



## Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series

### Present Trends and Disparities

[June 10, 2021](#)

#### Comments and Questions from audience members at the event

##### *Transcriptions*

“My name is just Joe, no more no less. After I graduated high school, I joined the army and went to Germany. I was stationed in Amberg. We guarded the West Germany-Czechoslovakia communit border. In Nuremberg, I lived in the barracks. The SS Barracks they called it during the war. I went down underneath and saw all the equipment and writing on the wall. When I was in Amberg, I was the only American GI to be a member of a horseback riding club. Most of their horses were killed in World War II, so they were really prized and it was an honor to do that for two and half years. There was a gentleman named Dr. Sauer who was high in the SS. My young German friend who I spent a lot of time with said that the scar on his cheek indicated he was SCS in high authority. That was kind of wild. Anyway, I think the Marshall Plan in Germany, which the United States under FDR, physically resurrected almost all of Germany. My German friend also took me to a movie theater one night and it was a documentary on the Holocaust. It was real. I was sitting in an audience of hundreds of Germans and I didn’t hear a pin drop. This was in maybe 59. Although Germany to my knowledge is a great country now, they’re great and they have a great president.”

“My name is Ty. I was apprehensive about asking this question because I’m not responding to an email from Dr. Mullen. I have a question. As a black American male who identifies culturally as black American who’s non-affluent, I see definitively that there’s a liberal white ethos who cares to try to control the narrative. Any space where pro-blackness exists, it’s often seen as a threat. So for our panelists as well as our guest speaker, how do you see this new generation of black people addressing this, when as a black American, specifically our black men non-affluent lower socio-economic, you are an economic migrant with an entire capitalistic structure that’s set against you? How do you see us migrating that in order to create social cohesiveness?”

“Thank you. My name is Sam Quick. I’m born and raised here, a local all my life. My question is the restoration that is going on, which should have happened 40 years ago in my opinion, how is this restoration going to help build the legacy that we once had here in Asheville for the black community that has gone and dissipated? How is this going to help rebuild the legacy that we

once had so we can share it with our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren?”

“My name is Justus Rogers. I’m a community activist and a retired federal law enforcement officer. My question is, we are a culture of people adapted to living in a white controlled community, part of reparations should be mental health wellness in the black community. How do we become well under a society that was created to keep us unwell and broken? We live in a system that works perfectly for those who have created that system to stay alive. What does it look like to be a healthy black community? And my last statement may be a little uncomfortable. But I think we should do what’s right and not what’s white.”

“My name is Ray Mapp. First of all, I’d like to pick up on what the prosecutor just said about the projects. Being empathetic about how America was set up. Once a government supports the kidnapping of a group of people to be enslaved, that means that their offspring will not have an inheritance and they will not be empowered in a capitalistic society. So all of the cities around the country had to figure out what to do with these children who are the descendants of slaves. So that’s why they created the projects. They had to house them. They had to house us. One thing I wanted to talk about and I want us all to think about is the fact that in America, there is a white privilege of having a domestic terrorist organization. That’s a white privilege in America. But my question is this, with all the educated people in this country and room, why is it that we allow black people to be extorted to pay taxes into a government that allows domestic terrorism against them? Some of the police may be KKK members. The ku klux klan is legal. The proud boys are legal. And our taxes might be paying them as a police officer. And their agenda has nothing to do with what the police training is. So with all of our education and our status, we allow ourselves to be extorted. It’s time for us to be embarrassed about that. Now being extorted is a crime. If we could get our tax money back for all the years that the federal government has allowed the KKK to be legal after they bombed Oklahoma City building and bombed the church to kill all the children, and committed several terrorist acts. In fact, Tulsa, Oklahoma was done by the ku klux klan and they’re going to call it a white mob so we won’t go after the ku klux klan. But when are we going to have the courage to face the big ugly dragon in the room?”

“Thank Dr. Waters and thank you to the panel. A couple of questions about how those of us who have some skill can participate in this process. I think Attorney Feguson last week called it something like reputational assassination. There are a lot of folks who aren’t here in the room who hopefully we can engage in another format and in another venue that is much more centered around them. There are a lot of people who’ve suffered. I’m an Asheville native by the way. Black folks owned houses before urban renewal came. Unfortunately, there’s another data

statistic, that we had more land confiscated during urban renewal than any other city in the southeastern USA. That was over 600 acres and over 1200 homes. Is there any wonder we have a capital gap here? We have no businesses that are black that are busting a million dollars in gross revenues and have employees. There's just so much that we haven't told the truth about. We still shy away from the truth. It will set you free. But that's only reserved for some folks like us who are maladjusted who just don't give a damn one way or the other anymore because we don't have anything to lose. Let me just say that a lot of us have pandered because of career opportunities not to the truth but what is convenient. When you're a resource poor community, you do what you have to do and I understand that. That is not pointing an accusatory finger at anybody. But it also lends itself to having people who are not quite the most ableist nor the brightest and best to deal with our people. So when you have that, just like when you have a sick child, you invite quackery in. And we saw what happened with the block, that there was rampant quackery and was backed by the police power and the zoning and the redevelopment authority of the city. We lost a vital black business district. My question is, how can those of us who do have skill participate in this process? Because most of the time, we're left out and when it comes to staff, especially in governmental departments, even people who are of color who are in there, are no more than gatekeepers to us. We're just excluded. So my question is, when are we going to have a real truth telling session where those of us who do have some skills can feel safe enough to come in and use those skills to help our community?"

"I'm Bernard. I want to talk about leveling the playing field. Right now, reparations is all about leveling the playing field and it started with talking about education or the miseducation of the negro. A famous brother named Carter G. Woodson wrote "The Miseducation of the Negro." What are we doing to level the playing field with the miseducation of the negro? Taking it further, what are we doing to expand the definition of reparations? What does it mean? What does it mean to the average person that is not here? What does it mean to the average person that doesn't understand justice? What does it mean to the average person who is low-resource or has a low economic resource and they can't even spell reparations? What does it mean during these time frames? And one of the things that I'd also like to hear you talk about is the restructuring of the tax code in Asheville. The tax code that is over burdening or overcharging the poor class or the not so super rich or the rich. What are we doing to level that playing field so that the super rich are paying taxes that are equivalent to their investments not their incomes? How are we rewriting the tax code to affect reparations?"

"Thank you. This has been an extremely informative panel discussion. I'll make my question very quick so we can continue. What are some policies that you think should be immediately implemented and what institutions should be implementing these policies? How do we make that happen?"

“Grant Millin. I’m a long time Asheville resident. I have lived here since 1980 and I ride the bus. I drive through the public housing units and that’s part of the reason I noticed that 71 percent of Asheville’s African Americans living in public housing number and that’s in the 2019 City of Asheville Equity Action Plan. That wasn’t me; that was Kimberlee Archie, who was the first manager. It gets referenced in the Equity and Inclusion Assessment that rolled out this year. If we don’t know that, because zero journalists covered that assessment and that number 71 percent of Asheville’s African Americans living in public housing. The way they talk about it, but how can you not? So segregation happening now. But I want to tell you that this can get blown up. Defunding the police is over because the black leadership in Atlanta is just this past few weeks saying “law and order.” It’s law and order again. I’m really interested in pinpointing stuff. I’m going to be talking about making Mission hospital a public hospital. There’s stuff to do but it’s for all of us. I will talk about the disabled. I’m really interested in seeing this unveil and I’m going to help focus this and people may get really angry at me sometimes because of the stuff I bring up. Like street fentanyl. This town is like a hub of illegal fentanyl. It’s tragic and people are not talking about it. City Hall is not wanting to get into this. I’m really interested in seeing it for real. Asheville’s African Americans being that better future.”

“This is not a question. I could not allow the night to pass by. I know many of you have paid homage to him but my brother by another mother as he called me, Elder John Hayes and to the family, my deepest condolence. Also, since I am a member of the class of 1969 from the last predominately African American high school in Asheville, I must pay homage and respect to Mr. Cheryl and Miss Elizabeth Eubanks who helped the class of 1969 and taught me. And I better throw in Mr. John Duesenberg. He helped us to designate our path and to all of you I say this simply, I address the Buncombe County Commissioners and the Asheville City Council before the pandemic began, half-hearted piecemeal efforts is not going to get it done. Now we can all get hung up on the paralysis of analysis until the cows come in but there’s certain things that are going on right now that you’re presenting that you’re making an effort to do that’s contrary to what you’re actually doing. Mendacity. We’re all a bunch of mendacious individuals, a bunch of liars, a bunch of shapeshifters. You cannot talk about equity. You created an equity czar. You fell out with the equity czar and you dismissed her. So let’s just keep it real people. If you want to accomplish something, keep it real, keep it inclusive. And include every aspect of the community. One reason I stepped up here is because I had to give my respects to the Hayes and the Cheryl family. But we got mis definition and misinformation. Nobody is talking about how you got to define your terms. When you say defund the police, you don’t literally mean you’re going to defund the police. What you mean is, you’re going to bring some of that money into other social agencies that can help the individual so you won’t shoot down a man that’s having a mental attack and find out later that he was acting like that.”

“My name is Daniel Young. I’m from Hillcrest. I want to give respect to Elder John Hayes. Mr. Hayes taught us, me as a black man from Hillcrest, that we can be anything no matter where we are from. This is what Mr. Hayes meant to Hillcrest. I’m here speaking on my community. I’m a teacher now here in Asheville. I got a felony. I’m a project of what we can do, of what Mr. Hayes showed us what we are capable to do. I’m teaching our kids how to survive here in Asheville. This reparations money needs to be going to a place where we can teach our youth about how to be black and how to appreciate who they are. We need a school where we can teach our kids to have pride in themselves. I’m working at Asheville City Schools and we got teachers that don’t have no compassion for us, who look at our kids as a possibility of being a thief. We need a place where we can cultivate our own kids, teach our kids how to have respect for their self and how to love their self, how to treat our trauma. These teachers are not teaching us nothing. Use this reparations money for us, for our kids so we can get help, so we can teach our kids. Stop holding us back because we got felonies and we cannot teach our kids. The ones who don’t got felonies are not teaching our kids shit. Excuse my language. They are failing our system, our kids. We got kids that don’t even want to go to school because they can feel the racism coming from the teachers. Use this reparations money so it can help our community. I’ve been here all my life. Hillcrest, we continue to struggle. You’re showing pictures of the southside. What about Hillcrest? What about the other balck in this community? I have seen the police come into our community and shoot us down. That’s right, we want to defund these police. If you’re not going to do right by our community, stay out of our community. We don’t need to be policed by you. We need help. We need these city council members to get off these seats, come to the hood. Talk to these kids. Talk to these black girls and tell them what they can be. Get off your pedestals and come and do some work in our neighborhoods. Let’s break these barriers down.”

### Voicemail Comment

#### *Transcriptions*

“Hi, my name is Sabrina. I'm an Asheville city. Native Asheville is my ancestry home. And to be quite honest, this city has always been filled with love and music and accepting people. And if you go through my city and you find something that you want to destroy, then you've never really seen my city. You've never seen what it means. If you've ever walked the streets of my city, then you would know what it means. And you went and destroy anything. In spite of it, I think it is wrong that the city council has devoted so much money just for a program that is only designed to destroy my history. If you're not from my city. And you're, you have no understanding of what everything inside of this city does. It tells a story of the ones that have come before us. And if you can't respect that and you don't deserve to live in my ancestral home. And that's all I have to say, because I don't want you to destroy any more of the history of Asheville. And if you can't respect it, then you don't need to live here.”

## Written Comment from comment cards and emails

“The Vance Monument is gone, and it’s well that this symbol of white supremacy no longer abides in a place of honor in our community. Confederate monuments, almost all of which were erected decades after the Civil War, were not emblematic of The Lost Cause, but were erected as statements of a continuing domination by whites over non-whites. But Donald Trump and others say that taking down Confederate monuments is destroying our history. They have a point - white supremacy is part of our history.

A friend gave me an article published in the London Times Literary Supplement that described a happening in England following the murder of George Floyd. A statue erected in 1895 of a man who had gained vast wealth in the Atlantic slave trade was toppled by Black Lives Matter protesters. One of the protesters, Jen Reid, stood on the vacant pedestal and defiantly raised her fist in a black power salute. Her picture was taken and from that picture a new statue was cast and surreptitiously placed on that same pedestal. It was removed later the same day. The author of the article, James Hall, suggested that it might have been better if the original statue had been left standing and the statue of Jen Reid had been placed facing-off against it, depicting the conflict. Both being gone left nothing. In Mr. Hall’s words, there is “a real danger that out of sight becomes out of mind”.

Although that happened in England, the concept suggested by Mr. Hall contains a thought for us. The fight, the rage, the powerful dynamic of the clash of value systems needs to be before us vividly and graphically.

It’s been said that all history is contemporary history. Systemic racism can’t be destroyed by removing statuary. For reparations to make any sense we must know and own our true history - the good, the bad, and the ugly of it. The ongoing injustice must be kept persistently and compellingly before the public in the context of what has gone before. As Mr. Hall noted, there is a real danger that out of sight becomes out of mind.

We’re in a face-off with historic and present injustice. In 1857 Frederick Douglass said, “This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them.”

The struggle won’t be quick and easy. Being in the right creates its own power. People must understand and be convinced of the rightness of the cause and our commitment to achieve racial justice. They must understand its fundamental importance. And we must be persistent.

With reparations, as with defeating authoritarian assaults, we are in a struggle for the soul of our country.”

**Comment by: Jim Hugenschmidt**

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“Hello! Dan Lewis here; former student and co-creator of the Facebook page “I Survived the 1969 Asheville High Riot”, where we have spent many years gathering all available information about the unfortunate events of September 29, 1969, where police and other outside influences escalated a peaceful Black student demonstration into a riot that shut the city down for three days. At the 1969 site you will find all available information printed in local and regional news, along with hundreds of eye-witness accounts and an interview with the Black former student who was instrumental in organizing the peaceful demonstration, and was unjustly blamed for the long inaction and then overreaction of the school board, and local police, who helped escalate the peaceful demonstration into a riot. These traumatic and racially motivated events are among the worst ever documented in Asheville history, and one-sided news accounts never interview a single Black student for their side of the story; the injustice has injured racial integration and balance to this day, over 50 years later. Any serious discussion of reparations in Asheville should also discuss these events: I strongly believe that these young students civil rights under the Constitution were both violated and deprived of, and it has left a divisive scar 50 years wide and deep in Asheville race relations. I personally investigated these events for close to a decade; as a young White student who witnessed the peaceful demonstration and the police bringing violence to it, I was aware then that something was terribly wrong, and that the young Black students were not to blame, although all following accounts implied that the innocent ones were actually to blame. Below is my conclusions, after gathering all available accounts and interviews. I am happy to meet and discuss this further with anyone interested. Thanks, Dan Lewis 828-778-1726 ..... A FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP: 1969 Many of you know that the goal of this Facebook page is to gather together as many stories as possible to determine what actually happened on September 29th, 1969, and why. I and many others have long been disturbed that what happened was blamed on the students, while several more powerful factions played far more questionable parts in the drama. I have obsessed over this as much as anyone, probably more. After literally thousands of hours over a lot of years, below is the conclusion of my investigation. Peace. A FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP: WHY THE AHS RIOT OF 1969 HAPPENED In order to start a fire, you have to have the right materials, the right conditions and a source of ignition, a spark that can ignite those flammable materials into fire. Fifty years ago, in the sleepy little mountain town of Asheville, North Carolina, a fire of cultural repression ignited a peaceful student protest into a riot and quickly burned out of control, forcing the city to literally shut down for three days and nights, an event unique in Asheville’s history. Newspaper accounts of the era reported what civic leaders told them, and the riot was blamed on the originally planned peaceful student protest, and this inaccurate reporting remains the accepted account of what happened. Here, on the Facebook page “I

SURVIVED THE 1969 ASHEVILLE HIGH RIOT" for the first time, we have gathered hundreds of stories from the students who were actually there, eyewitness memories from everyone we could find and contact, old newspaper articles, actual photos, background information and legal proceedings from the aftermath of the Asheville High riot of September 1969. The full and accurate story was never reported; here is a much expanded and hopefully far more accurate assessment of what actually happened. Hundreds of people have shared their stories, which inspired years of additional research, digging up old newspaper stories from microfilm at Pack Library, hundreds of hours of internet research and personal face to face interviews with a few essential voices. Roger Ball, an AHS student and school photographer in 1969 shared his unique and remarkable photographs of the peaceful student protest that was ignited into a riot; what we have assembled is the largest and most comprehensive body of evidence ever gathered on these events; years have been spent in trying to understand exactly what actually happened and why. What follows is a condensed version of the events leading up to the peaceful student protest at Asheville High School on September 28, 1969, and the aftermath. It is essential to understand that fifty years later, this remains an extremely painful wound in the hearts and minds of many former students, for various reasons. Consequently, in respect for those most deeply hurt, no names of any of the various participants will be used in this account; it is sincerely hoped that no further emotional stress will occur from this account, but rather a sense of relief that the full and accurate story finally be revealed. Every possible effort has been made to tell the full story; unsubstantiated aspects have been left out. Sincere apologies to anyone who is offended for any reason; that has never been the intent. The intent has been to tell the real story and set history right. Dan Lewis June 5, 2020 ..... WHERE TO BEGIN? In order to understand the story, it is essential to see what was happening before and during the time that these events took place; we can only fully understand what happened and why it happened by understanding what happened before that led up to this cultural clash; read on. Cultural oppression is as old as America and far older; in order to get to the central story, we will assume everyone has an understanding of slavery and racism in early America, and start this account, briefly, in the Asheville of the 1920s, when a citywide building effort built new schools in central and west Asheville. (If you are wondering what school buildings have to do with riots, be patient and read on; this will be made clear soon.) These new school buildings were designed by a noted Asheville architect and included David Millard Junior High, Stephens-Lee High School and Asheville High School (later known as Lee Edwards) and Hall Fletcher across the French Broad River in west Asheville. The largest high school, Asheville High, designed for the largest number of students, was built in granite to last far longer than the others, which were built beautifully but simply of brick. This is an important distinction; today, some ninety years later, only Asheville High survives. Each school played an important role in it's neighborhood, but none were as essential and beloved in its community as Stephens-Lee High School on the east side of Asheville in the racially segregated Black community, loosely defined by Eagle and



Valley Street on one side and Beaucatcher Mountain behind. Known in the community as “The Castle on the Hill”, Stephens-Lee was the most beautiful and impressive building in the Black community, and became the cultural and spiritual gathering place for meetings, events, even weddings and religious activities. The school itself was a unique cultural effort to raise the leaders of the next generation, and noted educators were gathered there to insure the success of that effort. Teachers were not simply educators, but extensions of the family; it was an effort unique to Stephens-Lee, not present nor duplicated in the other mostly White city schools. Black history and cosmetology, unavailable in White schools, was featured at Stephens-Lee. Their sports teams were also exceptional and much awarded, and their marching band became legendary at the annual Christmas parade. There was a deep community pride and cultural identification with that school, beyond any other school in the Asheville City School system. But by the 1960s, those once beautiful brick schools had all become dinosaurs; large cracks appeared across exterior walls, huge single-pane windows rattled and let winter cold and summer heat into crowded classrooms. Concrete steps were dished out by millions of footsteps over four decades, and the heating systems resembled the bowels of a massive Titanic-like steamship, fed by men with shovels. The plumbing was all substandard and antiquated; air conditioning had not been invented when those schools were built. The decision was made to tear down all the old brick schools and replace them with new ones; it was a decision based on economics and logic, but did not factor in the deep connection of “The Castle on the Hill” with the Black community, which was culturally devastated by the loss of their beloved gathering place; the painful impact of that loss remains, fifty plus years later. To the city, it was a logical business move; to the Black community, it was a terrible loss. Meanwhile, larger events were changing the country and the South in ways that also increased tensions on both Black and White communities across America. With the 1954 Supreme Court decision concerning *Brown vs. Board of Education*, schools across America were decreed by federal law to integrate. This was seen by most as a great step forward for Black communities nationwide; equal access to the same quality of education and resources was seen as a step closer to equality and equal opportunity... except in the rare Black schools like Asheville’s Stephens-Lee, where the quality of education and cultural identity often exceeded typical White schools. But federal mandates cannot be ignored, so an iconic Black school in Asheville would be lost in the larger national effort to equalize education. When researching the Asheville City School Board during this era, “reading between the lines” becomes important in getting a feeling about their actions, and more importantly, their lack of action. They were faced with two big problems: the systemwide school infrastructure issues covered above, and the systemwide integration of the city schools, mandated by the US government. To be fair, neither one was simple, easy or cheap. Yet another factor is the system and culture of the era; it is only logical to assume that certain people would have been reluctant to change a system that had been in place for generations. Any power structure firmly entrenched will resist change from external influences; it is safe to assume that

Asheville had people both anxious for and resistant to change. Racial segregation had been in place for generations, and some Whites preferred to keep it there, despite the federal mandate, so it's safe to say that a faction of both school board and city/county government was resistant to school integration, while others were eager for change. To illustrate this point, consider that while the federal mandate for school integration had been made 15 years before in 1954; Asheville schools were not officially integrated until September of 1969, only a few months before the federal deadline at the end of 1969. Ironically, Lee Edwards High, which would eventually become the central high school containing both former Lee Edwards and Stephens-Lee students, was already integrated. Black students who lived closer simply attended the closer high school, and there were no notable racial issues prior to the fall of 1969. So the greater issue was about the loss of the beloved Stephens-Lee school, sports teams, Black curriculum, Black educators and identity that had defined generations of Black students. So, how could this consolidation of two very different schools be accomplished, while somehow retaining the cultural identities and scholastic goals and achievements? It was a huge and complex challenge, and consolidation proved to be beyond the grasp of the local leaders faced with it. To further complicate the process and situation, racial tensions nationwide had been steadily escalating for the last fifteen years, during which major cities had burned when demonstrations had escalated into riots. Just the year before, in 1968, the beloved Black spiritual leader Doctor Martin Luther King JR. had been assassinated by a White shooter; with King murdered, his pleas for patience and non-violent protest gave way to righteous anger and demands for justice and change. The United States experienced hundreds of major and lesser protests in a few short years, with themes from racial and economic inequality to the Vietnam War; revolution was literally in the air and part of the times and culture for both races, sometimes (like the Vietnam protests) in solidarity. Months after the incident at Asheville High, four young unarmed White students were shot to death by National Guardsmen during an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University in Ohio. This is the background which frames this story; in order to fully understand what happened at Asheville High in September 1969, it is essential to keep the above in mind as the actual events of this story unfold.

**LEADING UP TO THE DEMONSTRATION:** The young Black students at Stephens-Lee had been educated to be the leaders of Tomorrow by the finest Black educators available in the country; they most likely knew the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution far better than their White counterparts at other schools, because they expected and had been prepared to fight the struggles that White students would never have to fight. So when school consolidation became their reality, unlike their White counterparts, the Black students had questions for and requests to present to the Asheville Board of Education. In retrospect, their requests were reasonable and logical: equal representation on student government councils, equal numbers of Black and White cheerleaders and majorettes, more Black educators and the addition of two specific Black courses, Black history and Cosmetology, both quite different than anything formerly offered at

predominantly White Lee Edwards, now becoming the consolidated Asheville High. Another important request was the inclusion of decades of treasured sports and scholastic trophies into the similar group already prominently displayed in the main rotunda of the consolidated Asheville High. Their reasoning behind the requests was simple: in a consolidation, each party had equal rights and opportunities; they were simply asking for equality, as their teachers had taught them to. Three unofficial leaders emerged from the new incoming Black students, two male and one female, and these three attended open school board meetings and presented their requests and reasoning for them. While there were a few Black school board members, it is safe to assume an 80 percent White, 20 percent Black school board; while Asheville and Buncombe County have become increasingly liberal since, it was the exact opposite in the 1960s. Consequently it is no surprise that requests by young Black students were denied, regardless of how politely or eloquently they were intended or delivered. Nevertheless, the three students persisted, and were joined by a young local Black civil activist who also stood up and supported the student requests; they petitioned repeatedly, attending several board meetings and were told repeatedly to wait, and that such changes would be considered at an unnamed later time. Remember that Doctor King had always counseled patience, but had been murdered the year before; patience was not in great supply in 1969. Change was needed, NOW. Still, the students then planned, in honor of Doctor King, a peaceful student demonstration; several meetings with trusted adult advisors were held to assure that their actions were safe, lawful and appropriate. The day was set for September 29, 1969; the time was 9:00 am, during first period. The word was passed from student to student; not all were willing to participate, but enough to make a good showing. Someone, perhaps a well intentioned adult adviser, felt it best to inform the authorities in advance. In retrospect, perhaps a huge mistake. **THE DEMONSTRATION TURNED RIOT** In those days, in a south still dominated by huge tobacco companies, students would congregate at the rear of the main building in “the smoking area”; even non-smokers hung out there with friends. This morning, there was an ominous addition: more than a dozen uniformed police gathered off to the side, each with an unusually long billy club. Most students had no idea why police were on school grounds, nor what was about to happen next. At the appointed time, newly consolidated Black students quietly stood up during their first class, gathered their books and walked out of classes all over the school, meeting on the front steps outside Asheville High. White students were clueless, and had no idea what was happening or why. Other Black students stayed in class, perhaps rightfully fearful of possible retaliation. Their meeting place was significant; although the school consolidation had been official for months, school board officials had neglected to change the signage at the front entrance to the school nor the carved marble inscription above the front door, which still read “Lee Edwards”. To the demonstrators, who’d had to give up their own beloved school, the lack of even superficial changes in signage must have reinforced their frustrations with the new school and the old school board. The demonstration began: a student would step forward, make

a brief impassioned speech, applause, some brief slogan chanting, and the process would begin again. Eventually, the principal would come out and speak, attempting to convince the students to return to class, and promising meetings soon to address their requests. The answer was no; they wanted change now; they had tried patience, and nothing came from it. It is logical to assume that the principal was in regular telephone contact with his superiors, between several pleas to the peacefully demonstrating students. At some point, those superiors on the school board called the City of Asheville, and another point of no return had been crossed. The waiting police filed out the front door, and the surprised and dismayed protesting students fell back, regrouping a short distance away. It is important to see the pictures of the young Black students neatly dressed in their school clothes, carrying an armful of books; the unspoken intent is to accomplish their demonstration and return to class; none appear threatening, none are armed nor dressed to fight nor even run away. The police formed a fence-like line and advanced on the line of students, billy-clubs held in a threatening manner, out-stretched and ready for action. The students retreated, some moving as if to leave school grounds, others reluctantly staying relatively close to advancing police, as if they didn't want to give up ground or appear fearful; initially it appears to be an uneasy standoff. Police advance again in a threatening manner, and dozens of more timid students leave quickly, fleeing in a disordered group, carrying their schoolbooks, miles from home. A small group remains defiantly. Then quickly, things go sideways: a third group of outsiders that had been waiting just off of school grounds for the expected police action joins the confusion, older and intent on escalating the friction. They are later described as those who had been badly used by local police, and hoped to join an expected conflict. The young civil activist from the school board meetings and another from downstate are also present. The two groups meet hand to hand, and blows are exchanged; one policeman goes down and a billy club is captured from police. Reinforcements quickly arrive in riot gear, helmets and plexiglass shields. Inexplicably the city manager, reportedly a war veteran, arrives and takes over; the police Chief is out of town. Improbably, the city manager is seen to rally the police and is said to have yelled "Charge!", leading what he later refers to as "his men" against the unarmed students and outsiders, as if reliving his military career. The unarmed group retreats slowly towards the north end of the old building, arming themselves from piles of building supplies and rubble from the new vocational building next door. They retreat between the two buildings, now throwing rubble at the advancing police who are intent in forcing the protesters off school grounds; a path of destruction is left behind them: dozens of plate glass windows broken, several small cars overturned and multiple windshields broken out as the conflict moves up through the back parking area. Finally the protesters are forced off school grounds. Inside the school, confusion, fear and panic, most students sequestered in classrooms during the action, oblivious to what happened and why, the school so completely disrupted that a short time later perhaps 12:30 to 1:00 pm, an announcement is made that the school is abruptly closed, hours before the school busses are scheduled to arrive. Panic stricken

students head towards the back parking lot, where they are confronted with a war scene of broken car windows and windshields and several overturned cars. Groups of students quickly flip the damaged cars upright, then pack themselves into vehicles like sardines and escape the wounded school. A citywide curfew is called from dusk till dawn; only emergency workers and police are allowed on city streets; city schools remain closed for three days. The city shelters in place, waiting for the storm to pass. THE AFTERMATH: The Asheville City School Board holds an investigation, which seems ironic, they being partially responsible for the conflict; by repeatedly refusing to even consider changes, their actions are at the start of the conflict; the gathered fuel for the fire. No official or reporter seems to mind that armed police advanced on unarmed students. The militant city manager also gets a pass by local authorities and newspapers; his intentions and motives seemed then and remains now very questionable. In the end, the school board caves in and agrees to every one of the requests made by the student activists. But, examples must be made, someone must be blamed, and someone must suffer...other than the school board, or the police, or the city manager, of course. So the three young idealistic student leaders become the perpetrators, the criminals responsible, because they had stood up and spoken out in school board meetings, and their names were known. One of the three had been admonished for not wearing socks to school, as dozens of students often didn't, so he was singled out as the scapegoat, while all three were warned by a local judge to never gather or speak to each other again. The student chosen as scapegoat was expelled, his promising future as a gifted student destroyed forever. All evidence points to a failure of leadership in both city school board and city government, with old southern institutional racism as the real villains, in conjunction with police, a complicit judge and complicit newspaper reports, whose accounts consistently imply falsely that the young Black students were the criminals in this terrible mess. It should be noted that the Constitution gives Americans the right to free speech, and to gather and peacefully demonstrate. These rights were not accorded to the young Black students of Asheville High in 1969; instead, after reviewing years of gathered stories and old newspaper accounts, it is clear that they were treated as criminals, unjustly and without compelling evidence. This is a story fifty years in the telling, and all the original reporting was slanted in favor of the old power structure of the time. The injustice that resulted from these events has cast a shadow over race relations in western North Carolina that lingers to this day. What can we do now, fifty years later? A formal apology from both City and School Board would be a good start; although the real perpetrators are probably all in their graves, an apology might just begin to heal a wound fifty years old and fifty years deep. Maybe. So there's what actually happened, from someone who was there, watched a lot of it, and knew it was wrong as it happened. Everything uncovered since leads to the same conclusion: The young Black students who protested that day at Asheville High accomplished everything they set out to do, but the system branded them as criminals for being brave enough to defy the old southern system of White supremacy. The young Black protesters made things better for every generation that followed,

but many will carry their hurt forever. In my entire school career, I never personally saw another group of students of any color act as bravely in the face of certain adversity, as that small protest on the steps of Asheville High in 1969. That's the real story."

**Comment by: Jim Hugenschmidt**

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"I am having some trouble with in kind reparations proposals and feel that reparations should be in cash in order to empower the individual recipients to use however they choose, not leaders or communities.

Why do the speakers care so much about inspiring reparations at the state and federal level, why doesn't the city just act independently, ignore the state and feds and repair its own history in total isolation? sending reparation funds to the people harmed by historic Asheville city policy wherever those individuals or their next of kin might be today. They should not be considering the state or feds at all except for avoiding state or federal interference.

There is no reason to think Asheville values will ever have anything in common with NC values or US values or that policies in one have any reason to ever inspire policies in either of the others, nor should it attempt to do so. I think the distance and irrelevance of the 3 policies and value sets will only increase over time as each jurisdiction receives increasing numbers of political refugees from the others.

Most of those most harmed by past City of Asheville racist policies were displaced from the area long ago and have not been to Asheville in a long time, and the younger ones, ever. So we should not be thinking of many of the recipients as being Asheville residents so reparations should be delivered long distances in cash; moving paper or metal coin I guess unless it is bitcoin. Dollars really should not be sent through data cables, that is what bitcoin is for. In any event, only cash and bitcoin has a wide enough acceptance in informal markets to offer dispersed reparation recipients enough individual choices and freedom from leaders of any color. Acreage and mules are too hard to hide and too easy for leaders to track down and seize. Reparations should be unrecoverable, like buried pirate treasure."

**Comment by: Alan Ditmore**

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"The harm suffered by our community as a consequence of systemic oppression is truly immeasurable. As panelist Sen stated, it is multi-generational and would take extensive

narrative research in order to begin to grasp the harm experienced. And the truth is, the real cost is much higher than has already been pledged by the City of Asheville. So then, should these limited and underappreciated funds be applied specifically towards those Asheville residents who've suffered the most generational harm? Is there an initiative to measure the quality of life for those in Asheville by either the City or community organizers, using Dr. Mullen's research as a guidepost? Possibly a quality of life index that could be applied to each residential applicant? Would we be willing to weight those applicants that could prove to be descendants of local residents? Are we willing to invest directly into the lives of those who've suffered the most or will we invest in larger programs to help more people in slighter ways? What are our panelist's thoughts? Thank you for your time and consideration.”

**Comment by: Douglas**

“Although Asheville must never expect to inspire NC or US reparations, it might inspire reparations by other municipalities, which might have more freedom from state, provincial or national interference, such as Quebec City or Alice Springs Australia; though I have no idea how much harm was done by past racist policies of those city governments. Asheville might inspire Hilo Hawaii, but don't expect to inspire NC or USA any more than Casto inspired the mayor of Miami!”

**Comment by: Alan**

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**Questions to Consider - From questions on comment cards**

- 1. As you start this reparations journey with the City of Asheville, what is important for you to learn/share?**

“I want to learn more about Asheville relationships, history and role to civil rights and helping fix and heal what we can.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“I needed to physically come here so that my housemate would have to know that I support the reparations process.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Please see the work of Samuel Sinjajune - police recording and about reducing police violence.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“As a recently returned UNCA grad back in the area after 10 years, I want to get up to speed on the reparations initiatives here and do what I can to support them.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Storied from Black Asheville - These experiences living in Asheville and Buncombe County - Learning more about reparations and how to conceptualize them; lots of thought is out there.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Why so many locals continue to be left out.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“The 5 w’s of reparations and how we get the learning full values of it. Also how reparations is defined and applied today and in the future.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“What specifically happened in Asheville, what events and policies harmed black Asheville? What has the Asheville police done to harm black Asheville citizens? How can we hold the police accountable? How can we get the truth out of the APD so there can be reconciliation? How can we know it is the full truth? I would like to see storytelling events sponsored by the city for truth and reconciliation. I would like to see the god purse of the TDA to be used to help black folks - grants for education, businesses, housing, I would like to see the hotel tax be used similarly.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Education, more affordable housing for the black. I would to know how can I afford any of the units in the City of Asheville when the rent of these unity are 1400-2000 a month. Give us affordable housing in the city. Stop punishing us in the county.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“I think my role is to learn about and be prepared to make the case for reparations in the face of friends/family who are suspect, unaware, or sadly at worst have outright disdain for BLM movement.”

“I want to bear witness. I want to listen and hear. I want to feel healthy. I suffer from a lot of white guilt for my race. I am from New Orleans and love black culture.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“There will be policy changes that will effect the future.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“I’m white and have only lived in the city/the south 9 months, so I have little to share. I am a mom and a social worker and I am really concerned about education disparities because our world is sick until then. Many people have told me the charters here aren’t lacking diversity and



aren't sapping the public schools which I don't believe but I am worried about how charters tear communities apart." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"How will decisions be made? How will local partners be involved." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"I feel the need to continue the conversation to deal with racism and justice. Yes I am wanting the city to know as a black community you took everything that we had our legacy as black people. Stop destroy our community and running our race away." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"The truth and reconciliation process must continue to be long and thorough. Every black voice in Asheville/Buncombe County must be heard. This must be more than performance, but actual change, natural healing, tangible reparations must be made." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"What are ideas to untangle the men that people have inherited." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"Understanding the fundamental principles of reparations and use that knowledge to help shape local policy that will benefit black Asheville." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"I want to hear genuine commitment to healing and financial repair that thinks outside the individualistic and capitalist structure that also involves land back to to indigenous and black families." - **Answer by: Citizen**

## **2. What, if anything, resonated with you most during the truth telling and information sharing speaker series?**

"Mental health and well-being for our cities." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"The stories from the Asheville teacher, one of the last speakers, tell our kids what they are worth - that they have options." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"I'm glad to be a part of this process but am thinking about all those not in the room who have valuable lived experience to share. Are there better spaces to hold these sessions moving forward?" - **Answer by: Citizen**

"The question and answer was the best part of the event." - **Answer by: Citizen**

"Hearing from people - not so much on the stage as in the audience. Hearing the panelist respond to the questions. The presentation of data related to the black vs. white experience of

living in Asheville and Buncombe County. How little white people know about black Asheville.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“That the “tale” is different when told by the “lion” and the “hunter”. Folks who are most impacted - not present.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“The people are the power to see reparations is done, the injustices that are apparent in Asheville discrepancy in law enforcement, criminal justice system. Need increase in citizenship. Need change in policy and procedure.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“That we need to use the truth and reconciliation reparations movement in Asheville to fight white supremacy, white nationalist terrorists and groups.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Well nothing but education. When should have talk more about how they are pushing blacks in the county.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Reparations for segregation, not necessarily slavery. Comments made by Dr. Harvey.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“The most valuable resource today was by Dr. Marcus Harvey. He referred to a Federal reparation dollar amount in the trillions of dollars due to president of US who recorded Field Order No. 15 when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. The land value that was stolen from freed slaves. Also, he mentioned the role of religion making people subservient to authority. Religion is opiate of the masses.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“All the conversations and data that was shared said key points that we need to focus on.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“The panelist takes too much time to speak and not enough time for the audience to ask questions. These talks will continue to be ineffective unless people have a chance to be heard.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“How can it be a conversation when the audience barely had any time to ask questions? The 1st speaker spoke for over 30 minutes and she isn’t even from Asheville. How about allowing those in black Asheville actually have a chance to speak to the things that matter and are important to them. Folks who are not normally able to be a part of this conversation.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Role of history on the present and in shaping the future.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“That everyone wants this to happen and change is need in Asheville I feel that as a black man Asheville has destroyed the black population by coming into our community not giving black people better houses and education and taking black business away because taking jobs away from Asheville.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Disparity of people of color in health care and police. The quality of the panelist, the passion about this subject. The ideas generated. Education.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“The slide show presentation from Dr. Mullen was eye opening and insightful. Also the presentation of Rinku Zen was powerful and insightful.’ - **Answer by: Citizen**

### **3. What next steps are important for you?**

“Figuring out ways in our community and locally to keep with mental health and creativity and arts programs.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Not to overwhelm my housemate but to know when to speak and when not to.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“I think other truth telling opportunities should take place in more community central areas and areas like the block should be black owned and revitalized by the black community.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“More story telling! More ideas from wide range of people, mostly black Ashevilleians. More transparency and publicity about this discussion. More use of people in this community who are expert facilitators.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“A real truth and reconciliation process with locals who are most impacted.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Developing action and achieving success for reparations.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Finding ways to get folks who are interested in helping promote and achieve reparations meet each other and build connections. We will need a culture of fighting white supremacy to make any headway against the white terrorist. That means music, poetry, art, job creation, mutual aid programs, after school programs, real programs. We need to address the wealth gap. I have no idea how to do this except shame people who are ultra rich.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Education of our children, affordable housing in the city, not county.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Education myself through reading.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Informing more in the community about steps and process so people know how to take action.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Talks within various communities.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“More comm input from black folks.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“More conversations like this.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Seeing this conversation translate into tangible outcomes for black Asheville. I want to see local institutions being held accountable that choose to not upholding reparation initiatives.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“How will we be successful in reparations without addressing the great lie of settler colonialism that tells the poor white person, at least you’re not black or native. We need a project that includes rural white people without alienating them.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

#### **4. What is *my* role in the next steps?**

“Listen and educate myself more. Reach out to others who are interested in the field.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Be available to talk and pray hard.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“To continue to educate myself and find where I can best support as a 30 year old white woman who is empathetic and educated in many other areas.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Show up. Write letters. Listen.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“To tell the truth and back up with my skills and ability to communicate with folks who do not trust.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“I want to be a part of the commission. Michael Tate 828-318-2245.” - **Answer by: Michael Tate**

“Keep showing up, keep having dialogue about how to help disparities between black folks of color and white people. Hope that the KKK and proud boys and white nationalists in our state federal government, military and police don’t kill us all before we start reparations.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“To have affordable housing in the city.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Spread the word - offer resources and mental health support.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“I would like to be a part of the reparations talks.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“What is it? I would actually like to be involved.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Listening to black comm leaders and following their lead.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“To take part in everything I can to do what is needed to help our community to show.” - **Answer by: Sam Quick**

“Stay engaged and holding City Council accountable for more than performance action. Spreading the word to black Asheville and white Asheville to become and remain engaged.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Listening for now.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Stay engaged in forums like this and participating in local politics and local elections that will shape local legislation.” - **Answer by: Citizen**

“Inspire and connect reparations to community development.” - **Answer by: Citizen**