

Hate Can't Teach: Why statue removal is NOT historical erasure - Show Notes

Confederate monuments spawn controversy wherever they sit, and recently their removal has caused emotional uproar from all sides of the political spectrum. These ghostly shells of the past represent the myth of the Lost Cause, striking slavery from the list of reasons why the Civil War was fought and turning blame towards the North. Our special guests, Katie Bramell, a museum professional who tackled this subject at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, and her former co-worker Jesse Kramer, the director of Exhibits and Collections at Conner Prairie join Zoë and Easton to unpack the issue; if our country almost split in half, what is there to celebrate? From the deep South to the heart of Indiana, these harmful celebrations still negatively impact people who simply want to live lives free of fear. How do we deal with issues beyond flags and statues? What role do museums have in all of this? Can a monument truly receive proper interpretation? We'll try to answer these questions as best we can!

Description of and link to Through2Eyes: <https://www.through2eyes.com/>

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center Website: <https://freedomcenter.org/>

Link to Kehende Wiley New Yorker article:

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/kehinde-wileys-anti-confederate-memorial>

Description of and link to civic love questions: <https://www.nphm.org/civiclove>

Transcription:

Jesse Kramer 0:00
Rated E for Everyone

Easton Phillips 0:08
All right, welcome back. Welcome back everybody to another episode of 'This is Problematic!'- Connor Prairie's one and only podcast. I'm Easton.

Zoe Morgan 0:16
And I'm Zoë.

Easton Phillips 0:17

And we're so happy today to bring you back through another rousing topic surrounding some problematic history. And today we have the debut of one of our dear dear Conner Prairie confidants. We have Jesse Kramer, welcome!

Jesse Kramer 0:31

Thank you, happy to be here.

Easton Phillips 0:33

That's Conner Prairie's Director of exhibits and collections, folks. And we're also joined by Miss Katie Bramell. She is a museum professional who worked at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center with Jesse.

Katie Bramell 0:45

Hey, everybody.

Easton Phillips 0:46

I also worked there, but I think I missed- I missed that era. (Missed the window) I met Jesse, but not you.

Katie Bramell 0:50

Yeah, unfortunately.

Easton Phillips 0:52

A little too young, but that's okay. Today, we're going to be discussing Confederate memory and monuments. We know it's kind of a hot-button issue surrounding these memorials. And when they're taken down, there's always the discussion of- what are we losing? And what are we gaining?- when this happens. So I'm actually really glad to have you both on here because I know you've had direct connections to this topic, you know, at the Freedom Center, being a of course, a museum, that's- it was built to talk about black history and the fight for freedom that we experience. So I'm excited to talk about this. How are y'all feeling?

Jesse Kramer 1:29

Really excited to be here really excited to have this conversation? Yeah,

Katie Bramell 1:32

I think it's, you know, the conversation has evolved so much to when we first started doing this. I mean, we- the exhibit that Jesse and I worked on together opened in 2018. And a lot of the work was done in like 2016-2017. So that was right after Dylan Roof shot nine parishioners in South Carolina at the AME Emmanuel church. And I was really, you know, obviously the conversation was happening a lot about confederate flags, particularly at that time and monuments and symbols, because of his proclamation to white supremacy, his ideology of wanting to start a race war at the time, and a lot of companies were starting to, I think, have this conversation in a more public space, it seemed that like, at the time they hadn't been doing before, you know. Like NASCAR was like, "we're gonna ban the Confederate flag and 2015." That was kind of crazy. I mean, you got like a lot of people going to these NASCAR races, again, because of the whole ideology of: it's their heritage, it's southern pride-having these symbols on their clothes and like a part of who they are as individuals. So that is really- it did inform how I was looking at this entire project of this larger conversation and really realizing that people didn't understand, I think, to a certain extent, the weight and the history behind these symbols.

And then, Easton, to kind of put the concept of presentism into context for our listeners, could you define what presentism is, and give us a few examples?

Easton Phillips 3:14

I would love to. So presentism is a thing that in the historical field is kind of looked at as this 'elephant in the room'- type concept of like, "we all agree that it's there and that it's bad, but why?" So presentism basically occurs when we take historical figures and events completely out of context, and put them in present day norms, morals, ideas, and perspectives. It's not an excuse to ignore the negative attributes about a historical person or a group of people or the events. So one really good example that I was given was about- okay, so early Indiana settlers, when malaria was out breaking, they blamed wet foliage and leaf piles, you know, the miasma theory, because as they're cutting down all these trees, all this wet stuff is just sitting there and getting rained on. But now we know that the issue is mosquitos, and especially those near water sources, but germ theory and hand washing wasn't even a thing back then. So there's no way they could have known, they were just going off of what they-what professionals at the time had said. So if I were looking at that with a presentist view, you know, you'd call these people like, "oh, well, how are those settlers so stupid? Like, how did they know about yours? Of course, you're supposed to wash your hands? Of course, you're supposed to stay away from the water, weren't they getting bit by the mosquitoes?" But you can't judge them based on stuff they wouldn't have known. And I don't think we've ever talked about this. And maybe this will be a longer conversation later. But this conversation does come up when we talk about the name of our podcast, you know, 'this is problematic.' Why is it called 'this is problematic.' And we're not calling history as a whole problematic. We're just acknowledging nuance, like that's at the core of our mission. You know, we don't explore them to just label history as

problematic or blame the people involved but we're trying to bring to light the issues that have existed and still exist now. I think that's the huge thing. That's why we also have the call to action to bring it forward and that area, but, you know, presentism is often used in these types of conversations when it comes to the Confederacy. So, you know, it gets brought up when they- when people change the names of mascots, it's brought up when they try to do "inclusive" interpretation that historic homes of slave owners and historic plantations. And as we just said, the removal of Confederate statues. And one of the main issues is when you take it down, people say, "Well, you're erasing history." So I'll just let you all take off with that, like, so if you heard someone say that, given your experience with the Freedom Center, what do you say?

Jesse Kramer 5:43

One of the things that we have to take into account with this is, you know, people are saying that presentism is erasing history. But presentism, I think, I guess the best way I could describe it is we're not erasing history. We're just telling a fuller story of history, and we're choosing what we do and don't celebrate in history, you have this movement that happens with the daughters of the Confederacy in the 1920s, where they start putting up all these monuments all over the country. And that was actually a form of historic erasure in its own right, you're taking the history of the civil war and what happened post Civil War, and trying to rewrite the narrative trying to uplift all of these people who were part of this traitorous cause and celebrate that in a way that, you know, sort of whitewashes the whole story and makes it seem like it was more about states rights and not about enslavement. Which it wasn't about states rights, it was about enslavement. That's what the Civil War was fought over. So the fact that you've got these folks that are going in and putting up all of these monuments and trying to change this narrative, and trying to soften the story of what happened, in an effort to uplift their ancestors in a way that makes them seem less bad, is actually a form of historic erasure. So if we're talking about historic erasure, let's really talk about it. Let's talk about whose histories are being erased. And why.

Katie Bramell 7:25

The idea that- by taking down a monument erasing that history, first of all, there's just no way to properly interpret a monument with a full history. It there's just like, you can put a plaque there, that's not going to do it, that's not going to do enough justice. And you're also like this is a glorification too like, they are monuments-they're not, you know, battlefields that are having proper interpretation and exhibits, they are monuments that are created to glorify war criminals. And I mean, at the end of the day, these people seceded from the Union like they are, they are treasonous like that this is the only time in history that we really look at- Like Jesse said- this idea of an institution, we had people leave the union to uphold slavery and we are celebrating it and also saying, "Oh, actually, that's not what they did and this is a monument for them." So it's just it's very frustrating to a certain extent.

Jesse Kramer 8:30

And it was really important to us when we created this exhibit to bring in artifacts from the National Underground Railroad freedom Center's collection that supported the statements that we're making. This is just historical fact. We had a secession document that was in the exhibit that explicitly states in the state of Texas, that the reason they seceded from the Union was to preserve enslavement. So, you know, having that actual document from that time, in an exhibit case there was really important and also showing the rise in the timeline of how these monuments went up, post Civil War, there wasn't a lot of celebration that was happening during the Reconstruction period, there was a lot there was a lot of shame and guilt that existed. There was a lot of- a lot of things that were going on. in people's minds, there was the loss of a society that existed in that time. And all of these changes are happening, but you have, you know, a couple generations later, there is this desire to uplift and preserve these folks that were fighting in this war and to kind of absolve them of all of the evils that existed with enslavement and to make it something that it wasn't

So, in the 1920s, you have the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, like just, you know, just massively massive explosion in numbers from from the kkk. And you also have all of these monuments that were very cheaply made going up all over the country. And, you know, the- the monument that came down, North Carolina that crumpled, we tried to get that monument for the exhibit, we were going to originally put it as kind of the last thing that was in that exhibit space. And we weren't able to get it, you know, people say that these things need to go into museums, and that we should be putting these monuments and museums because that way, we're not erasing this history. Well, museums, one, are not a historic dumping ground for these objects. Two, museums couldn't get them at that time. We tried. We, we tried. And it was so tight, it was- it was in a storage space in in the county's- and one of the county storage spaces that they had, and we weren't able to get it because it was tied up in litigation with the daughters and the sons of the Confederacy. So, you know, this idea that these these things should go into museums?

It's- it's a really interesting conversation, like, if they do, how do you interpret them? And that was something that we were talking about, as well, we, we had decided that if we had put this into the exhibit, it would have been on the floor. It because it was -it was a monument that was torn down. And we were going to have the conversation about the fact that happened, and why that happened. And why there was this rise in this movement to have these these monuments removed, because you've got people walking through their own spaces, seeing these- the symbols of racism, that are there in their communities. And it's just not an okay thing to have in 2024. I mean, you don't see monuments throughout other countries to, to war criminals, and you don't see monuments and other countries, to people who have done atrocious things to other groups of humanity. So it's just a really interesting conversation, because on the one hand, you do have that, you know, "you're trying to take

away our history." No, we're trying to tell your history in an accurate way, in a way that is telling everyone's history and not uplifting people who did really horrific things.

Zoe Morgan 12:45

Yeah. And, and I want to be clear that, again, we're not talking about this history with a presentist view, right? In the example that Easton shared about the early Indiana settlers, they had, whatever information they had at the time was what they were using to make their best decisions. But for those that kept African Americans enslaved, they had the knowledge to know and to understand that what they were doing was wrong. And that was a choice that was made. It was bad, then and it is bad now. And so that is why this is not looking at it with the presentist view. I just want to be clear about that.

Jesse Kramer 13:23

Then you bring in the conversation about Thomas Jefferson. I mean, he has actively recognized that enslavement is bad. But when he died, there was an auction that was held at the back of Monticello where almost everyone who he owned was sold off. And so that's the conversation that we need to be having like these folks knew what they were doing. They knew what they were doing was wrong. And they still, time after time, chose to continue doing it.

Zoe Morgan 13:54

As we heard Jesse earlier talking about this, like Lost Cause narrative and how that myth has been debunked time and time again. But let's talk a little bit about the Confederacy to put that into context. So the Confederate States of America comprised of 11 southern states, All 11 of these southern states seceded from the Union in 1860 and 1861, carrying on all the affairs of a separate government and conducting the war until the spring of 1865. So Easton, do you want to tell us how that started?

Easton Phillips 14:30

It was April 12, 1861. And Brigadier General PGT Beauregard fired on Fort Sumter, which is in Charleston Harbor. Basically, they said they felt constricted by the North, they wanted slavery to remain and if it wasn't going to remain, then we don't want to be part of your country. So they fired first. And the war itself was only four years. Of course it ended with Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse, but many started to argue the reasons "Why the south lost?" And then it began to creep into the whole "Well, why was the war fought in the first place", and then that's where you get, of course, like y'all have already touched on- states rights, northern aggression, economy- all of those arguments. And we actually have some primary sources here. We have the declaration from South Carolina. And that was the basis because they seceded first. They tried to secede a ton of times beforehand. And we already talked about that but this time, they really meant

it. And South Carolina- all the 10 other states used South Carolina's declaration as the basis for theirs. And right here it says: "the flagrant violations of the Constitution of the United States by the federal government and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the sovereign states of this union, especially in relation to slavery." All of the separation decree documents after mentioned slavery as the reason that they wanted to secede. And so that's why our understanding of the Confederate States of America kind of got overtaken and mixed with this mythologized Lost Cause narrative. So basically, the South became a noble victim, you know, "the war of Northern aggression" They were just fighting and they were outmanned, and no matter what they fought for- It was never slavery (they said).

The National Trust for Historic Preservation released a statement about Confederate monument removal. I'm not gonna read the whole thing but it basically says, "for reasons of memorialization most Confederate monuments were intended to serve as a celebration of a lost cause mythology, and to advance ideas of white supremacy. And many of them still stand as symbols of those ideologies, and sometimes serve as rallying points for bigotry and hate today, for those African Americans, it serves as a constant and painful reminder that racism is embedded in American society. And so we believe it's past time for us as a nation, to acknowledge that these symbols do not reflect and are, in fact, abhorrent to our values, and to our foundational obligation to continue building a more perfect union that embodies equality and justice for all." So for the racial -for the greater good, you know, Confederate monuments, while they are designated as historic, and a lot were brought up over a century ago, the National Trust supported their removal in public spaces. So we can stop glorifying and reinforcing white supremacy, whether it's overtly and implicitly. And I wanted to ask you both in your work, what arguments have you seen in favor of continuing to present monuments to the Confederacy in public spaces?

Katie Bramell 17:33

I think the biggest one, again, is this idea of like preserving history, and if you take it down, then you can't, you know, you're gonna forget that this all happened, you know, the points that we've been making earlier. And I remember when we were doing - when I was doing this research, I was really interested in A.What the public reaction was, like, it was really important to me with this exhibit for people to be able to contribute to the conversation at multiple points. Like at the beginning of the exhibit, there was a "how do you feel about Confederate symbols", really, before any of the context was introduced? And then at the end of the exhibit we allowed for notepads, we allowed for people to write their comments about what should be done with these monuments? Where should they go? You know, do you like- the heritage and hate debate, and people could write whatever they wanted to. And I found that to be really interesting, of course, you know, you also have to take into consideration that most of the people that were coming to the national Underground Railroad Freedom Center, already had a pretty good understanding of American history, or at least they were

learning it while they were there. Like they're already interested in this idea of learning about the Underground Railroad. So it's skewed. But I think a lot- when there were responses that were pro-monument placement, or like leaving them where they are, it was definitely this idea of, "if we take it down, we're not going to remember the legacy of the Civil War." And again, like, I think there's this fear sometimes of not really remembering the way that people retreated enslavement reconstruction, but again, to make the point I made earlier the point Jesse keeps making like you can't- these were revisionist history. They were brought up, they were usually built and erected because of a revisionist history ideology. And to completely like- you can't fully interpret a monument you just can't.

Jesse Kramer 19:39

And there's also just the cultural aspect of this. I've spoken to several southerners in in the time that I have been in this field and grew up right on- right on the Mason-Dixon Line. So yeah, there's a lot of conversation that occurs. I mean, like, in southeastern Indiana you still have people who fly Confederate flags in a state that was never confederate. So there there is, there are aspects of this, that, that need to be considered here there, you know, with this, with this idea that we're taking this revisionist history and it becomes a cultural identity. It becomes something that is ingrained in the culture of the South, in so many ways, in the culture of white Southerners, this, this idea that they were wronged in some way that, they've just- it's been ingrained into the culture, that this is this Lost Cause narrative. And this idea that there were heroes on both sides of this. And so it's a really interesting conversation to have with some of these folks. And a lot of times, it's hurt, and a desire to feel like their story is being told as well. And it's, you know, it's a misguided notion, in a lot of ways, but we have to recognize that there is a cultural identity that's tied up in all of this, and that cultural identity is dangerous. I mean, it leads to- it leads to violence. And, you know, some people say that the Civil War ended in 1865, I would argue it never ended.

Easton Phillips 21:33

Yeah, I think Ryan put it in a really good term, as monuments themselves are more of a celebration and not a teaching of history, you know. And speaking of areas where it has led to violence, we have instances in Indianapolis, in our state, sometimes referred to as the "middle finger of the South." There is a story here about the Garfield Park monument in Indianapolis. So this was the site of a race riot in the summer of 1919. That's famously called Red summer because there were race riots all across the country during that year. And so this is - this is how it went down. So, the Confederate soldiers and sailors monument was first erected in 1912 by the United States government, and it was to honor the 1,616 Confederate soldiers who died as prisoners at Camp Morton- which was in Indianapolis. And it was one of only four memorials to Confederates that were sponsored by the federal government at the request of the Southern club of Indianapolis, which was a group of Indiana

residents who, for some reason, celebrated southern culture and held annual Memorial Day ceremonies and for the soldiers.

And this happened up until like 15 years after the statue got installed. The statue was moved to Garfield Park, which was near the southern Avenue entrance, because it was more visible to the public that way, and it was originally moved there from Greenlawn cemetery. That's where soldiers had been buried until they were moved to Crown Hill. During that infamous summer of 1919, a group of white youths in Indianapolis thought they're being followed by groups of African Americans, that's all we have for the reasonings and it got to a point where on July 14, hundreds of white teenagers, from 16 to 19 years old, converged on Garfield Park- where the statue is. And they got bricks and clubs and just attacked any black folks they came across. And so this kind of escalated to the point where a bunch of African American folk took shelter in the house of a person- a black resident named Nathan Weather. When the mob followed them, Weather fired a shot into the crowd trying to disperse the mob, and a seven year old onlooker was hit. Nobody died, thankfully. But the Charlotte Pieper (Pi-purr)- I think is how you pronounce that- She received the flesh wound from stray buckshot and another youth of 18 was also hit. And police were able to disperse the mob and quell the riot. And then the monument stayed there. And it wasn't taken down until June 8th of 2020, which is after 92 years of sitting there. And it now sits in storage. So that's all we know about where it went. But it's just insane to think about that. Especially because, you know, it was there. And then it's almost as if these statues become rallying points for just the worst kind of ideology and action.

Jesse Kramer 24:31

Charlottesville is a really good example of that. You know, you have we actually highlighted that in the exhibit. When we couldn't get a monument we decided we were going to do something else and as history was happening around us at that moment. They decided- the city of Charlottesville decided to drape a giant black tarp over the monument. And so that was a perfect opportunity for us to recreate the monument in the exhibit space. So we actually built out a frame that would mimic Robert E Lee on horseback, and then wrapped it in a giant plastic plastic tarp. So you walked into that last space in the exhibit and you were greeted with the behemoth of a monument in that space at actual size. Not on its pedestal, obviously, we didn't have the height in the gallery for that, but...

Zoe Morgan 25:32

And people should look down on it.

Jesse Kramer 25:36

Yeah, well, that's another interesting conversation about interpretation of these monuments. If they do go into museums, like how are they displayed? Do you- do you put them down below the surface of the- of the gallery and have people be able to walk over top of them? You know, this is- these are

things that need to be talked about. But the monuments themselves should not be something that is uplifted. So yeah. I don't want to change the subject too much. But Katie, do you want to talk a little bit about what you and Rachel did when you were going down and doing all of this research? And your trip down south? And what that was like?

Katie Bramell 26:24

Yeah, I mean, that honestly made me think of it because- we went to- so I live in Nashville now. And I did in 2014. So I stopped here in Nashville at the time and interviewed a gentleman who was a part of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Because I was really wanting to get again- I was really fascinated by this. Like, it's, I don't know why, but I was just so like- I want to get this side of the story in a way that it would never make sense to me. And I don't- I knew it was never going to make sense. But I felt it was important to a certain extent, just because I felt a real insecurity about people trusting what I was saying if I didn't have this narrative of the other side. So that was part of it. Then we continued down to Mississippi, did some research and the archives there at the state of Mississippi archives, because so much Civil Rights activism during the time period was met with resistance and met oftentimes with Confederate symbols. So for example, when James Meredith was the first black student to integrate to Ole Miss. And there was, you know, obviously, there was a riot in response to that, and so many people were there with Confederate flags to show again, that support of white supremacy and that systematic response to integration. So, you know, going to the archives was important because I was trying to get those primary documents because again, that was really important to me, just knowing the conversation I've had with people. I mean, I'm from- originally from Missouri, my family, I would say identifies as southern because really south of I-70 in Missouri, you're kind of in a weird, like, we're in the Midwest, but we're in the south, and just trying to talk to my family about the Confederate flag at that time, there wasn't a lot happening in media. And they just had just no understanding- A. Wanted to argue with me, even though like talking about the Civil War. But B. (They) just had really little understanding of all of the instances of upholding white supremacy associated with these symbols. So that was kind of what really fueled my research of being able to find these primary sources. And then we continued on to Selma, Alabama, which obviously is the site of the march on Selma in 1965. But what I found to be just so crazy, I had never been to Selma before, I've spent time in Alabama for multitude of reasons. In the middle of town, is a giant confederate cemetery, and not just a cemetery- it has statues, it has flags, and you literally have to drive- if you're a resident of Selma, Alabama you have to drive through the center of town in this confederate- it's like a circle around this cemetery. And I like it, it was visceral. And just to know that you're in this site that is so important to the civil rights movement- that is so important to interpretation- to be forced to do this you know, to drive through this- it was it was really- it really impacted my think my research and really trying to, again, pull that into this larger narrative of this argument to really help people see like- no, this is intentional. When we are doing these things is intentional. So, yeah.

Easton Phillips 29:59

Wow. Might I say, first of all, you are very brave.

Katie Bramell 30:04

Yeah, I mean, I don't know, like, and I also have, you know, the privilege of moving through spaces as a white girl who again grew up in sort of rural South areas, I can move a little bit in a comfortable space. But yeah, it was- it was crazy. It was like being in a different world. And again that was- I think we were doing that in 2016. I will say it's different now, like living in Nashville in 2024 is different, the South is different, because of everything that happened in 2020, because of Black Lives Matter, because of things that needed to happen, but it's just, it's wild.

Zoe Morgan 30:42

Yeah. I can't, I'm just thinking about the Confederate graveyard. And one of the conversations that Jesse and I had too was, you know, thinking about who has the right to be buried at, you know, that time and thinking about all of the unmarked graves, and I'm thinking about my ancestors and not knowing well, you know, not being able to even like trace a lot of my genealogy, first of all, but... (Right) Whenever they did pass, not knowing where that was, when that was, and then yet you have this, again, really like monument to all of these, you know, Confederate soldiers that died in the war. And it's truly a slap in the face.

Easton Phillips 31:19

Really, for real. And especially just when you're when you say, Selma, I instantly think of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, you know, but then when other people think of Selma, they think, 'the place with that beautiful space honoring their ancestors- being Confederate soldiers'. So it's like, I don't know, it just feels so awful.

Jesse Kramer 31:41

The juxtaposition between the ancestors of, you know, Confederates- the Confederate soldier ancestors and the enslaved ancestors, right like this, this conversation that's happening right now is, it's just really impactful. There's this idea that you know, where you come from and who you come from is important and just- What is being celebrated? There's this disconnect, like how is it- I understand wanting to have pride in where you come from, but when where you come from is about subjugation and enslavement and the cultural genocide of a people, like- How do you square that? How do you move forward as an individual? And I think a lot of it comes from not being educated on these things, and being taught inaccurate histories, and there is so much legislation that's being put into place to keep people from being able to learn the full truth of history and the history of our country. Because we don't want to feel bad about what our ancestors did. It's just, it's such a

ridiculous notion, because if we learn from our past we can move forward to a more inclusive and equitable future, and why wouldn't everyone want that? Because when it comes down to it, it's all about family and- you know in connection with other human beings. And that's, I think, a big root of this- this idea that you know, 'we can't say bad things about our ancestors.' But yes, we can. And it's okay, we can move forward from this. And we can be better people.

Zoe Morgan 33:45

Here at Conner Prairie, and definitely on the education team, we believe in, you know, kinship and having a connection to the land in order to connect with ourselves and then connect with each other. And a lot of these monuments, again, are in these green spaces that should feel inclusive for everyone. And when we're talking about, you know, connecting with nature, we're removing the opportunity for black and brown people to connect with each other- to connect with nature, for kinship to truly happen. Because they go into these public spaces, and they don't feel safe. And so if I don't feel safe, then like in my own body outside in nature, I don't also feel safe in connecting with others, as well. And so it's just again, like a huge disservice. And also, again, as like a nature enthusiast and nature lover, it's really sad for me to just see black and brown people lose, I guess, accessibility to these spaces that we're so often kept out of. And so it just like personally, it breaks my heart. And so moving forward. You know, we have a choice in what we celebrate in these spaces. And so I really think that we can, you know, come together and decide collectively who we're going to celebrate that it feels safe for everyone, and how we're going to celebrate. So that you know they feel safe in these green spaces so that they have the opportunity then to, you know, again feel safe and included in the space to connect with nature, to connect with each other and to connect with it themselves.

So, Confederate Memorial Park is located in the southern part of Indiana near the small town of Corydon and the park was established in 1978 to honor the Confederate soldiers who fought and died during the Civil War. And one of the major points of interest in the park is the monument to the Confederate soldiers, which was erected in 1909. And in July 1863, a group led by General John Hunt Morgan rode through southern Indiana and clashed with Union troops at Corydon. And although the Union soldiers were eventually able to repel the Confederate attack, the battle was an important moment in the history of the state. And so the Battle of Corydon Memorial Park marks the spot where Harrison County's Home Guard skirmished with Morgan's troops, and the park includes commemorative markers, a replica log cabin, and a walking trail. It also hosts an annual reenactment of the battle near the end of June and the battle site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The park holds a living history day to commemorate the battle and reenactors in Civil War period costumes were on hand. And so, Easton, you want to talk a little bit more about our Conner Prairie connection with John Hunt Morgan, specifically with our Civil War journey exhibit that we had.

Easton Phillips 36:42

So, for a very long time, I don't know exactly how long CWJ has been around (about 12 years) 12 years. So for 12 years, we've have our own interactive experience out here in CWJ regarding John Hunt Morgan's attack on Dupont. He also hit Dupont, as well as Corydon and a couple other places. But the battle of Corydon was really the only battle that took place in Indiana as far as the Civil War was concerned. And so CWJ is no longer here at Conner Prairie. We are now- we are using the space for different things now for- Let me watch the way I say this before I say something wrong.

Jesse Kramer 37:26

Well, I can kind of weigh in. So Civil War journey was the end of its, its lifespan anyway, it was actually only supposed to be an installation for I think five years. But we carried it through for 12. But it- with all of the renovations of the new museum experience center and having to move our staff out to multiple different places throughout the site. Our staff are in 17 different locations across the Conner Prairie grounds right now. And also in co-working spaces and things like that. It became necessary for us to use the space for staffing, but also to open it up to a new experience, we're actually going to be doing further experiences out here in future years. But we're in kind of a transitional period with the space right now as we ramp up to do a whole lot more here at Conner Prairie. So the Civil War story is still in existence here through our new exhibit- Promised Land as Proving Ground, we do touch on the civil war there. And in that space, we'll also be able to do deeper dives into that subject matter that will focus not just on Indiana history, but the history throughout the entire country in that time period. So it's going to allow us to tell them much more broad story and will also allow us to step outside of what was essentially a skirmish in Indiana and tell a much more broad and full context which is great, because everybody deserves to get the fuller story of history and that's what we're all about here.

Easton Phillips 39:12

Now that we're talking about that so- the one on Garfield Park has been removed. The one in Corydon is not- it's still there. But those were really the only Confederate monuments in Indiana. And so we ask what are the- some of the invisible legacies of the Confederacy seen in both Indiana and other northern states.

Jesse Kramer 39:35

One of the main things, and again- I'm gonna plug Promised Land as Proving Ground again. (Yeah) If you get into our reclamation building, we're talking about the 20th century, primarily the 20th and 21st centuries in that space. And there is a whole section that we have called 'traveling while black' and it is all about the places it was safe or not safe for black folks to travel in the state. And if you if you look at a map of sundown towns, it's staggering how many were in the states of Illinois and

Indiana. It's just one giant red splotch on the map. So a sundown town is a place that it was unsafe for black and brown folks to be traveling through, through the evening, and nighttime. So, once the sun set, it was not a safe place for you to be. And lynchings would occur in these spaces; arrests would be made, if you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. So when we're talking about the legacies of racism in these spaces, that is one that is glaring, and there are still areas throughout the state where it is unsafe to travel. That's in 2024.

Zoe Morgan 41:05

Yeah and while we're plugging things, for those of you that are in Central Indiana, I also want to plug Sampson Levingston of Through2Eyes, his walk and talk history tours. And when we're talking about these invisible legacies, you know, he takes people on walks of the city and they actually bring that invisible, you know, side of history to the forefront. You're looking at different plaques. You're looking at the names on the building, like who were they & what was their legacy? Were they an abolitionist, or, you know, were the anti abolition?- all of that. And so he really gets into that history and you see how present it is in everyday life. And it's just stuff that we're just walking right past that is still impacting us. And I would say even for those of you that are not in Central Indiana, if you're looking to learn more about the history that feels invisible to you, get out and walk around your town, walk around your city, take a look at the plaques, the different names, do your research, because there's so much that is still present and visible, that we feel as invisible.

Easton Phillips 42:15

Then I do want to ask- I'll start with Miss Bramell- if you want to weigh in on this point. So, if monuments don't represent the history itself, then we ask the question like: Why do we- Why have monuments? Because there's an implied idea that there's like permanence there, you know, this is here to stay. It's built to last you know- and why they're so hard to destroy for those who have tried to destroy them, is because they're literally- etched in stone. It's etched in rock, it's metal, it's supposed to stay there.

Katie Bramell 42:50

Yeah, I mean, in my own opinion, I think that they- I don't think that there's any space for them in our public spaces in society like they are.... again, it's not a proper tool to tell the story of history, it is glorifying history, it is glorifying the lost cause revisionist history. It doesn't- they don't- there's just no proper way, in my opinion, to do it. And, you know, like we've been talking about with the idea of presence, like removing them, putting them in museums, museums should not be the end all be all for this type of history, there is a way to tell this story properly, with context- with interpretation by using photos of monuments by like using, you know, like Jesse just talked about what we did in Cincinnati with recreating- you can recreate to get a size because that's part of it- like the intimidation factor

with building these types of monuments for the purposes of white supremacy, like it was done intentionally. We know that when monuments were built, the most popular times were in the early 1900s, when Jim Crow laws were happening all across the United States, when segregation was present when lynchings were present. These monuments were put up for a reason- for intimidation purposes, for retelling a story- then again in the 60s- 50s and 60s, there was another influx of these monuments being put up. So, you know, there are ways- this was done intentionally.

And like I said, I just do not think there's just any way to properly tell the story through that and there are just so much better things that we can do as a society. And I think- also Jesse's mentioned this before- this all boils down to a lack of real true understanding of the Civil War, true understanding of American history, of black history, of enslavement, of reconstruction. I mean, reconstruction is not taught for the most part in schools today. I mean, we would have kids come to the Freedom Center, from all over Ohio and Indiana and Kentucky, and this history was just scratched- they just scratched the surface on it. And now with everything that's happening in our public education system, in the south, especially, I mean, it is not, it's not a great time, I'm sure to be a parent living in states in the South and sending your kids to public schools and not knowing like what education they're going to receive. And knowing that these important parts of history are going to be left out. And then that creates more ignorance and more lack of understanding. And just, I think a frustration piece in there that is getting this real support for these types of symbols. So it's a large, it's a large issue. But I think looking at them as a whole at their presence in society. I just do not see. And I'm a you know, I'm a historian, right? Like, I am fully in support of telling history and telling the whole story, but there's just no way you can do it.

Easton Phillips 44:31

Y'know, it's funny what you just said about the reconstruction piece? Do you think maybe the reason why it doesn't get taught a ton is because people both north and south don't want to recognize the fact that it was a failure.

Katie Bramell 46:18

100%- and it's uncomfortable, right? Like, as a, you know, I'm sure as a white teacher, it's uncomfortable to talk about the forced enslavement and then, you know, during the Reconstruction what white Americans did to black Americans in this country and what's allowed to be happening, and like, it's not fun things to talk about. But it's important. Like, it doesn't, it doesn't have to be comfortable. Like that was always our big thing that we talked about the freedom center, this doesn't, you don't need to feel good after this, like you don't need to be like, but then it all was fixed in 1964, with the civil rights act like that's not. (Dr.King!) Unfortunately, like, that just doesn't- that's not how history has happened in this country. And a lot of that is because we're too, we're too afraid, I think, to really have these tough conversations.

Jesse Kramer 47:13

Shame is something that needs to be talked about here as well, there's so much shame that surrounds all of this. And when someone is ashamed, they want to hide that shame usually, and doing that just creates more shameful actions. So really, for- for us to move forward on these things, we need to put all of these things out into the light and talk about them in a way that is going to move us all forward. Because trying to go back to the past and having nostalgia for a time that was not "better", is a really dangerous thing. And that's something we talk about here a lot too. You know, we have folks that come visit here because it's nostalgic for them. It's "it was a simpler time." It was a "simpler way of life." Well, it was simpler for whom? Who was a simpler for? And that's me quoting Dr. Charlene Fletcher right there. She's the one who threw that out there originally. And it's an excellent point because nostalgia is a dangerous thing when it comes to history. This idea that things were "better", and they weren't. They weren't better for anyone, really. I mean, you go back to 1836- if you got a paper cut, you could die. It's not a better time, it was a lot harder. And this, this idea that, you know, if we go back to the 1950s, things are gonna be simpler, easier. No, it's not. Women couldn't have a bank account, like, without their husband's permission. So like, these are things that we have to look at and see how much progress has been made. But also, you know, if we backslide into these things, I think a lot of people are going to be really disappointed if that happens, and they're going to realize that things weren't really better.

Zoe Morgan 49:21

Yeah, well, that's why I also took a large issue when I first started working here with the whole "step into the story", because I was like, whose story am I stepping into?

Easton Phillips 49:30

Ooh.

Jesse Kramer 49:32

That's a great point.

Zoe Morgan 49:33

Because the- you know, my story, the story of my ancestors doesn't feel like it has a place here. And it was one that- it felt like the institution was not ready to tap into until Promised Land as Proving Ground. And so anyway, I just appreciate you saying that.

Jesse Kramer 49:51

I mean, it's- it's something that- Promised Land as Proving Ground is a very small first step in a much larger conversation in how we engage with the public in general as a museum and I think that it's

your point about kinship, and all of that, and finding that we are all children and stewards of this land, is really important to see. And, you know, where we are in the world and 2024 today, there are so, so, so many bigger existential problems that we face as a society, like as a global human society, for us to be still having conversations about monuments. It just, but that's part of it. So it's just, yeah, it's- we have a lot of work to do. And, you know, how we teach our history matters in these larger conversations about how we move forward as a society and as, you know, a collective humanity. And, you know, just recognizing each other as fellow human beings.

Easton Phillips 51:13

So, when you say that, I do want to ask you both. So how do we then remove symbols like that, that are bigger than just a statue? Like, how do you personally feel?

Jesse Kramer 51:25

I think it starts with having conversations with the people who are close to you, you know, it starts there. And you know, not preaching at people, but meeting them where they are, and helping to bring them forward with you on this journey, because this kind of work is important for us to have more respect for one another and see each other as unique and important individuals. And you know, treating people with respect and dignity is a huge step in the right direction on that but also bringing them along on this journey. Because there are things that I witnessed when I was growing up in southeastern Indiana and the school system that I was in that were absolutely atrocious and the teachers did nothing about it. And there were- there were statements that were made, things that were said in the hallway, it was a very homogenously white school. I think there were two children in my school that were people of color and that was in the 90s and early 2000s. So you know, a lot of this has to do with getting out and meeting different people and getting to know different people and, you know, really broadening your horizons because it's really the saddest thing to me about this- this legacy of the monuments and this legacy of racism that exists in our country. The saddest thing to me about it is how many people are closing themselves off to really wonderful interactions with other people, and how many- how I just mourn for all the people who don't get a chance to know people outside of their their own little group. It's- it's really sad, because they're, they're missing out on so much love and so many wonderful things. And it's just tragic.

Katie Bramell 53:30

Starting where- in your circle where it makes sense. You just have to have patience. And I think that leading, again, with this education piece to wherever we can, trying to make sure that- if it's not in the schools- that museums exist that are having these conversations, I mean, you guys are doing a great, great work at Conner Prairie, you know, a living history museum, like that's awesome! Like, being in these spaces where we know school kids are going to go, Right? Because they are- it's part of their curriculum, it's so important.

Easton Phillips 54:04

Thank you. (Yeah) We try our best.

Zoe Morgan 54:08

Oh, no. And I do want to say again, with, you know, starting to have those conversations with your inner circle, it can seem a little daunting at first. And so we have talked about this before, but a good entryway is the national public housing museum's 36 questions that lead to civic love. Again, just finding that connection, that common ground first, starting with something like "what is your favorite kitchen smell?" Or "who would you invite to dinner" or something like that. And then, once you- again, it's designed to fall in civic love with each other. And I think that's a good entry point into getting into the nitty gritty- the tougher questions that will make you uncomfortable, but they're necessary and have to be had.

Jesse Kramer 54:51

And get comfortable being uncomfortable. That's a huge part of it. And recognize that it is absolutely a privilege to feel tired in this work and frustrated, because there are a lot of people moving through our world who don't get to feel tired. And who have to fight this every single day. So, keep that in mind when you're doing it. When you get frustrated when you get tired, realize that you have the option to be tired, but you have to keep moving forward because other people don't have the option to stop. (That's deep!)

Easton Phillips 55:30

Well, did we want to then step into your call to action before we start rapid-firing the questions?

Zoe Morgan 55:36

Yeah, sure. So I want to talk a little bit about the monument's impact that it has on the community that it's in. So as we've, you know, talked about; these Confederate monuments can have a significant impact on the communities that they're in. And they often stir a lot of controversy and debate. And as we've said, while some of these- while some people view these monuments as heritage and history, what they really represent is racism and oppression. And they symbolize a legacy of racism, slavery, and oppression and perpetuate the exclusion and inequalities experienced by marginalized communities- like that's the message that these are sending. As we said, many of them were erected during Jim Crow and the civil rights movement and it was a way to assert white supremacy. We didn't really touch on Stone Mountain, but the kkk, met at Stone Mountain, they're promoting the message that white supremacy is important to them. And it's a clear indication that they want to uphold these racist ideologies instead of dismantle them. And that's the message that's still being sent in 2024. And, you know, most of these monuments, as I said earlier, occupy these

public spaces that are supposed to be welcoming and inclusive for all members of the community. And when I was looking at Stone Mountain Park, it's a beautiful natural green space that should be welcoming to everyone. But it is quite literally a memorial to the Confederacy as it depicts Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. And it officially opened April 14, 1965- 100 years to the day after Lincoln's assassination and is located off of Robert E. Lee Boulevard. Yeah, so (Sigh of disbelief) Yeah, it's bad. It's awful.

Jesse Kramer 57:20
It seems intentional.

Zoe Morgan 57:21
It's intentional. It is an example of an atrocious time in our history that's being glorified intentionally. And it continues to be used to empower white supremacist to this day. And again, so even though- well, I will say the kkk is still alive and well. So they are still meeting just in plain sight, and without hoods- to be clear. So what message is that sending to the residents of that community- Right? They are not welcome, they are not safe. They are not valued. They are not appreciated. And how do you live like that? How do you live in a place like that? But I do want to talk about some of the ways that we can civically get engaged in this. I've attended quite a few civic summits and sessions focused on engaging young people in civics over the last month. And what all of them have really concluded is that one of the main barriers keeping youth from civic engagement is the feeling that they can't make a difference. And so there's no point in voting or making their voices heard. But I'd like to highlight that the removal of these Confederate monuments are largely due to civic action and put participation, and that mass protests and petitions have led to the removal of these monuments. And that is an example that civic action does work. So if you have a Confederate monument or other works of racist art that you'd like to see removed from your community, there are actions that you can take, even though it doesn't feel like it. So I just like to talk a little bit about those.

So you can form or join a group that's advocating for the removal of the monument. Again, collective action can really help amplify the voices and increase impact in your community. Creating and circulating petitions calling for the removal of the monument can help raise awareness, because some people might not even actually know- as we as we've said, and so the education piece is very important. And so it can bring awareness and help demonstrate community support for removal. So that you know, you don't feel alone in that and that also government officials see "oh, this whole community that I would also like the support of, wants this thing taken down, so I would like to support them in their efforts." Yeah. You can start contacting local government officials to express your concern. You can propose alternatives to Confederate monuments such as markers of memorials honoring the victims of slavery, or celebrating diverse community histories. For example, in 2019, in Richmond, Virginia, artist Kehinde Wiley unveiled a new statute titled "rumors of war",

and we'll link to this New Yorker article that this story is featured in so that you can all see this statue, but it mimics the militaristic style of Confederate statues that were erected during the Jim Crow era. But Wiley's work actually features a young black man in a sweatshirt and high tops sitting atop a stallion. It's a beautiful image, and he has locs. And I just personally appreciate that because I have locs. So I'm just like seeing myself in this history. And again, we're going to link to that. But there's a (written) passage for Wiley's hope for this statue that really stuck out to me. So, "he noted that art has always depicted what people value even in paintings of ruffled collars or bowls of fruit, the monuments in Richmond point to a century of white supremacy. And he hoped that by using the visual language of memorialization to depict the people who were oppressed, he could show that the city's values have changed." And so that's really our hope in removing them. But also, again, in some of these alternatives to that art, we want to change what message we are sending to the community, in that- this is what we value, and it is not white supremacy, it is not racism, and it's not oppression.

So other things that you can do: You can organize peaceful protests, or demonstrations to raise visibility, and pressure decision makers to take action on removing Confederate monuments. It's so important to hold them accountable for their commitments to remove these Confederate monuments. You can work with other local organizations or advocacy groups, to mobilize broader support for removal efforts. There are more people doing this work than you think- is, you know what I'm really hearing from both of you, Jesse and Katie. And so there's strength in numbers. And it's helpful to have people around you that can encourage and can continue to encourage you and motivate you to continue this fight when you are feeling discouraged because it is difficult, challenging work that it just feels disheartening at times but as Jesse said, right, you have to just continue that fight. So continue to seek out those people that are in the fight with you. So those are some of the things that you can do. If you have any, again, Confederate monuments or other works of- its, I don't even want to call them 'art.' But any kind of history like that, that you'd like removed from your community.

Easton Phillips 1:02:28

That's really good. Also, yes to emphasize also -peaceful protests (Peaceful)- please don't go out and break something and say that 'this is problematic' told me to do it, like please. So I did also want to ask, we understand that, of course, Miss Bramell and Jesse- during your time at the Freedom Center, y'all dealt with this: trying to acquire monuments and then getting- unfortunately having to face the "leave them up/tear them down"- thing during what was maybe not as politically turbulent now, but definitely a politically turbulent era, and how that played out. But I just want to know if you got any memories from that time you wanted to share, maybe happy ones, but if you don't have any happy ones, that's fine, too. But I just know we've talked about a lot of sad things. And so...

Katie Bramell 1:03:10

Working on that exhibit was just so surreal for me because it was my capstone project for my masters. So getting to see it in person, getting to work with Jesse to curate it, and he had, you know, fantastic vision from a design perspective and also helping how the story is getting told, was just really rewarding and really fun. And just also, I swear, I talked about how we put together that monument for like five years after. Because I kept working with the people- the same people- and I'm just like, "Hey, remember when we were just drilling plywood together for what felt like, two days or something?" I mean, it was, that was a very extensive build, and it was just so rewarding and cool to work on that as like my first big exhibit project. And I think people really enjoyed it. Like, I'm not trying to be like, toot own horn or anything or, but like what we put together, I think, really started a conversation. And it was- it was a success. So I feel just so lucky to be able to work on that with you, Jesse, and to tell people about it, so.

Jesse Kramer 1:04:25

And I feel very lucky that I got to work with you on it as well. That was a really, really cool project. And it was my- it was my swan song at the Freedom Center. So yeah, I unfortunately, did not get to witness people going through it beyond the opening night of that exhibit, because that was literally my last day at the Freedom Center. I extended my- extended my time there to be able to complete that exhibit and then move on up to Conner Prairie. So yeah, we, we really had just a wonderful collaboration on it. And what Katie put together for that was absolutely phenomenal. The exhibit script was amazing and there were so many things that, in a very small space, we were able to address that really just linked everything together. It was like- this is how we got from point A to point B to point C, to where we are now. And I think that is so key in history and the histories that we tell, it's making those connections for people so they can see the cause and effect throughout time- to how we got to where we are is really just so important. And I think the coolest thing about that exhibit was the link that we had directly to one of our colleagues, Dr. Newsome. His daughter, Bree Newsome- It was, I think a year before the exhibit went up, climbed the flagpole in South Carolina at the State House, and tore the Confederate flag down.

And we had a painting that was donated to the Freedom Center of her that was on display. And we had a quote from her about why she made the decision in that moment to stand up and do that. So, this is someone who will be viewed as a major player in the modern movement for civil rights in the future. And it was really cool to be able to make that connection- in that space and at that time. I remember when I was driving that weekend and I heard it on the radio- I heard it on NPR. I was just like, "Oh, our marketing department is going to have a rough week." Because it was only a matter of time before the local media realized that it was Dr. Newsome's daughter, but she eventually came and spoke at the Freedom Center and talked about her experience with that. And I believe the program was called 'tearing ate from the sky.' But it was just so awesome that we were able to

include that part of the story in there as well because it was that immediate connection to our organization in a way and that was really cool.

Easton Phillips 1:07:28

I think that was a really good note to end on. (Yeah, I think we should) I really don't want to ask anything else aside from- Well, first I want to thank you all- both for your time- for hanging out with us and talking through this- we really appreciate you and your expertise. You both are, in my eyes, champions in the museum field and in my career I want to be more like y'all, so thank you.

Zoe Morgan 1:07:48

So yeah, thank you so much for listening to this episode of 'This is problematic.' You can find us on Instagram at 'thisisproblematicpodcastcp' and you can find us on...X (twitter) @problematicpod2.

Easton Phillips 1:08:04

I love the way you said "X."

Zoe Morgan 1:08:06

I just wanted to say Twitter's so badly. Yeah, it's always Twitter to me anyway.

Easton Phillips 1:08:11

Thank y'all so much for coming by. Until next time, take care!

-Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

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