



Alabama DEPARTMENT OF
ARCHIVES & HISTORY

**Statement of Recommitment
June 23, 2020**

As our state and nation struggle to navigate through a place of contention, fear, and uncertainty, the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) recommits itself to the mission of illuminating the path that brought us here, and thereby equipping all of us, together, to build a future characterized by justice, human dignity, and a commitment to the wellbeing of all people.

Our recommitment includes acknowledgment of these truths.

1. Systemic racism remains a reality in American society, despite belief in racial equality on the part of most individuals. Historically, our governments, our economy, and many private institutions seeded or perpetuated discrimination against racial minorities to the political, economic, and social advantage of whites. The decline of overt bigotry in mainstream society has not erased the legacies of blatantly racist systems that operated for hundreds of years.
2. The ADAH is, in significant part, rooted in this legacy. The State of Alabama founded the department in 1901 to address a lack of proper management of government records, but also to serve a white southern concern for the preservation of Confederate history and the promotion of Lost Cause ideals. For well over a half-century, the agency committed extensive resources to the acquisition of Confederate records and artifacts while declining to acquire and preserve materials documenting the lives and contributions of African Americans in Alabama.
3. As an organization, we remain mostly white, especially in agency leadership and in our archival and curatorial staffs. Even with a serious, sustained commitment to understand the historical roots of injustice and its present manifestations, we cannot know the full measure of fear and frustration experienced by African Americans who have lived different realities in the past and today. We listen and study with intent and with sympathy, but our understanding requires ongoing work.

Our recommitment includes these objectives.

4. We will continue and expand efforts of the past four decades to document and tell a fully inclusive story of Alabama's role in the American experience. If history is to serve the present, it must offer an honest assessment of the past.
5. We will be a facilitator of public dialogue, seeking opportunities to build bridges through mutually respectful discussions of personal, community, and state history. These voices will help shape our exhibitions and public programs.
6. We will pursue greater diversity at the ADAH through robust recruitment initiatives. These will include introducing high school students to career opportunities in public history and providing paid internships to undergraduate and graduate students. We will offer a welcoming, inclusive community of colleagues, and meaningful opportunities to contribute to the work of the agency.

7. We will model and advocate for responsible stewardship of historical materials held by collecting institutions as well as in the public square. As communities struggle with decisions over Confederate iconography, we assert that options are not limited to static persistence, on the one hand, or to destruction on the other.

Our recommitment includes the continued development of resources such as the following, useful for gaining a greater understanding of racism's origins and consequences.

8. *We the People: Alabama's Defining Documents* was a special exhibition of Alabama's six constitutions during 2019, the state's bicentennial year. The exhibit [website](#) and [catalog](#) let the historical record speak for itself in explaining how Alabama law stacked the deck against African Americans during slavery, after emancipation, and for two-thirds of the way through the twentieth century.
9. Family history can be a challenging pursuit for anyone, sometimes resulting in dead ends and unanswered questions. For African Americans, genealogy comes with added complexity because black ancestors almost universally lived in slavery. When African Americans can be found in antebellum historical records, it is often in a bill of sale written by a slave trader or in an estate inventory, listed alongside livestock and pieces of furniture. To better understand how race has bearing even on researching family history, watch our two-part guide to ["Tracing Your African American Ancestors."](#)
10. For more than thirty years, the Friends of the Alabama Archives have sponsored Food for Thought, a monthly lecture series bringing scholarship to public audiences. On our YouTube channel, explore playlists containing talks on topics such as ["Slavery, Emancipation, and Reconstruction,"](#) ["Race and Equal Rights,"](#) or ["The Civil Rights Movement."](#)
11. Take a visual journey through African American community life in the 1960s with the [Jim Pepler Southern Courier Photograph Collection](#), containing eleven thousand images of political activism, religious life, music, sports, and black neighborhoods.
12. Find more content from the ADAH and our partners at [Alabama History@Home](#).

Steve Murray, Director, and the Board of Trustees
Alabama Department of Archives and History