



Reframing History

Episode 3: Making Progress Towards Justice

Series Description:

As the public debates around history grow louder, it seems there's a gap between how history practitioners understand their work and what the public thinks history is. We need a more productive public conversation about history. But how do we get on the same page? How do we promote an understanding of history that is inclusive and builds trust in the process of nuanced historical research? Over the course of this series, we'll be speaking to historians, history communicators, and educators from around the country about the language we use to communicate history to the public. Hosted by Christy Coleman and Jason Steinhauer, this six-part series delves deep into a new, research-backed communication framework developed by FrameWorks Institute in partnership with the American Association for State and Local History, the National Council on Public History, and the Organization for American History. *Reframing History* is produced by Better Lemon Creative Audio for AASLH.

Episode Description:

The public widely recognizes the necessity of learning from the past. But there's a catch. For most people, the meaning of "learning from society's mistakes" is inseparable from their diagnosis of society today. So in this episode, we discuss one solution to this challenge laid out



in the Making History Matter report: “Emphasize how history helps us make progress toward a just world to increase recognition of history’s importance.” To explore the ideas of hard history and learning from the past, we are joined by Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries and Heather Bruegl.

Episode Transcript:

[Theme music plays]

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: It's critically important that we stop separating out the past from the present, that we take the time to recognize not only legacies but also direct connections. And until we do that, we will continue to do the things that created inequality in the past.

Heather Bruegl: But in order to move towards justice and understand justice, you've got to understand that past. You've got to understand there's a history that we just don't seem to want to discuss.

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: So I use primary sources, the words of people themselves, to get my students to say, "Oh, wait a minute. Maybe what I've been taught in the past hasn't been fully accurate." I have to build up trust with them so that they can understand that what I'm sharing with them isn't a biased personal opinion, it's a professional analysis of historical documents, and artifacts.

Christy Coleman: This is *Reframing History*: A limited series from the American Association for State and Local History.

I'm Christy Coleman, Executive Director at the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation.

Jason Steinhauer: And I'm Jason Steinhauer, Global Fellow at The Wilson Center and author of *History Disrupted*.

Jason Steinhauer: In this six-part series, we're speaking to history practitioners from around the country about how they communicate the role and value of history to the public. To help frame this conversation, we're using a new report on history communication called "Making History Matter." This research-backed report offers specific language that communicators can use to bridge the gap between



how we talk about history and how the public understands history work. You can download the report at aaslh.org/reframinghistory.

Jason Steinhauer: This is Episode 3: "Making Progress Towards Justice"

Christy Coleman: In this episode, we're talking to two guests, Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries and Heather Bruegl. They're helping us explore the third recommendation from the Making History Matter report, which is: "Emphasize how history helps us make progress towards justice to increase recognition of history's importance."

Jason Steinhauer: The Frameworks Institute found that members of the public widely recognized that learning from the past is necessary to improve as a society. But that finding comes with a big caveat: for most people, the meaning of "learning from society's mistakes" and "moving forward" is inseparable from their diagnosis of society today.

Christy Coleman: So, if we are going to emphasize history as a tool for "making progress" towards justice, we need to be clear about what the goal of that progress is and what justice means. These are ideas our guests on this episode have thought deeply about, and I think their insights will help us make these abstract ideas more concrete and actionable.

First, we spoke with Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries. We asked him what he thinks "learning from the past" looks like in practice.

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: I'm Hasan Kwame Jeffries, an Associate Professor of history in the Department of History at The Ohio State University where I teach and research on the African American experience, with a particular emphasis on the African American freedom struggle, the Civil Rights movement and Black Power movements of the 20th and 21st century.

I'm sure all of us are familiar with the phrase, "If you don't understand the past then you are doomed to repeat it," and in many ways that is true. But I also think in the American context, specifically, that that is giving us a little bit too much credit for having stopped doing the things in the past that contributed to inequality in the past, but that also contribute to inequality in the present. And so I am very much of the mind that it is important to understand the past, to study the past, not so that we don't repeat the things



that we did wrong in the past, but so that we can disrupt that continuum so we can stop doing the things that created inequality in the past that continue to contribute to inequality and the marginalization of groups in the present.

Jason Steinhauer: We also asked Hasan to talk about how he defines "justice." What would it mean to make progress toward justice, from his point of view?

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: I think as an educator, there's kind of two approaches. One is the very specific kind of very local. You know, what does it look like to provide justice for the victims- Not just of police violence, but for the victims of mass incarceration, those who have been unfairly and wrongly incarcerated, what does justice look like for them down the road? And a lot of times students can, you know, across the political spectrum regardless of race and ethnicity, when you present them with somebody who's been imprisoned wrongly for 35 years, they say, "Okay, how do we create justice for them?" They'll come up with some wonderful ideas. And they get it. It becomes different when you say, "Well, how do you create justice for the descendants of slavery? Then you get a lot of stuttering, "Oh, I don't know. What am I going to lose?" And this, that, and the other.

I think what we have to do: we have to make clear what inequality was, right? Not just that inequality and discrimination existed in the past—because yes it did, and students will acknowledge that—but it wasn't just a function of a handful of bad people. Inequality exists and persists because it was built into the systems and structures of society. And to get students to understand that, to understand that at a macro level, that today if we could snap our fingers and rid bias in every single way from the hearts and minds of every individual in America, tomorrow, there would still be disparate outcomes based upon gender and race when it came to wealth and health and all these other factors. So then you have to say, "Okay, how can we create a just society understanding that we have built into society, systems that undermine that which we would call justice?" Then that gets some thinking, right? Like, "Okay, how can we do this?"

Also critically important, and this is where it gets tricky because often, we frame justice as a zero-sum game. If I create an equitable outcome for this group of people, if I create justice for this group, that means I'm taking something away from this other group of people, right? That's where you get the



hesitancy. But in the broader scheme of things when we're talking about a just society is a society that benefits everybody. Everybody benefits by investing in creating a just society.

Jason Steinhauer: There are a few terms we use to describe histories of violence and oppression. Hasan uses the term "hard history," and as the co-host of a podcast called *Teaching Hard History*, he's the right person to help us unpack the concept of "Hard history" and its role in making progress towards justice.

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: Well, I define hard history as those aspects of our past that make us feel uncomfortable in the present. They are things that happened—thinking about the African American experience: Jim Crow, slavery, convict leasing, lynching. These are horrors, these are tragedies They occurred and they make us feel uncomfortable. It's hard to talk about these things. It's hard to learn about these things. It's hard to wrap our minds around the founders of this nation buying and selling Black children and putting them to work for their comfort and convenience. That's just difficult because we don't want to deal with it.

So rather than deal with it, often we pretend as though it doesn't exist. This leads us not to confront hard history directly but to lean into things like nostalgia, which is just fictitious versions of the past, stuff that makes us feel good about the past as though we've stopped doing the things that have created inequality—past and present.

But that doesn't serve us any good because it masks reality. So rather than running from that which makes us uncomfortable, we have to lean into it so that we can understand why we still have inequality today, why our democracy doesn't function fully the way it should in terms of creating opportunities for political participation for everyone.

Christy Coleman: So then the question is, what prevents people from learning these hard histories and how do we deal with that resistance?

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: When we think about confronting hard history, I think there are a couple reasons why we refuse to and these are important. Those reasons are very much connected to the various groups that we're talking about. African Americans, for example, have a reluctance to confront hard history, especially within the classroom, for reasons that are different than your average white person.



So let's talk about slavery. Let's talk about lynching or Jim Crow. You'll find that Black students K-12, even in college in my classrooms, they're like, "I don't really know about this. I'm not really feeling talking about this." Why? Because it's been done so poorly for so long. So there is this pushback like, you know, "This is traumatizing the way this has been taught, I don't want to deal with it."

Now that's different than your average White student who encounters this and is like, "What are you talking about? What did my grandmother do? What are you say my grandfather did? I don't want to deal with it." That's a different hesitancy, it's coming from a different place. It's not because they've been traumatized, it's because it's disrupting their understanding of the past in a very personal way.

So those are two very different reasons why people in America would be reluctant to deal with hard history. But in the end, nobody's dealing with the truth of the past, the reality of the past. Then you say, "Okay. Well, what can we do? What can we do about it?" As I mentioned, I teach at Ohio State, and Ohio State is very white, right? It's very, very white. It's been very White for a long time and actually, it's gotten wider over the last 15 years or so. And the majority of my white students are coming from suburbs and rural communities and tend to lean politically right, and tend to lean politically conservative.

I am almost always the first African American teacher they've ever had, the first teacher of color they've ever had—certainly for a history class—but in many instances, ever. In addition to being the first African American or person of color who's ever been in an authority position over them in their lives. And so I understand that. So when I enter the classroom, I realize that there is an ingrained distrust of what I have to say. I know this for a fact because the kids will tell me afterward, right? Like, "Oh, I didn't realize but I really wasn't gonna believe what you were gonna say." I don't lead with my own voice. If we want to talk about the Confederacy, if we want to talk about the founders or we want to talk about Jim Crow and white supremacy, if we want to talk about segregation and housing, I don't lead with my own voice; I produce the primary sources. I say, "Hey, we want to talk about Jefferson and what Jefferson was believing and White supremacy. I need you to read the notes of Virginia. And I'm just gonna share with you. You want to talk about the Confederacy and the Confederacy was built on preserving the institution slavery, then let's look at Alexander Stephens and his Cornerstone of the Confederacy of Slavery speech."



So I use primary sources, the words of people themselves, to get my students to say, "Oh, wait a minute. Maybe what I've been taught in the past hasn't been fully accurate. Maybe I should listen to this guy up here who has something to say" But it takes me a while, I have to build up trust with them so that they can understand that what I'm sharing with them isn't a biased personal opinion, it's a professional analysis of historical documents, artifacts and the like. I have to do that, especially for the skeptical white students who are coming in with preconceived notions of what I am trying to teach.

For Black students, for students of color, it's different. The students of color, they have to hear my voice. Because it's not just the documents, I got to tell them, look, I understand what you've been taught. I understand that intuitively you knew that something was wrong with this, that there were missing pieces. And so I'm here to tell you that I'm going to fill in some of those gaps, I'm going to fill in some of those pieces. I just need you to trust me, and take this journey with me. Then we will get to the point where we can fully understand and embrace it. The two things I'm not going to do is I'm not going to traumatize you and I'm not going to trivialize this history, but I need you to be all-in and be open to what I'm trying to share. I tell my students and the public all the time, I'm not trying to change anybody's mind. I'm just trying to open it. And what you get from that will be up to you. But I need you to be open to these new ideas, these new perspectives, these different perspectives about the past and the present.

Jason Steinhauer: So I think tied up in that resistance to hard history is confusion about neutrality and facts. Frameworks found that the public often believes history is a "just" a series of facts; that good historians are simply documenting what happened without any interpretation. Of course, history does involve facts and dates, and facts and dates are important, right? But there's more to it, and I think Hasan has developed some very effective ways of communicating this nuance to history learners:

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: There is no neutral. What we project as neutrality, what we pretend to be neutrality is actually reinforcing dominant narratives. But then connected to that, both this sort of false sense of neutral— which is really about supporting dominant narratives—is this idea about facts. And what are facts? Facts are real, right? There are certain facts, right? Certain things happened; that's not necessarily debatable. But that isn't the end of the story. This is where understanding the historian's craft and what historians do and how you can have disagreement and analysis becomes critically important. I teach at Ohio State and Ohio State is a big football university. And so I ask them very early



on and I say, "Who won the last football game at Ohio State?" "The Ohio State crushed Michigan State 53-7." I'm like, "Good. We've established the fact. Everyone agrees? Now, why did they win?" "Oh, wait. Well, it was the quarterback, it was the offense, it was the defense." Everybody's disagreeing. But wait, what happened to the fact that they won? You can't agree on the analysis of why? And then I say, "Well, what would somebody from Michigan State say about why their team lost? They'll agree that they lost, but they may not agree why they lost." And so then I take that and say, "Okay, now let's go back to the Founding or the Constitution or any of these other issues. We can agree to certain things: it was written, but why was it written?" And then they will say, "Oh, wait, I can see." Now how do we base our analysis?

So this idea of one, interrogating facts is like yeah, there are facts, but then there's also analysis. There's also judgment. And then what is that based on and who is an expert. Then looking back, what do you do when you don't have all the evidence? I say, "We all saw, we were witnesses to this game. But there was also a game in 1920. And here is a box score of the game that Ohio State won. Now tell me, why did they win?" And they're like, "Well, I don't know. I wasn't there." "All right, how can you find out?" And they're like, "Ooh..." So then there's this digging part and research part and, "Well, what's a credible source and where can we find out this information?" Then they realize well, we can't tell you. Because there's some stuff that we can't answer because we don't have the information. We don't have eyewitnesses, we don't have these other sources. So getting them to see that one: facts are real, but two, not all facts are equal. And three, there are still judgments that can be made based upon some of the evidence and perspectives that we incorporate in our analysis of what we're trying to understand.

[Musical transition]

Jason Steinhauer: So Christy, seems to me that trust is a big through-line throughout this interview. How do you gain the trust of your students in this particular instance, to be able to approach difficult topics I'm wondering from your experience and where you said, how you think about this question of trust?



Christy Coleman: Well, I think it begins anytime you're dialoguing with someone and you are showing genuine interest in what they're saying. Even if they are patently wrong, right? There is a, there is a skill, there is a depth skill at being able to help that person understand something new without making them feel stupid or embarrassing them in the process. Now I will say that doesn't always happen in academia, but in, but in public history, it absolutely does. We learn how to build a rapport. And as you are building the rapport with the visitor, through those open-end questions, through the dialogue that you're having with them, through the information that you're sharing, the nature of the questions that are being asked...I think all of those techniques are really helpful. The other advantage that we have, obviously a museum space is we often have the artifact or the real place that, and that, and of itself builds a trust factor.

Jason Steinhauer: I think for me in my career, trust begins with listening,, and listening means allowing people space to talk so that you don't dominate the conversation and you don't suck up all the oxygen in the room and you don't come off as if you know, all the answers and as you said, everyone else is misinformed or idiotic; that immediately erodes trust. And I think, uh, increasingly people want those types of interactions, whether it be in a museum space or in academic space or on social media, no one wants to be told that they're stupid or that they're an idiot or that they're misinformed. And the instant that starts to happen, trust is almost impossible to regain. Um, so I think that's when we think about communicating history and how we communicate and how we frame things, inviting people into conversations from a place of respect seems to me to be a crucial component.

Jason Steinhauer: Next up, we spoke to historian and educator Heather Breugl.

Heather Breugl: My name is Heather Breugl. I am an enrolled citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, a first-line descendant of Stockbridge-Munsee.

Heather Breugl: I think making strides towards justice, moving forward, being progressive in that thinking—as a historian it starts in the past. You've got to reconcile what happened in the past in order to understand why things are in 2021 the way that they are. And there's a history that I think in the United States that we tend to not look at. We don't want to reconcile it. It's icky, it makes us feel uncomfortable.



We don't want to talk about it. But in order to move towards justice and understand justice, you've got to understand that past. You've got to understand there's a history that we just don't seem to want to discuss.

So in 2016-2017 when we had those water protectors at the Dakota Access Pipeline and they were protecting that drinking source, protecting the land, you saw armed military and police force coming in to these peaceful unarmed protesters. Why is that? Well, there is a history between the military and Indigenous people that didn't just start in 2016. It goes farther back than that. Then you flash forward to January 6th of last year, and you saw nothing being done. You saw some resistance, but you saw a mob of people attacking the very center of democracy. You can even go back a few more years, when you had that standoff at the Bundy ranch. It was a group of white guys who were asserting their quote "land rights." So you have to reconcile that past in order to understand why that's a thing. The murder of George Floyd didn't just spark the Freedom Summer of 2020 out of nowhere; there was an accumulation of things that happened. And I think the only way we can move towards that justice, towards understanding and having a more inclusive history, is [by] going back to the past and understanding why groups are treated differently: because they've been treated differently since the inception of the United States.

Christy Coleman: So what's stopping us from learning from our past, from making those connections from past to present?

Heather Bruegl: What the missing link is between people and wanting to learn history is understanding that there is a direct correlation between [the] history of the past and society today. There is. There has to be. You have to somehow bridge that disconnect. Because it's easy for people to say, "Oh well, that happened in the past. That's something that doesn't really affect now." Except for the fact that it does. And when you understand what happened in the past and what was done to either rectify it or let it just go unchecked, you understand how that correlates to why society is the way it is in 2022.

And I really love it when people come up to me and say, "Well, that happened in the past. That wasn't me." You're right, it wasn't you. It wasn't you." I tell people all the time. If I'm giving a lecture and I'm talking about Land Back or land acknowledgments, I'm like, "You sitting right here did not move my



ancestors off of this land, you didn't do it. But you benefited from it." Right? So that's what we've got to talk about. People who have been enfranchised to vote for however long, have benefited from people who haven't been able to. That's a societal structure that we have to talk about. And you have to bridge the gap between the historical and the now to understand they're together, they're connected. And we keep making the same mistakes all of the time. Because it goes back to we don't learn from the past. Yeah, it's important to learn from the past. People say that all the time. But they don't want to when it makes them have to question their own train of thought, their own thinking, their own education.

Jason Steinhauer: This has come up a few times already in this podcast: that people tend to think of history as a fixed body of knowledge. And because the public doesn't understand the historical process, they aren't well equipped to accept where their knowledge of the past is inaccurate or incomplete.

Heather Bruegl: It's this process of unlearning that people have to go through. And unlearning, I kind of almost equate to the grieving process. Because there is anger, there is denial, there is sadness because you find out for a period of time that you either have been lied to or you haven't learned to the extent that you could have learned. And that just goes into other societal structures like our school systems. I mean, we put so much of that burden on our teachers who only have X amount of time every year to be able to get these points across, who then have their hands tied by whatever policies are put in place. I mean, there's a huge fight over Critical Race theory. That shouldn't be a fight.

And I also tell people too, taking away that myth and learning the real truth about everything it's hard and it's nasty and it's uncomfortable. But oh my gosh, isn't it way more interesting than that Santa-Clausification of everything that we've put on? When you strip away the greatness of the Founders, right—Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Ben Franklin—and you learn that they were just really flawed ordinary people in a set of extraordinary circumstances, it makes that history in my opinion, way more interesting. Because I'm learning about the person as opposed to the myth. And I think that's huge.

And I think we have to do that when it comes to our history overall. It's not something that we do at all. For years, the massacre that happened at Wounded Knee in 1890 was called the Battle of Wounded Knee. It wasn't a battle. The Seventh Cavalry went in and massacred—murdered—250 unarmed Lakota



elders, women, and children. And then the government awarded them twenty Medals of Honor. So we have to talk about what was the thinking? What was that process in doing that? Why did the US military think that it was a good idea to award these Medals of Honor? What was honorable about that massacre? So we have to go in and we have to examine. And when we learn the truth, we are going to grieve. Because it's getting over being lied to and not being told the full story. That's important. And the more uncomfortable you are, the better, because you're learning.

Christy Coleman: So Jason, Heather really stresses the need to make that connection between past and present to help people understand the now by understanding the past. So what do you think about that? I mean, are history museums and organizations making enough connections to the now? Or are, are they afraid to be seen as political?

Jason Steinhauer: Yeah, it's an interesting question. I've thought a lot about this the past few years, because I feel like not to keep bringing it back to my book, but one of the things I talk about in my book is how increasingly it's making, it's become difficult to make the argument that history has any intrinsic value in of itself. In other words, history has to be in service to something. And I think we've seen that in history profession where history is in service to larger causes, whether it be social justice or racial justice, and then I think we also see that when it comes to history as being in service to the present day headlines, and that's become an in tire genre and of itself inside the history profession over the last 10 to 15 years, where it's like history to inform the news history behind the headlines history to help you understand better what's going on in the world today. And I think that's become sort of an imperative argument that history institutions have to make in order to feel like they're relevant in order to, uh, keep visitors coming in the door or keep, or keep students enrolling in the classes. I think that has a lot of benefits. It also comes with a few pitfalls, but I think it all really has to start with understanding, understanding more accurately what happened in the past. If you just try to take the past and apply to the present without the research, without the evidence-based analysis, without the critical thinking, without going through the archives or going through the source material and digging up the information, then it just too easily becomes sophistry or sound bites that you see on social media or on television that are not backed up by any evidence.



And so I think what our, both of our guests have talked about is that if you wanna make those connections between the past and the present, you have to come with the receipts, you have to come having done the hard work in the archives, doing research, looking at the evidence, digging, mining, dealing with the stuff that is uncomfortable that may be ugly or doesn't paint us or your ancestors or your relatives in the most flattering way. And then thinking about how you make that tie-in to the present. And I think that's a huge challenge in this current meat environment where everyone wants answers right away. Everyone's looking the moment something happens to grab something from the past and just stick it onto the present without having done that hard research.

Christy Coleman: I would agree, but I think honestly, you know, the idea of history for history's sake is also a little flawed. We study history, we learn history, we engage with history because of a desire for, uh, communal connection, right? I mean, at the end of the day, that's what it's about, how are we connected to each other? How are we connected as communities? How do we get to this point? What is the, A, the B, the C the D, and the E that I'm currently in. And I think in terms of the public history space for the longest time, we didn't want to make those connections with people. You know, we opted to say many. I can't tell you how many times I've heard it and you probably heard it too well, you know, we'll just give them the information and let them make up their own mind.

Because we acknowledge that they're gonna be filtering what we say or what they experience through that life lens. Doesn't make it wrong. It just means that we are not necessarily taking responsibility for our work at least, you know, that's my view, right?

I was looking at some research that was done by AHA, and it was tracking how, how the public was receiving its historical information. And it was so fascinating. What we found is that what the study found is that Americans get their historical information...69% say they get their history information from documentary film or TV and 68% from fictional historical fiction or TV. And then further down the list after the TV news, um, other websites at 59% newspapers and magazines at 55%, we come down to the historic site visit where 38% of Americans say, that's where they get their, their historical information from. Or general museum visit at 35%. That's extraordinary how, you know, in the bottom third, we are in the bottom third as institutions in terms of how Americans are getting their information regarding



history. And why is that? Why is that? What should we be thinking about? That's why I think this whole project, this whole reframing history piece is so, so, so critical. It's so critical at this stage.

Jason Steinhauer: Yeah. I think that's why everything needs to be radically rethought, I think. And I think sometimes when we have these conversations about what the future of history museums looks like, or what the future of history communication looks like, we don't envision a radical redoing. We tinker around the edges. And, I can tell you that, from what I've seen and witnessed over the past 20 years in my career, a lot of the stuff that people think is working is not working. And so things like this per project are great because it can potentially give people a different toolkit to try. But I also think that there are just so many headwinds facing professional history, whether it be technological, whether it be media, whether it be funding, you name it across the board, that really it's time to reenvision and reimagine much of what happens inside both academic spaces and public history spaces. I hope that our own profession has the courage and the bravery to actually confront those things head-on and try some new and different things and not just tinker around the edges.

Christy Coleman: So, finally, we asked both Hasan and Heather whether they were hopeful that our society can learn from history? Can we honestly investigate our past instead of choosing nostalgia and myths?

Let's hear from Hasan first:

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: Yeah. I am not an optimist, especially in the American context, because I know a little bit too much about the past. And while I'm not optimistic about immediate change and the like, I am hopeful. And I think there's a difference. I'm hopeful because I understand what progress actually has been made and how it has been achieved. That through struggle and sacrifice—not through a natural evolution, but because people have been willing to fight—that there has been progress. Also if we look back at the historical record, particularly the experience of African Americans who have always been pushing the envelope of the idea of democracy to make it more expansive, you've always had that. And there is no sign that that is ever going to relent. And so as long as you have Black folk, as long as you



have other allies who are committed to democracy and who are willing to fight for change and sacrifice, then I am hopeful that there will continue to be progress and progress can be made. But we have to be clear that that gets lost if we don't look at the past in an honest way. If we just continue to revel in nostalgia—fictitious versions of the past—then we will not see and understand how change has actually occurred, how the real progress that has been made has actually come to be.

Now when we look back at the past and why people lack the hope, why they're pessimistic is because they don't see the struggle. It's because we don't teach how change actually occurred. Now, they may be told about one or two great men or women and that's it. And if that's all they have, then they're sitting around waiting for somebody else to come back. That's not the way social change, that's not the way progress, that's not the way justice is brought about.

So while I'm not necessarily optimistic that most of us will get behind this in the moment, I am hopeful, and even more hopeful following the protests of the last year or so—summer of 2020—in which we saw the largest protests for justice in American history. We had to be teaching that too. These are young people who were out there who are seeing this like, "No, no, there's something more and we want more and we can expect more." We got to tap into that energy and show them the ways in which people have created change in the past so they don't lose that momentum going forward.

Christy Coleman: And here's Heather's answer:

Heather Bruegl: The first thing that came into my head is if you don't think there's value in learning from the past, you are part of the problem. And unfortunately, what we can see from even the past four years, there's no hope in people wanting to learn from the past or even learn facts for that matter. I don't want it to be doom and gloom, but I don't see it happening without a huge overhaul in the way of people thinking. And I want to be proved wrong. Prove me wrong. Oh my god, please prove me wrong. [laughs]

Christy Coleman: So, to wrap up this episode, we asked Heather what message she'd like to leave for those of you listening who want to use history to make progress towards justice and who are already doing the work or gearing up to do the work in the face of certain backlash.



Heather Bruegl: Oh, my God. You are going to hit wall after wall and closed door after closed door, and you are going to have people who are going to be kicking and fighting their way into not learning more. "I've already made up my mind; don't confuse me with the facts." I had a history professor tell that to me and said we were going to run into that a lot. And I have run into it quite a bit. You are going to have the old guard who's going to be afraid of change and messing with the status quo and rocking the boat. And your job as an educator, as a historian, as a museum educator, is to understand that your role in this is to tell the truth.

Museums are not neutral. It's our job to tell the story: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Just as it is as historians to tell the story: the good, the bad, and the ugly. And so while you are going to continuously be hit over and over and over again by your board of directors, the public, your bosses to "Hey, slow down. You're going a little too fast." My advice to you is to keep going in that direction. Because you're hitting a nerve, you're making them scared, you're making them think. And if you keep going at that rate you will have prevailed. It's important to get that out there, to get the truth out there, to tell inclusive and engaging histories. Because at the end of the day, your job is to educate the public. Even though you might get pushback from that public, more often than not, you're going to have someone who's going to walk through those doors and he's going to be so grateful. Because they either saw themselves or heard themselves somewhere in your programming. And that, at the end of the day, is all that matters. It's that you told that inclusive story and someone left there going, "I feel seen," and that makes all the difference.

[Outro music plays through end]

Jason Steinhauer: *Reframing History* is brought to you by the American Association for State and Local History. It is made possible through support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. To learn more about the project and read the report, please visit AASLH.org/reframinghistory

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Again, I'm Jason Steinhauer...

Christy Coleman: And I'm Christy Coleman.

If you enjoyed this episode or learned something you'll apply to your history communication toolkit, please let your friends and colleagues know so that this research gets shared as widely as possible.

And on the next episode of Reframing History:

[Set of teaser clips from Ep 4 interviews]