



Diversity Task Force
Town Hall
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Groton, Massachusetts 01450
selectboard@grotonma.gov

Raquel Majeski, Chair
Michelle Collette, Vice Chair
Gordon Candow
Amy Degen
Susan Hughes
Bhaskar Gupta Karpurapu
Deirdre Slavin Mitchell
James Moore
Fran Stanley

Regular Session Minutes

Date/Time: Thursday, May 19, 2022 at 7 pm **DRAFT**
Location: Virtual meeting
Members
in attendance: Raquel Majeski, Susan Hughes, James Moore, Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell, Michelle Collette, Fran Stanley, Amy Degen, and Gordon Candow (arrived late)
Referenced document: *Why Juneteenth is Important to Me* by James Santo Moore

Raquel Majeski called the meeting to order at 7 pm. Roll call was taken and members identified themselves. Cameras for Committee members were on.

Agenda item 1: Review and Approve Juneteenth Letter

Susan Hughes ordered 50 copies of *On Juneteenth* book by Annette Gordon-Reed. Vanessa Abraham agreed to keep the book at the Groton Public Library. Any extra books that are not picked up will be kept at the Groton Public Library together with copies of the Emancipation Proclamation. The *Groton Herald* agreed to run a feature article on Juneteenth. They proposed a 600-word limit on the article. James Moore's piece is substantially longer. Susan Hughes will write up language to this effect and share it with James Moore so that this information can be incorporated into the *Groton Herald* piece.

Susan Hughes has editorial skills and has offered to help edit James Moore's statement. All agreed that it would be ideal if the Herald could accommodate a longer word count and accept photos. This would allow for more of the richness and details of James Moore's writing to be included. Any edits would be with James Moore's participation and agreement. Michelle Collette suggested that James Moore copyright his article to preserve ownership rights and retain control over edits.

Gordon Candow identified himself and joined the meeting with his camera on.

Michelle Collette first offered a motion for the Diversity Task Force to support the submission of James Moore's narrative as edited for inclusion in the Groton Herald with gratitude. If the article is changed, then Deirdre Slavin-Mitchell would prefer to vote on the accepting and using the article once the final version is available. Michelle Collette withdrew her motion. Raquel Majeski noted that the assignment was for an article on behalf of the entire Committee and that the result evolved into one Committee member's perspective. The Committee will meet again on June 2, 2022 to review the narrative if edited. If the piece is not edited, then the narrative has the support of the Committee by consensus.

Committee members noticed that the Select Board has voted to make Juneteenth a municipal holiday.

Committee reviewed upcoming Juneteenth events:

Saturday, June 18, 2022 from 12 to 4 pm: Committee members will participate individually in the **Chelmsford Juneteenth** event located on Chelmsford Common (4 North Street, Chelmsford, MA).

Sunday, June 19, 2022 at 2 pm: *George Boutwell and the Emancipation Proclamation: Saying What Lincoln Couldn't Say*. **Historical talk given by Jeffrey Boutwell** at The Center, 163 West Main Street, West Groton. Jeffrey Boutwell will return to Groton and speak about George Boutwell's role in ending slavery. In the spring and summer of 1862, George Boutwell was Abraham Lincoln's point man in

advocating for emancipation, both as a moral duty and a military necessity, at a time when the President had to be cautious about getting ahead of public opinion.

Monday, June 20, 2022: **Virtual event with Annette Gordon-Reed**, the author of *On Juneteenth*. Details forthcoming. Offered free of cost to everyone.

Tuesday, June 21, 2022 from 7 pm to 8:30 pm: **Outdoor musical performance Celebrating Strong Roots: Exploring America's African Roots Through Music and Dance** gazebo behind the Groton Public Library. From Pop/Rock/Neo-Soul music to Tap dance/Charleston and Lindy Hop, categorization has been seemingly simple but how familiar are you with how the origins overlap? Join pianist/composer Kevin Harris, dancer/choreographer Ricardo Foster, and drummer Tyson Jackson for an outdoor performance to celebrate the legacy and resilience of Black Culture through music and dance. Bring your own chair or blanket and enjoy the celebration! Made possible by a grant from the Town of Groton's Trust Funds' Lecture Fund.

Agenda item 2: Working Group Updates

James Moore said that he is looking forward to working with the Destination Groton committee.

Fran Stanley reported that the Planning Board will be discussing the MBTA Communities Multi-Family zoning on May 26, 2022. The Chapter 40B application for the former Deluxe property at 500 Main Street is expected any day now. Fran Stanley asked that the application be evaluated in terms of the opportunity that the plan offers rather than just seeing the proposed development density.

Raquel Majeski said that she and Amy Degen would be revisiting ideas for the Committee's next initiatives.

Agenda item 3: Approve Minutes

Draft minutes will be reviewed at a future meeting.

Committee members discussed continuation of the Committee and the Select Board's expected annual reappointments for all Committee members. Susan Hughes said that as she serves on this Committee as a representative of the Racial and Social Justice Group, another RSJG member may want to be appointed to the Committee next year. Amy Degen said that she is serving as a representative from the Groton Interfaith group. She said that Groton Interfaith is looking inward more as a group and that she may be replaced by Nadia Madden.

Meeting adjourned at 7:44 pm.

Next meeting: Thursday, June 2, 2022 at 7 pm

Juneteenth: A Descendant's Perspective

by James Santo Moore
Diversity Task Force Member

When I was 32, I was the father of a two-year-old girl and commuting to work from Worcester to Boston. I had a job but wanted a career. Growing more and more dissatisfied with my situation, I would often go to bed with dreams filled with restlessness and distraction.

One of these nights, my great-grandfather, William James Moore, came to me. I recognized him instantly. He lived for 100 years, dying when I was 8-years-old. In this dream, William (as he was known) and I silently looked up at the sky though I could hear him in a way that only dreams can make possible. We gazed at the planets, bright orbs as large as the sun, glistening before a dark backdrop and demanding our attention. Eventually, we turned to each other, and voicelessly he told me that our family had gotten off its path.

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The son of slaves emancipated during the Civil War, William was born in 1872 in West Chester, PA. His father was a sexton at the First Presbyterian Church, and because of this, his playmates included the white children of the town's elite families. Like many kids, they enjoyed spending time together in the woods, absent

from the heavy eyes of their parents. They played various games, most of which led to discovery and exploration. They also read and William, whose parents were refused a formal education and were considered chattel to be bought and sold, acquired a true passion for the universe around him, large and small. In the late 1800s, even the idea that a Black person had the capacity to master the complexities of the “educated” world was folly. William, however, became a strong student to the surprise of many, both Black and white. This stereotype, so nefariously pervasive, lurked behind him throughout his life and continued to follow his children and his children’s children, generation after generation. It follows me today.

William was the first Black student to graduate high school in West Chester. In 1892, he became a graduate of Howard University, the “Harvard” of traditional Black colleges and universities in our country. Armed with a much greater education than an overwhelming majority of white Americans, he set out to enrich the lives of others, knowing that the task at hand would be arduous and challenging. This man, who would later come to me in a dream, was asked to start a school for Black youth in Cape May, NJ, a segregated town that lay on the border that separated the North from the South less than 30 years previously. He was given charge of a one-room schoolhouse with children of all ages since the education of Black youth was inconsistent at best. The school grew and evolved, and he was an educator there for 53 years. He had a truly inspiring record of getting young, Black students to college. Children. Parents. Grandparents. Each generation passed through his welcoming doors.

This was not making William a rich man, so to supplement his income and help support his 9 surviving children, he started to work summers cleaning the locker rooms at the Cape May Golf and Tennis Club. Not only a great teacher but also a fine athlete, he picked up the game of tennis in his thirties and eventually became the first Black tennis pro in the country, teaching countless white folks how to play and improve their game using a unique and effective teaching style that is still recognized today. The tennis courts became his home away from home. In his honor, this club was eventually named the William J. Moore Tennis Center.

*

I never dreamed of William before that night, and when I awoke, it was with a true sense of direction. I was going to teach as he did before me. I wanted to make sure that I did this in a diverse community that included Black children. I knew that, sadly, too many Black American children go through their whole education without ever having a Black teacher. Within three years, I was standing in front of a group of students in a classroom at North High School in Worcester.

Some years after becoming a teacher, I had the opportunity to read an autobiography by my great-grandfather entitled *William of Cape May*. I discovered that at Howard, he studied Astronomy.

*

How many Americans have benefited from the cloth of caring that William lovingly wove? This does not only include the myriad of students that walked into his classroom or onto his courts. His spirit of supporting others is the fibers threaded through my family. My grandfather served in the Coast Guard; my father was in the Army and coached youth track; my two brothers are both retired New Jersey State Troopers; I taught in Worcester for 21 years; my daughter manages a community farm. How many of us will never even know the considerable gifts emancipation has given us? Of course, the ongoing transition from a slaveholding society to one of true equality has not been smooth but things of such importance are rarely so. We are still learning. These are lessons in need of thoughtful teaching and continual patience. They are difficult lessons for many of us. I think that yelling at each other simply constitutes poor teaching. I believe that William J. Moore would agree.

Juneteenth is a celebration of the final chapter of a tale of sin and woe, embellished with ignorance, hatred and greed, punctuated with violence, and concluded with a theme of courage, perseverance, hope and love. Ironically, it is a story of freedom from a society that blindly claimed to be free. It is an American story to be celebrated by all Americans because it is filled with the mistakes of our past as well as our ability to grow and become a better nation - more united, more understanding and more loving of each other and our world.

Juneteenth, perhaps above all else, is a story of redemption.

We need these lessons because we continue to make mistakes that will need to be corrected. In her book *On Juneteenth*, Annette Gordon-Reed wrote, “Love does not require taking an uncritical stance toward the object of one’s affections. In truth, it often requires the opposite. We can’t be of real service to the hopes we have for places - and people, ourselves included - without a clear-eyed assessment of their (and our) strengths and weaknesses. That often demands a willingness to be critical, sometimes deeply so. How that is done matters, of course. Striking the right balance can be exceedingly hard” (Gordon-Reed 141).

It is my hope that we can continue to work towards our collective future together, no matter what “side” we are on, as Americans and as human beings, with the determination that comes with a knowledge that no matter how clumsily we proceed, we really can become a more loving and caring people. It is my hope that we can all learn, embrace and cherish the lessons of Juneteenth.

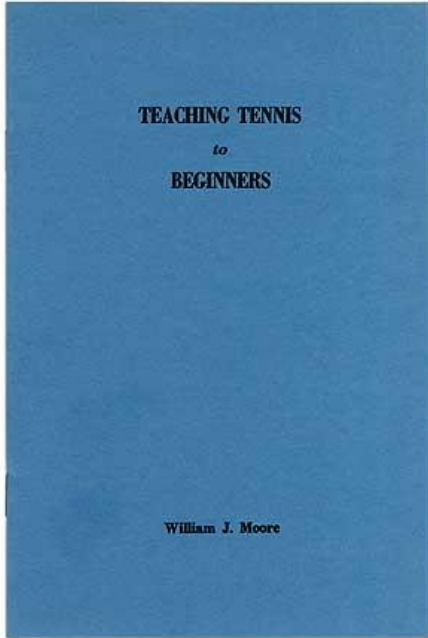
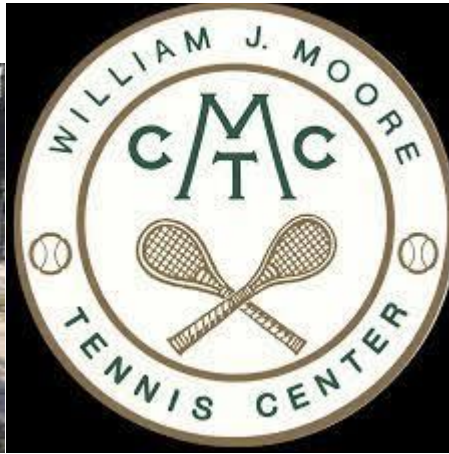
50 copies of On Juneteenth by Annette Gordon-Reed are available for free at the Groton Public Library and have been purchased through a grant from Lawrence Academy.

Photos

William James Moore



The Tennis Center in Cape May, NJ



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THE ALBERT HAND CO.
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William and me