Preserving Our History To Help Us Understand The Past And The Present

Launching Phase II – Outstanding Black Women Of Yalobusha County

The past is past, right? We can’t do anything about it, but we can learn from it and use it to understand the past and to create a better future. Sometimes our heritage can be painful, and it can be hard to find inspiration in the past. But the past has a future we never expect.

Since 2014, Dottie Reed has been collaborating with Dr. Jessie Wilkerson, the University of Mississippi professor of Southern Studies, to document and preserve Mississippi black community history. This project has led to a number of discoveries and has changed the way we think about the past. The project will continue in 2019 with a focus on the history of black women. The project’s goal is to preserve the stories of Yalobusha County’s black citizens.

The project will rely on relationships between students and faculty at Ole Miss and community members in Yalobusha County. Ole Miss History professor, Dr. Jessie Wilkerson, describes how the process will work below.

Dr. Wilkerson notes that Ole Miss has been working with Water Valley and Yalobusha County for many years. “I have been teaching a class on oral history in the fall 2019 semester, and I will work with a team of graduate students to document black community history in North Mississippi. Many of the graduate students in the class are working toward their master’s degree in the Southern Studies program, as an interdisciplinary program that investigates the history of the South and U.S. women’s history. I soon had the opportunity to talk with regular people about their daily lives and family stories, especially those of black people and other marginalized groups.

In this spirit, I last fall proposed that I needed to record oral histories of black families in Yalobusha County. Oral history is a recording of a first-person account made by an interviewer and interviewee. Recording oral history interviews with regular people about their daily lives and family stories will help us weave a broader story of black families in Yalobusha County. Stories that we will supplement with other types of research.

My hope is to work with Ms. Reed to bring public, university resources to the valuable work she has already begun. Our project will rely on relationships between students and faculty at the university and community members in Yalobusha County. I know that we have to work to gain your trust.

Here is what the project will look like in its first phase: I am teaching a class on oral history in the fall 2019 semester, and I will work with a team of graduate students to document black community history in North Mississippi. Many of the graduate students in the class are working toward their master’s degree in the Southern Studies program, an interdisciplinary program that investigates the conflict and culture of the South, as well as other research in the field of oral history. After understanding that training on how to conduct and record oral history interviews, we will work with students to see who might be interested in participating in the project.

As part of that process, Ms. Reed, the team of graduate students, and I will visit Water Valley on September 29. In the weeks and months after that, students will interview individuals, asking them about their lives in Yalobusha County and the history of their families in the region, with the interviews usually last between one and two hours. Students will inform and motivate the generations to document and showcase untold stories that can be handed down to inform and motivate the generations to come. And we will all be better for it.

It has been said that God has given us each of us spirit, gifts, talents, and services to work selflessly to create a better world. We all have the power to change the world, and we will do so with your help.

I and my students take seriously the mission of the university to serve the people of the state and the world. I train my students to listen for the lesser known stories, those that have been muted in dominant narratives. But I train them to value and understand the past.

Read a recent report by the CDC that details the risks of sleeping while wearing contact lenses, which increases the risk of dangerous infections of the cornea. The CDC recommends that people who wear contact lenses practice frequent hygiene when handling their lenses, patients develop corned ulcers, perforations or scarring. Many people have had damage to their eyes due to these infections.

Certain ulcers such as Pseudomonas aeruginosa can cause serious eye infections. Experts say sleeping with lenses (even extended-wear lenses) can increase the risk of corneal ulceration. Doctors warn that even if someone has slept wearing contact lenses, they should still stop this practice immediately.

Dottie Reed is collaborating with Dr. Jessie Wilkerson of the University of Mississippi on an oral history project to help preserve the stories of Yalobusha County’s black citizens.

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Don’t Sleep With Your Contacts

If you have any questions for me about the project, or if you are interested in participating, please don’t hesitate to reach out. My email is jcwilker@olemiss.edu and my office phone is 662 915 3371.

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