explain American slavery is incomprehensible."

"Upon hearing of this unbelievable and racially insensitive story, AAHGS National President, Gene Stephenson wrote a letter to several Virginia state dignitaries including Jamestown Rediscovery's Board Chair Elizabeth S. Kostelny, of Preservation Virginia."

"Believing that Preservation Virginia and its staff would follow their Crisis Management Plan, I thought they would just reply with an innocuous letter stating it was a misunderstanding, we will do better in the future and lets work to make this a better world. But in an unexpected move, I was really shocked as to what they did next ...they doubled down on the initial comment and justified it with a fictitious 1605 play the *Masque of Blackness*, as the rationale for a present day highly charged and racially insensitive comment."

"In concurrence with our Board of Directors, I reached out on numerous occasions by email and by phone calls to Kostelny and her Board of Directors to open as soon as possible a deeper and more meaningful dialogue, and to help explain why the choice of these words that the first Africans, who were are all now commemorating their arrival in English North America, were slaves because their skin was black in color and black represented dark, dirty and ugly can easily be taken out of context; can be used in a divisive and incendiary manner by the wrong people; can have an adverse effect on young children and other impressionable individuals in the audience who may believe that

these words hold truth; and for a highly respected intuition such as Preservation Virginia and its subsidiary and its BOD may be promoting a narrative that can easily set race relations behind by hundreds of years by giving the appearance that it and staff condone and support such rhetoric, beliefs and attitudes. I truly wanted to work in the spirit of scholarly collaboration.”

“Despite my offers and willingness to work with and in the spirit of cooperation and understanding fell on deaf ears. On three separate occasions from July 16th to August 7th Kostelny repeatedly replied ‘our invitation to you [is] to take the tour and see for yourself the information that is conveyed in the context of the tour.’ I was shocked as to the tone deafness.”

Thom Reed, AAHGS National Vice President for Genealogy:

“The response from Jamestown Rediscovery is almost more troubling than the incident. They state they don’t have the information to make a definitive statement of the status of Blacks in Virginia colony, but they’re still trying to perpetuate a false narrative. I understand the need to illustrate certain facets of our complex history, but truth is truth and there should be no misinterpretation of anything.”

“It’s very difficult to hear that they’re only sorry that things were misinterpreted and misunderstood, not apologizing for what was said. They know what they said was offensive and difficult to hear, but they stand behind words that can be employed to defend the inhumane practice of chattel slavery.”

“If the narrative can’t be documented from anything other than a play, then why use that language? Reputable historians don’t use obscure references to justify an inaccurate representation of history.”

“Provide scholarly research, and present the truth and present it accurately, and don’t pull in an arcane screenplay ...*The Masque of Blackness*.” For all we know, the play may have been as offensive to most of the English then as it is now!”

“How does this inflammatory language have any bearing on the status of the first documented Africans?”

Jane Thomas, AAHGS Prince George’s County Chapter President:

“I know exactly how the elderly man who was in attendance of this session must have felt. It sickens me and I am also personally offended being an African American woman who happens to have dark skin. I am very offended and deeply hurt over the suggestion that my skin color is dark, dirty and ugly. And, I did not have to pay money to sit there and have to listen to insults!”

“I am shocked that an institution such as Jamestown thinks this is ok, and that its scholars are relying on relics of the past to tell a story in the present, in what is supposed to be an educational forum of scholarly research and leadership.”

“The bottom line is we need to correct this narrative and not allow it to permeate our history, now or in the future.”

“If our history is being taught incorrectly, we have to correct it. It is a possibility that the Board, its staff top to bottom, and any of their advisors may need to be educated. We have to get the narrative correct.”

Robert Burch, AAHGS UTAH Chapter President:

“It appears that there are those individuals - scholars or not, who equate skin color to moral virtues and integrity because of a person skin. To give a moral value not an economic value or intellectual value because of the color of the skin and the statements made by Jamestown attributes a moral value to Africans and their present day descendants because of the color of their skin.”

It appears whatever orientation that people have coming into Jamestown, it orients them towards the false truth. Based on their unbelievable reply, which is worse than the actual comment if that can be believed, there is an intellectual dishonesty of the people who are running Jamestown.”

Nathania Branch Miles, AAHGS National 2019 Annual Conference Co-Chair:

“I’m not happy with the derogatory, offensive and racist remarks that were made at Jamestown, particularly during the lead-up to the Commemoration of the first arrival of well documented Africans to Virginia, and to think that in 2019 that this nonsense is still being regurgitated ...it’s just disgusting!”

“I am so offended by the black skin statement, and they still think it ok to have junior staff repeat it and then senior staff and the board justify it. It’s apparent, and it’s clear to me that they just don’t get how offensive this is. And, to hide behind a question as to whether or not these Africans were free or not as a justification for dredging up remarks that are racially insensitive clearly demonstrates that they lack the professional decorum and sensitivity to properly educate the public.”

“They don’t know firsthand who these Africans were, and to make a blanket statement that because they’re skin was dark that they were dirty and filthy, they don’t know this firsthand that to be true.”

“How offensive, and then say this is what the English were thinking so it’s all right to use it today to justify slavery – just disgusting!”

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ABOUT AAHGS

The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. (AAHGS) is a non-profit membership organization that strives to preserve African ancestral family history, genealogy, and cultural diversity by teaching research techniques and disseminating information throughout the community. Our primary goals are to promote scholarly research, provide resources for historical and genealogical studies, create a network of persons with similar interests, and assist members in documenting their family histories.

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