



## HAAC BRINGS AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN HAVERSTRAW TO LIFE PART 2

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/investigative Reporter



In this part of the conversation, we are beginning with Norfleet's explanation of The HAAC joined with the Holocaust Museum and set out to show the world that prejudice and hatred have no place in our society. And going into the contributions of Blacks and Jews to our society and concluding with the new statue Norfleet had commissioned for the HAAC park in the Village of Haverstraw.



Showing the unity of Jewish and African American cultures

Norfleet said, "When you put the two groups together collectively, we have a strength, you have a strength, and together we can really make a change in, in the world. They would like to keep those two groups apart if you ask me. That's my personal opinion.

Unity brings strength. They want to divide and conquer. "That's right."

Our discussion turned to the idea of the understanding of the hatred; I don't understand hatred to begin with at all. As a former history teacher, I understand the historical prejudice against African Americans because of the way the Europeans treated them and, and the way they felt that they were subhuman. I understand that prejudice. I don't agree with it, but I understand where that, ideal and that and that cultural way of doing things came from. They thought they were savages, the superiority of the Europeans and stuff like that. But I never understood the hatred towards the Jews. Egyptians, they are, OK, that's an historical hatred for the same way Europeans felt towards the Africans.

<https://youtu.be/DeiKdRah9lo>

Norfleet continued, "But when I went to Poland for the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, I got to see it from the other side, being in Europe, there were, I counted in the airport, there were 7 black people, and I happened to know all of them. As we came in there and it was interesting because people were taking pictures of me and I was taking pictures back of them because, you know, I acted like I never saw white people before. What I didn't see was any of the n-word. I didn't like what you see in America. You see the n-words black dog places, or you might see this or you might see that, but I saw a lot of swastikas and then walking into Auschwitz was very interesting because it was very familiar. Some of the things that I saw is, is exactly what I could show you in America. We'll be going again.

I've never been, To Europe and, and as a history person, my mother went to Auschwitz, God, I don't know how many dozens of years ago. It's something that I'd want to see just for the historical aspect of it and I probably had family there. I could bet if there's a list of names I would find my family there.

"Well, when I got to this particular part and it was, an outdoor area where they were murdering people and how I know the stories are very connected is that as I got closer, my feet froze and I couldn't move any further and people were saying, Are you all right? What's wrong? I said, like it's all too familiar. They asked, 'What do you mean? You've never been here before.' I said, I haven't been here before, but I've seen this before. A lot of Hitler's antics, he took them right from the American plantation owners. Some of the things that I saw was very familiar to some of the things that I see here. Then they opened up the Hess House they had just not discovered but redesigned, the Hess House that they found right outside Auschwitz, and I happened to hear one of the tour guides gave us permission

to come in and one of the tour guides was talking to the group and they said, 'You know what monsters these people were. They had the children's bedrooms on the top floor facing the camps where they were killing the people, and they said, what kind of parents would do this? I had my finger up and I said, 'Can I explain it to you?'" she explained.



Rail entrance to Auschwitz

She said, 'You know?' I said, Yeah, because if you come to America, the plantation owners did the same thing. They stayed right there. The kids were able to see the slaves be whipped, killed, murdered, raped, because, they have to make it so normal. This is part of life. Perpetuate the lifestyle & the acceptance of it. This is just how it goes. I said, and so they make them so that they're numb to it. It's like, you know, this is part of what you have to do. You have to continue to kill these people. So, they can't be your friends, they can't be and in America it's even worse because a lot of times these were your blood siblings. They may have siblings, but they're your blood siblings and you're growing up playing with them, and next thing you know you own them and you can do whatever you want with them because they're not even people."

<https://youtu.be/3Ceota42Ub8>

She went on to compare the DC museum to the one in Israel. When they were in line, and before that piece, they blink you, it goes from dark to light, and so you only get like a, a second of it and what they were walking into. When they got into the light, they saw the remains. "But in Poland, I'll tell you the piece that got me, which most Americans do not

how they used slaves when they died, you know, either for consumption or they used their hair as filling for the chairs. They used their skin as leather. It was a big thing lampshades and lampshade, yeah. When I got to Poland a lot of people got very weak at that moment when they saw the hair. It was like I can't imagine, I can't remember how many thousands of pounds of hair."

"That they had confiscated once they took over, and I said, yeah, this is what people need to know. It didn't stop with the death. There was a reason to gas them because they were using them for other things. They were using the skin, but they got that from the American plantation owners where they use the skin for you to make, instead of leather, instead of cowhide, you use skin, and I think I love that, Eisenhower said document, document, document because what the Jewish people have over African Americans is there was nobody there to document. We were, that was not a privilege we had, well, there was documentation but not. The documentation that was made was just numbers and records. There was no film like there was in the 1940s to really document the plight of the African Americans."

Matthew Brady wasn't even taking pictures, of the slaves. But they wouldn't, they wouldn't have, even the documentation got destroyed versus in with the Jewish community it's preserved. You can do something like this, because you're talking about 6 million versus 24 million, but America's smart enough to hide the things, and that's why we have this park.



Haverstraw African American memorial Park

"If that was known that house should have been known as a historical site as the first African American church, you won't see that, that's the difference where I have to give it to Poland and Germany when they did the reparations when they tried to make good, they helped with money to preserve it and they were exposed for it. Here in America, it's never exposed it. Even now there's so many discoveries. Look at all the things that we're discovering about who was heading NASA, getting the thing, I mean, just history alone, who does this? If you ask the average person, if you ask the average teacher in these schools to name five inventions by a black person, they cannot tell you."

She said it's because it's all hidden. Hidden figures was one thing, but this is a hidden history and in Haverstraw, her family's been here for 120 years and until she found this out, nobody knew any of this happened.

"That's why it's such a story, and that's why, you know, the awards keep coming and people keep wanting the story because it's remarkable that it happened in New York. It happens in the town that we've been in.

I've covered a number of the awards Norfleet has gotten over the years.

The school here, you do a lot of different programs with them. Let's go back over the whole thing leading up into the current statue that you've got there.

<https://youtu.be/nBDC-UGDI8c>

Norfleet added to the story. "Had she not heard about some of the patriarchs of the faith, she would never have ventured just like most people didn't. But she knew that that same God would carry her through and he did on all of her missions, so that's one thing. When you look at the statue, it has a lot of symbolism not just for Harriet Tubman, but the Bible which is critical because Harriet Tubman stood on that word and, and on that foundational Bible that she's standing on is the two chapters. It's the exodus of the Jewish people out of captivity and then her last words on earth and her last words on earth, was she was reciting the prayer and she says, I go to prepare a place for you and that was it."

"Those two are bookmarked so people can understand from the beginning to the end, this woman was a woman of faith before she was Harriet Tubman, she was a woman of faith standing on the word of God. Second, it was in honor of the church that I had knocked down because that's how critical it was when you have slavery. The only piece you ever get is that they have to go to church, and that's why foundationally, you know, black people are, are Christian people, because that's what we believe the God that we will see us through. That's the only hope they had. There was no other hope. It still is very strong to this day. So I wanted the Bible there. And then third, it's my mother's family Bible. So, it meant something to me because my grandfather got to Haverstraw because the Knight Riders." She said concluding this segment.