

Jaylen Brown: Just give us one more moment. We see that a lot of people are still joining. Alright. We'll go ahead and get started. Hello, thanks for joining us today. Welcome to today's episode of Unwritten where expert authors join student hosts such as myself for discussions on the most important occurring events of our day. Last week, we had a very powerful discussion with the Haynes(ph) doctors about systemic racism and today, we're going to be discussing civil rights and American history. But before we get there, I'm Jaylen Brown. I'm a junior at the University of Central Florida majoring in Finance and a Campus Ambassador for Pearson joined today by my good friend, LaWanda Stone, director of Corporate Affairs for Pearson who'll be moderating our live Q&A. So, if you have any questions, get them ready, drop them in the chat, we'll get to them in about 15 minutes or so.

So, please join me in welcoming professors, Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner and Dr. Gary B. Nash, co-authors of *The Struggle for Freedom*, a history of African-Americans. Dr. Lapsansky-Werner is a professor of history at Haverford College where for many years, she was also a curator of Haverford's extensive archive in Quaker Books and manuscripts. Dr. Nash is a history professor at UCLA and directs at National Center for History in the schools. So, I'd like to begin this conversation by turning over to LaWanda to explain why are we having this conversation now.

LaWanda Stone: Thanks so much, Jaylen and thanks, everyone for joining us today. America is finally facing a reckoning with race relations. It's vital that we have these kinds of serious and difficult conversations because talking about it is the first step in defining and ultimately ameliorating systemic racism. Education is such a force for equity and change yet, black and ethnically diverse people around the world have been held back in a vicious cycle due to systemic racism. Learning has the power to shape hearts and minds for generations to come. As an education company, we have a role to play in convening the conversations that lead us to a better understanding of each other and our world, the world we live in. Today's conversation is to step in that direction as we explore the history of civil rights in America. Distinguished authors and professors, can you tell us why you chose to join today's conversation?

Dr. Gary Nash: Shall I begin?

LaWanda Stone: Sounds great.

Dr. Gary Nash: Alright. This is Gary Nash. Race relations began for me when I was in the U.S. Navy after college for three years on a destroyer just after two-minute integrated in the armed forces and from stem to stern about 300 young men disproportionately from the south, black and white had to learn to live together on a small ship as this was unprecedented. It didn't go without skinned knuckles and bloodied faces but in the navy, you had to learn how to behave together as fellow sailors. Color didn't matter when they're called to the battle stations began and in the mess hall, people ate the same food. So, from stem to stern, relates to relation, race relations became a part of my life but ever since, really, I've been trying to teach about them and be active in the attempts to overcome our rather difficult history of race relations.

LaWanda Stone: Dr. Lapsansky? Why did you choose to join us today?

Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner: I'm going to try to be brief but I never am so I'm going to be fast instead. I'm delighted to be here because I believe that discussions like this not only made me lead to a more humane world for all of us and help us to mitigate some of the us and them positions. We as a global society have somehow let ourselves fall into. We all know something's not right and we can suspect correctly, I think, that part of a something that's

not right is something we can't see and the other part of the thing that's not right is that it's asking us to engage somehow in making it right, right?

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And a part of it is the question of systemic racism. It seems vague and hard to get our hands around but the whole notion of systemic carries with the idea of something that we can't see, that's behind the scenes. We have a circulation system inside our bodies that we pay no attention to until it goes wrong and then we head off to the doctor. And today, we get to talk about how a system can operate with that kind of unseen power. The way leukemia can scramble up our circulating systems. So, that's a long answer but I'm here because I think our country may be ready for a fascinating conversation about who we are and who we aspire to be and that conversation is exciting to me. In addition to teaching, writing, I run a bed and breakfast and I cook right in the dining room and I encourage my breakfast guests to get to know people who are different from themselves. Different backgrounds, different circumstances, different experiences. I think appreciating people who are different from us is the possible salvation and the future of a civil society. And so, that's why I'm here and besides, learning new stuff and new people is fun.

Jaylen Brown: I totally agree. I love that and I -- personally, I know that you guys did so much which makes me more excited for this conversation because I know that you guys are loaded with experiences and unique perspectives like you're on a destroyer ship, that was awesome, that sounds awesome but I want to jump straight on in. Actually, I want to ask Emma the first question and it's something that's been on my mind but when I think about civil rights, I automatically think of the movement in the 1950s and '60s. Was this truly the start and what other points in history might we categorize as civil rights movements that got us to where we are today?

Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner: Okay. I'm going to start thinking out loud and when I get to a place where I've used more time than I should in this small amount of time we have, I'm going to get you to wave your hand and say, "Could you wrap it up now?"

Jaylen Brown: Got it.

Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner: I think that if I were thinking about the 1950s as the so called "start" of the civil rights movement, I would think of it as one pulse in an ongoing pulsation of civil rights movements. The first of which begins for African-American in the '70s and '80s when a group of African-Americans in the Boston area said, "We need to start a group called The African Society and we need to decide what our agenda needs to be and how we meet our agenda." And so, they begin those discussions in the '70s and '80s and '90's and those discussions are picked up in Pennsylvania in the middle of the '70s and '90s and Gary can tell you more about that in the wonderful book he's done. And so, that was another pulse. A fascinating pulse in the whole thing is that in 1830, a group of three African-Americans decided, "You know, in order for us really to have other people understand that we are really Americans, we need to stop calling ourselves African anything. We need to call ourselves African-American. We need to call ourselves colored Americans." And so, changing the name in 1830, they had a convention of colored Americans. Changing the name changed African's notion of themselves. I think that that -- some of that change came from the ending of the slave trade in 1808 because after that, the majority of African-Americans who came of age by 1830 were born here. They were Americans, who else are they going to be? They didn't come from someplace else. They are (00:09:15) and they began to think of themselves such. Another wave has come, another pulse in this ongoing drumbeat, if you will, could be identified in the 1850s when one African-American said, "Let's go to Africa and find someplace

to live. We'll talk to the Africans there and see if we can -- they'll let us come live there. And they saw themselves as really intruders into Africa. Being asked to come, being asked to -- asking to go there. That guy came home and the civil war was beginning. And so, he went to Abraham Lincoln and said "I'm an American, I'll help fighting." And (00:09:53) didn't by 1863, Stark(ph) become (00:09:56) in the American army. So, bit by bit, those pulses had lots of different meanings.

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I could go on I could actually get you to the 1950s, but I'm going to suggest that there are half a dozen more pulses before you actually arrive in the 1950s. I'm going to stop there.

Jaylen Brown: I love that. Thank you so much speaking of a civil rights. I want to switch -- ask Gary this question. But to my generation is pretty shocking that until the civil rights movement in 1964 discrimination could be practiced with impunity. Can you discuss the progress that has been made since discrimination was outlawed 56-years-ago?

Dr. Gary Nash: There has been a lot of change look at the student body. Look at the University of Central Florida. That's very different than Florida University would have been two generations ago. The professions have changed the military officers has changed, the business place has changed so change yes, there has been a lot of it still a long way to go and we see it around us today. You can pass laws that oblige people to stop discriminating in overt ways, but the laws can't change people's attitudes or what's in their heart and in their mind and then it can go on in a kind of underground way of being very racist and part of the problem even though institutionally there has been a lot of change. We've had a President Obama, of course. This is an incredible moment in American history and their many other leaders that we can point to women who are emblems of this change, but you know is Nelson Mandela said the long road to freedom is a very long road indeed and we're still walking on that road today as we try to turn what we think should be right in to what is right.

Jaylen Brown: All right. Thank you. Switching gears just a little bit. I want to circle back to Emma for this next question. In less than 100 days, we're going to have a historic election coming up and I was really fascinated to learn about your experience with voter registration in Mississippi in the 1960s. Let you to study history. So recently we celebrated the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act 1965. So can you talk about the Voting Rights Act and how far you think, we've actually come?

Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner: I've found of one civil rights leader who used to say. We ain't what we going to be. We ain't what we ought to be, but rather we ain't what we was. And the Civil Rights Act's removed some of the systemic things that you weren't there. You wouldn't see them, it's the unseen piece that goes with systemic. There was for example in many Southern States a literacy test you shouldn't be able to vote. If you can't read right you shouldn't be able to vote if you don't -- can't read. And the literacy test consisted of in many places having non-black people come to the polls and read a first grade book. And proved they could read. African-Americans would come to the polls and the book would be in Latin and they'd have to read from Latin or other kinds of things that if you weren't there, you wouldn't see it. The Voting Rights Act removed this kind of discrimination. It removed the kind of discrimination that said in many states. You may not vote here if your grandparents didn't vote. Well for many African Americans their grandparents couldn't vote. And once you have a slave who can't vote who has a grandchild who can't vote then the next grandchild of that grandchild can't vote either (00:14:15) that problem of the situation it was complicated because we think of slavery as the main thing that defined African-Americans and indeed that was true. But helping to put the last question you had into some context is to remember that

in Maryland, which was a slave state there were 50,000 free African-Americans in 1830. That is before slavery was over and they're always has been thousands of a free African-Americans who were figuring out. How do I get a better life for myself? And how do I get a better life for my colleagues who are still in bondage? And so part of what you have is the underground railroad, where people are pulling people forward.

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And part of what you have are people like Thurgood Marshall who say let's get this before the Supreme Court and get the unseen things in the system, seen and see if we can get them cleared up. That's my short answer.

Jaylen Brown: I love it. I love it. But Emma while we're on the topic of inequality in education is a subject that's been on everyone's minds. Can you talk about the Supreme Court's Landmark decision in ground versus the Board of Education, which was in 1962 to desegregate schools and its effect on the makeup of today's education system, including the establishment of historically black colleges in universities also known as HBCUs?

Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner: Okay, you've asked a huge question.

Jaylen: Oh yeah.

Dr. Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner: Exactly how to carve it down into answerable pieces. And the reason you asked a huge question is because the question you ask is huge. It really is a huge question. What about education as a part of the situation we face? I want to go back and define education, for example, because education sounds as if it's something that opens our minds, but sometimes education has been used to close people's minds and education consists of asking people to think and inviting people to think but sometimes education had been used to say don't think those things that you shouldn't think. And then sometimes systemic racism is built or systemic problems are built into the educational system. I'm going to move away from African-Americans for a moment and use an example that I think will resonate with those people.

For the longest time until the 1980s history was written as if they were no women in it. They just history went on and it made their ascension they were wars, and then we did this and we did that. You never had a woman doing anything occasionally you had women having things done to them and African-Americans had things done to them. But the education as we call it didn't include the huge number of women who got patents for things they invented. The education didn't include the huge number of African-Americans who as early as the 1870s were getting patents from machines they invented. Education didn't include the story of the cotton gin and the African-American part in designing that machine. And so I worry that we think that education is going to solve everything unless we figure out as I'm impressed that Pearson(ph) does to try to open that education so that it has more than a few people A, creating it, if history gets created by whoever tells the story and B, teaching it.

HBCUs historically black colleges and universities begin as early as the 1830s when a group of Quakers in Philadelphia said, "Oh this is terrible. Let's start a school for African-American children and help them learn some traits" and so some African-American students came to that school and within a few years their mothers and fathers looked at the school teachers and said, "You know, we don't want to be farmers. Teach us some French and some Spanish and some history and some music and some art" and sure enough. That's the first of the HBCUs. It was -- it's now Cheyney University in Pennsylvania. Similar schools begin in the 1850s with Lincoln University and then Howard University in the 1860s and then other

universities that increasingly enlarged the kind of education that a person could get and defined education as a gateway opening new questions and see new things rather than as a something that tells you, you stay in that spot. Shall I go on a -- have I used up that space?

Jaylen Brown: No, we -- I got one more question to ask Gary, but that was great. Thank you so much. But last question from me before I turn it over to Lawanda to answer some Q&A. But Gary in response to George Floyd's murder, dozens of statues and monuments have been toppled to face or even scheduled to be removed. We're seeing a reckoning of what we named military bases schools and streets. Is there any president for this in an American history and do you ever think cementing in America --

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-- especially southern states in particular would change so much to remove these relics to the past. It was a learning opportunity here.

Dr. Gary Nash: Interesting question. It's very complicated. It's very messy and we seem to be in an era now of statue removal and name renaming. Well, it's one, but we have to be careful. We have to think this through. We don't want to make mistakes along the way. It's one thing to remove the confederate flag from the Mississippi of, say, flag and it's another thing to rename Fort Bragg. But if we start removing statues, we are also removing teaching moments in history.

Let me give you a couple of examples. In Portland Oregon, because let's not give the north or the west a free pass on this whole question of controversy about statues. Students go to Thomas Jefferson High School. It was decided to remove Thomas Jefferson statue and changed the name of the high school. What are teachers going to do now when once this piece of metal is removed and it's an empty space? Can you teach through a vacuum? Can you teach through an empty space?

Much better I would think would be if those teachers would say "Students, let's go outside and talk to that man in metal. Let's have a conversation about what he was, what he accomplished that we admire and what some of the parts of his life that we find a tragic and wrong." But simply to obliterate him, five years from now, it'll still be an empty space and that teaching opportunity would be lost.

The Pettus Bridge where John Lewis marched and some of the others marched and had their heads broken. Remove the name and rename it John Lewis Bridge but keep a plaque there that tells people just how it got to be named the Pettus Bridge. Who was Pettus and when was it named? Or the same could be said about the -- of about the Robert. E. Lee or the Jefferson Davis statues. They were not put up just after the civil war.

They were confederate heroes. Know. We need to know that they were put up a generation later by people who were running the Ku Klux Klan and are re-establishing white supremacy in the south rolling back reconstruction. So these statues, Lee didn't even want statues of him erected after the civil war. He thought it was wrong.

But every statue is a teaching moment. So we really, really need to be careful. Princeton University changed the Woodrow Wilson's School of International Affairs to an unnamed school of international affairs but they also did something while removing that name. They added something and this -- this is my point. We need to be in a period of statue building as well as statue removals. What they did was to create the Betsey Stockton Garden right by the University Library. She was the slave of the third president of Princeton University. It is

now the Betsy Stockton Garden. She went on to get her freedom. She became a missionary. She went to Maui Hawaii in the 1830s as teacher and came back and became a teacher in Philadelphia. Now that's some -- that's a person worthy of remembering. There's not a statue for her yet but there's a garden named for her with a plaque which explains just who she was. So let's be careful about this because every removed statue is the obliteration of a teaching moment.

Jaylen Brown: All right, thank you so much professors. We -- I'm seeing we have a few questions in the chat so I'm going to go ahead and turn over to La Wanda.

LaWanda Stone: Thank you all for submitting your questions. We're going to jump right in. We do have a viewer who is studying visual literacy and for a class lecture. She is using two different U.S. history resource textbooks published by the same company in -- I'm sorry, they're published in Texas and California but by the same company. However, the textbooks are different. The California book -- you know where this is going -- contains more expanded information about civil rights whereas the Texas textbook excludes this additional info and includes expanded second amendment information. What are your feelings about this example of systemic racism? Are these decisions being made by regional school boards and ultimately, if so, they're having a tremendous amount of power in determining what defines necessary information in a U.S. textbook.

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Dr. Gary Nash: Well, I'll jump in there. Yes. United States is almost unique in the world for having a very, very decentralized curriculum schooling system where each state makes up its own mind. Within each state, hundreds of school districts can make up their own mind and that the school board is a local example of the democracy in work. But it can cut both ways. That's why you can get very different results in California and Texas. That would not happen in Italy or Nigeria or many other countries where national government tries to figure out with a lot of teacher input, academic input, what is an appropriate way to teach history.

So we live under the best of worlds and the worse of worlds because we allow a lot of ingenuity at the local level, innovation at the local level to surface but at the same time, students are captive in many cases of a very retrograde school boards who want to return to the past. So they want their kids to learn what they learn. I don't even recognize this new history, you're trying to teach us. This is someone's made up history they will say. Let's get back to the old fashion American history. Well, the old fashion American history was very exclusive and was very racist. It was inappropriate to a democratic society.

Dr. Emma Lapsansky-Werner: And in addition to all that, everybody got cheated. That is people who were different from each other and anyone of the member of which age, race, disability, gender, region didn't learn about those people over there that they might want to know. I mean, among the things that has been interesting to me about this education thing is that for a long time, most of American history was taught as if the whole world were in New England. Very little of American history texts and other things define African-Americans as people of agency, people who are doing things. Women, people who are doing things. Southerners, people who are doing things.

And every now and then we throw in a westerner so we know that Davy Crockett was there but we kind of haven't thought well about the array of things that are going on in other regions that didn't start mostly in New England or Washington DC. We got ways to go and school districts decide what they want to hear. The old traditional history and then they go textbook

writers and say don't put this in. Not the one's you're going to sell us. So it's one of the things we don't see. It's a part of the leukemia that's in our circulatory system.

LaWanda Stone: Thank you both. Let's get some healing into our circulatory system. Another question that has been raised several times in the chat. Civil rights will be frequently discussed upcoming in colleges this fall for back to school. Do you have any thoughts or guidance on how to lead your diverse students through this discussion?

How would you recommend developing the discussion among college students? Do you see it as a multi-topic, multiple discussions in a series, how would you approach it? How have you approached it?

Dr. Emma Lapsansky-Werner: I'm thinking there are two topics and I have approached it as two topics. Civil right is one topic. What do we, as a democratic society feel that people are entitled to. We (00:29:16) things. If life where they want, then we should be able to mandate life-saving things like wearing masks but there are -- there is a feeling that somehow that then approaches on American life.

So deciding how we're going to meet those things is a civil rights issue. The inclusion issue, it seems to me is a slightly different issue and it's the issue of saying to what degree do we want to have a world, a society, that reflects a variety of the ways that humanity is exercised or exhibited and what can we do to meet those two goals which would seems to me are two different goals.

(00:30:18)

When I do a writing class, I do a course on the American family and I ask students to ask their families "What do you care about is the important stories in the world you live in? What would you like me as a young person to carry forward and why?" And that if we can bring it down to a discussion within and among families and then take that discussion within and among families out into a wider world then we're in a better place.

Beyond the (00:30:56) "I don't like him because he is -- " and you finish that any way you want to or "She can't come in here because she is -- " and you finish that any way you want to. If you begin to expand the conversation, slow down the (00:31:08), walk back the anger, walk back the judgment, simply say "This person comes from here and this person comes to -- from there" and yet we're all subject to a disease that can wipe us out without checking whether or not we are one color or another. Let's figure out how to make that not happen guys. So it's asking some slightly different questions, is how I would I go at it.

LaWanda Stone: Thank you.

Dr Emma Lapsansky-Werner: Gary probably has a lot talk to you.

Dr Gary Nash: Civil Rights is not just a political science course. It has to be a course in sociology, in history. It's not just a course for African-Americans or Latino-Americans. It's for all Americans of just as African-American history should be woven into American history in general. So there are many opportunities in classes spread all over the curriculum. You could have a course that deals with civil rights and art or civil rights and music because it (00:32:17) just every aspect of our society and just please lead students back to our founding documents. If we could be true to those, we would be further down this long road of freedom.

LaWanda Stone: We're going to make that the last word. That's unfortunately all the time we have for questions today. Thank you all for submitting them. They were wonderful. At this time, you're going to see a poll. A quick poll flash across your screen. We would love to get your feedback on today's conversation with Dr. Nash and Dr. Lapsansky-Werner. And with that, Jaylen, I'm hand it back over to you.

Jaylen Brown: Thank you much for your time professors and I like to thank everyone who joined us today as we examined history. Hopefully you guys were able to learn something or even just get you thinking about this kind of stuff in a much deeper level. Overall, I hope this conversation was just as insightful for you as it was for me.

So join us next week. For next week's episode of Unwritten, we will examine history of protest movements with Dr. Clayborne Carson, fellow co-author of the Struggle for Freedom. So have a great day and stay safe out there.

Dr Emma Lapsansky-Werner: Thanks for having us.

Dr Gary Nash: Thank you. Thank you, good people from Pearson.

LaWanda Stone: Thank you.

(00:33:36)