

- Sarah McConnell: In 2018, Dr. Wes Bellamy, a city council member from Charlottesville, Virginia, watched a video in Danville, Virginia. He was at the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, in what was once the Sutherlin Mansion, Sutherlin as in William T. Sutherlin, a wealthy, white, former Danville resident.
- Sarah McConnell: During the last days of the Civil War, Sutherlin's estate served as the unofficial Confederate White House for Jefferson Davis. Today, it's an historic site, but when he watched the educational video about the home's original owner, Councilman Bellamy noticed there was also a lot of history left out, so, when the curator came back, he stood up and said something.
- Wes Bellamy: We sat and we listened about a slave owner with no mention of him actually owning the slaves and he was treated like a hero. I'm just flabbergasted. I'm really disappointed.
- Sarah McConnell: Councilman Bellamy's impromptu speech at the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History made the local papers the next day, and it got a lot of folks in Virginia and Danville thinking what types of stories are left out of official histories and what stories might we find in small southern cities like Danville, places that don't often make the history books, but are filled with African-American history?
- Sarah McConnell: From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. Today on the show, the first of a three-part series about the small city of Danville, Virginia. Danville, like so many other towns, is reckoning with its own history of racism and rewriting its narrative. To start, we go way back in the city's history back to the 1800s. This week's episode, Reconstructing Danville.
- Sarah McConnell: In 1883, a race riot transformed Danville and, some say, the entire south.
- Jane Dailey: Oh, yes. Now, there's a big circular that's sent around the entire state of Virginia saying, "Horrible things happening in Danville. Race riot White people have to defend themselves against terrible black people," and that plays a role in the election.
- Sarah McConnell: Later, we'll hear more about the legacy of William T. Sutherlin who once owned the last White House of the confederacy in Danville and also enslaved black Virginians.
- Jeffrey McClurk: He was truly enmeshed in what we think of as the Southern Plantation economy.
- Sarah McConnell: First, Jane Dailey, she's a professor of American history and law at the University of Chicago and studied the 1883 riot for her book, *Before Jim Crow, The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia*.

Sarah McConnell: Jane, what were the social norms governing black and white interaction in post-war Danville, Virginia?

Jane Dailey: There weren't real social norms, and that was a lot of the challenge. As far as white people were concerned, black people should behave the way they had under slavery and get out of their way and take off their hats and say, "Good afternoon, ma'am," and these sorts of things. African-Americans thought that now that they were emancipated and now that they were free people, the same rules should apply for them on the streets as applied for white people.

Sarah McConnell: During this period, 1883, there was a party in power called the Readjusters. I have never heard of the Readjusters before this. Who were they?

Jane Dailey: You haven't heard of them because white Virginians tried to erase them because they were embarrassing. It was a white-black coalition. No one wanted to see that. They were a coalition of a couple of different groups, white Democrats and African-American Republicans and then white independents that formed in opposition to elite Democratic rule.

Sarah McConnell: What was their mission?

Jane Dailey: The thing that bound them was they wanted infrastructure, especially public schools. They were paying a lot of taxes and they weren't getting anything out of those taxes because those taxes were used to fund the debt, which is called... why they're called Readjusters. They wanted to "readjust the debt," in other words, the state debt, bring it down, so they had real interests in common in very concrete things like schools.

Sarah McConnell: Help me understand what kind of debt we're talking about? You mean throughout the south after the war, southern states owed a bunch money to the Union?

Jane Dailey: In this case, what we have is a huge debt for antebellum infrastructure. Virginia, like everybody else, wanted to have railroads and they wanted canals and they wanted to be modernized, and they didn't have any money to do that, so they sold bonds to Europeans and, after the war, all of that was destroyed, but the debt was still there, and some states said, "Forget it. We're not paying that debt," and Virginians, with their high sense of honor, said, "We're paying the debt," and that meant that services were cut for everybody in the state.

Sarah McConnell: Why did Virginia have this particular bond of honor?

Jane Dailey: It's not particular to Virginia, although I think it is emphasized more in Virginia, but this whole southern white man code of honor was really something that crossed state lines for sure, and it tended to stay within the elite.

Sarah McConnell: Was Virginia's ruling party more likely to be composed of elite people?

Jane Dailey: Yes, I mean, pretty much everybody was, but Virginia, Virginia's white elite had a particularly strong stranglehold on politics in Virginia. White men in Virginia weren't even enfranchised until 1851.

Sarah McConnell: How did the Readjusters gain power? If the Readjusters are biracial and not elite, how do we have white non-elite and African-American lawmakers elected in Virginia?

Jane Dailey: They forged a common interest, and the common interest they forged, again, were very quotidian things like a desire for public education. Another thing that Virginia didn't have before the war was any system of public schools, so people felt very strongly about having that. African-Americans felt strongly, but so did white people, and that was a huge thing that bound them together, and also they just felt generally oppressed by the ruling class which taxed them in ways that they thought were unfair.

Sarah McConnell: How long did the Readjusters have power?

Jane Dailey: Four years, 1879 to 1883.

Sarah McConnell: Were white people voting for African-Americans in this biracial coalition?

Jane Dailey: Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. In Danville, they were, interestingly, so that you have elected officials in Danville who were elected by some whites, more blacks than whites, but who were elected by white voters as well as black voters. The important thing is that there was a black policeman, because that was resisted incredibly by white Democrats and sometimes by white Readjusters, too, so, the fact of representation is important.

Sarah McConnell: Help me understand whether Danville was an important city in the scheme of things back in this era? Was it a renowned Virginia city? Was it more powerful then than it is now?

Jane Dailey: It was more powerful then than it is now. It wasn't renowned in the sense of when we think of Richmond, but it was a town on the make in the 1880s. It was becoming industrialized. There were visionaries who wanted to harness the power of the Dan River and have textiles in Danville, which they do, of course, eventually, so it was one of these cities that's growing very rapidly and becoming more influential by the day.

Sarah McConnell: One of the things that you looked closely at in your book is how people of different races and social classes were interacting on the sidewalks. Tell me about the sidewalks and what was happening there.

Jane Dailey: The first thing to understand about the sidewalks is they were nothing like ours. They were about 18 inches above the ground. They were typically made of wood in this period. They were narrow so that if somebody, say, knocked you

off the sidewalk, you ended up in the gutter, and the gutter was not a nice place to be. Horses were on the streets, so you can imagine what's in the gutter if you have a whole street full of horses, for example, so it's a big deal to be knocked off of a sidewalk in these years in Virginia.

Sarah McConnell: Was it a sidewalk incident between white and black men that sparked what happened in Danville that day in 1883?

Jane Dailey: Yes, although it's an interesting one because it's indirect. What happened was two African-American men, working class men, are walking down the sidewalk and a white working class man is, too, and then there's a couple, a white couple, and one of the African-American men accidentally brushes the white lady, and everyone goes on, but the white man who has observed all of this decides to become offended by it, and he is the one who confronts the young African-American man and saying, "You should apologize for that," and the black man says basically, "I don't need to." He said something like, "I'm sorry, ma'am," but the other white man wants more, and the African-American men say, "No. This is over."

Sarah McConnell: Right away, what happens?

Jane Dailey: They beat up the white guy, and then a small crowd gathers, and the white guy is sent off to wash his face, wash off the blood, but, meanwhile, more people, more white people gather on the street and become incensed at this act of violence by a black man against a white man. These guys are probably like 20 years old, so they say, "Call for the policeman," and this is significant. The policeman who comes running is an African-American, and so, at first, some people in the crowd refused to believe that he's a policeman or refused to let him do his job. A couple more white policemen then come, and the question is who to arrest?

Jane Dailey: Things were getting complicated and confused at this point, and a bunch of the white men go to the sidewalk and then one of them starts shooting into the crowd, into the black crowd. Actually, it's a mixed crowd. He could have easily hit a white person. He doesn't. He hits a black person, and no one understands to this day why he did that.

Sarah McConnell: Was there then a gunfight between blacks and whites?

Jane Dailey: No, there wasn't for one reason. African-Americans weren't armed. There's a concealed weapons law in Virginia at this time that is there in part so that people don't shoot each other when they're voting, and the white men were violating that. They had weapons, but none of the African-Americans did.

Sarah McConnell: How many shots were fired? How many people killed?

Jane Dailey: Only a handful of people were killed, which maybe doesn't sound like much these days. The shots, you can never trust the testimony how many shots were fired. I would just say lots.

Sarah McConnell: Then was there pandemonium after that?

Jane Dailey: There was pandemonium after that, and mostly what happened is that African-Americans in town went home and stayed there, and then in the crucial election that happens a couple of days later, the black turnout is negligible because people are afraid. The white turnout is strong, and that's when the Readjusters lose power in Danville and they also lose power statewide.

Sarah McConnell: I understand that after this incident, the white people are also afraid and think, "Oh, no, African-Americans with power is scary to us."

Jane Dailey: They are afraid of African-Americans with power. They're afraid of black men who vote and who act like men.

Sarah McConnell: Do they use this in the election rhetoric?

Jane Dailey: Oh, yes. Now, there's a big circular that's sent around the entire state of Virginia saying, "Horrible things happening in Danville. Race riot. White people have to defend themselves against terrible black people," and that plays a role in the election. The Readjusters run around the state of Virginia trying to say, "No, that's not what happened," but it doesn't matter.

Sarah McConnell: In the larger scheme, was the Danville incident any worse than violent confrontations over race that broke out elsewhere?

Jane Dailey: I don't think it was either worse or better for Virginia. What matters is that it tipped an election, so it was the last stop on progressive interracial politics in Virginia until the 1960s. When the Readjusters lost, white supremacist Democrats were ushered in and they killed black voting for another 50 years, and they also killed a lot of white voting, too, which is something people don't realize. About a third of white voters in Virginia were also disenfranchised at the same time as African-American voters.

Sarah McConnell: After the incident happened, was anyone ever held accountable for their role in the killings? Was there a sort of the equivalent of the Mueller Report at this time?

Jane Dailey: There is a report actually. No one's held accountable, but there is a report in Congress. There's actually a congressional investigation of this riot because William Mahone, who is the leader of the party and a United States senator, claims that the riot infected the election so that it wasn't a fair election.

Sarah McConnell: Do you think there's something inevitable about the breakdown of an interracial order in Virginia? Was it just too tentative after the Civil War and slavery to think that black and white Virginians could have shared elected interests?

Jane Dailey: No. I actually think it's just the opposite. One of the things that impressed me about Readjusters was not that it wasn't inevitable either that they rose or that they fell, but just how hard it was to kill them, meaning, that white supremacists had to work really hard to beat the Readjusters, and then took them another 40 years to get black and white voters disenfranchised in Virginia. It's not until 1902 actually that Virginia finally disenfranchises all the people that would like to disenfranchise, so what I took out of the story was how resilient the coalition was and just how much violence it took to break it.

Sarah McConnell: I think very few of us who aren't historians have gotten enough of an education on this period of reconstruction after the Civil War or this period of the Readjusters. All we know is that Jim Crow happened. Right?

Jane Dailey: Right.

Sarah McConnell: We don't get that it wasn't necessarily inevitable.

Jane Dailey: We forget. We don't forget the period before Jim Crow. It's not taught. It's not taught in Virginia at all, I think, but in its home state, it could stand to be taught. North Carolinians actually know about the Wilmington Riot. Virginians don't really know this portion of their past, and I think it would be a good thing for them to know.

Sarah McConnell: Jane Dailey, thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

Jane Dailey: Thank you.

Sarah McConnell: Jane Dailey is the author of *Before Jim Crow, The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia*. She's a professor of American history and law at the University of Chicago.

Sarah McConnell: When Wes Bellamy confronted the museum curator of the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, he did so because he knew the building wasn't just a museum. Instead, it had first been a mansion that belonged to former Confederate officer and wealthy benefactor, William T. Sutherlin. We spoke with Jeffrey McClurken, professor of history and American studies at the University of Mary Washington, to better understand the life and legacy of Sutherlin and his mansion.

Jeffrey M.: Sutherlin in this case was William Thomas Sutherlin, who was a longtime leader in the city of Danville, incredibly prominent, one of the richest men in Danville and Pittsylvania County before the Civil War and the richest man in the city and county after the war.

Sarah McConnell: Had he owned slaves? Were they many?

Jeffrey M.: He had like many of the elite, white elite at the day. Slavery was a big part of the economic industry there, although he was also involved in manufacturing and selling tobacco, and he was involved with the banking system, so he was truly enmeshed in what we think of as the Southern Plantation economy.

Sarah McConnell: Was he a politician in Virginia during the Civil War?

Jeffrey M.: He was. Until was Sutherlin was mayor of Danville from 1855 to 1861 and then, in 1861, as it looked like a war was coming, as it looked like there was a question about whether or not Virginia was going to secede from the Union, Sutherlin was one of the two delegates from the Danville area that was sent to this secession convention, and he actually went as what we would call a conditional unionist. He was actually not in favor of seceding, but it was not an absolute opposition to secession, and so he actually voted against secession initially, but then, after Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to try to put down the rebellion, he changed his mind and was in support of secession.

Sarah McConnell: What do you think his relationship was during the war years to the confederacy? Was he sort of laissez-faire to all that fighting and the bureaucracy or was he a real believer?

Jeffrey M.: He very much embraced the cause of the confederacy, and he thought he might get a field appointment as a general. That didn't happen. He did take an appointment as a major in the Confederate Army, although it was largely as a quartermaster based in Danville, so he spent the war in Danville working to make sure that the railroad lines that went through were kept up, that supplies made their way to Richmond and that Danville continued to connect to the rest of the confederacy.

Sarah McConnell: What was Danville like during the Civil War and immediately afterward? I mean, was it considered a large and prominent city? Was it a small mill town? How would you describe the Danville of the Civil War?

Jeffrey M.: The Danville of the Civil War is very much based around two things, tobacco farming and manufacturing, and it's a central location as a transportation hub for a couple of different railroad lines, and so it's not a particularly large city, but it's not a particularly small city either. People in the state would have known about it. People in other states would have been aware of it because of its role in... If you were going to Richmond from large parts of the south, you would have to go through Danville, and so people certainly talked about it and wrote about it, but... so tobacco and its role in transportation are its two biggest Civil War era features.

Jeffrey M.: In the aftermath of the Civil War, tobacco continues to be incredibly important, and Danville continues to be a weigh station for the trains that go through there

to Richmond. Now, the whole southern economy is pretty devastated at this point, and so what you don't see as much of is the opportunities for, say, manufacturing, but that's something actually Sutherlin sees as something that can be changed, and so Sutherlin actually is among the founders of the town's cotton mills. Even though cotton isn't grown in Danville or the Danville area, it's grown much further south, he sees an opportunity because of the river, the Dan River. He sees an opportunity to build cotton mills and, in fact, is part of a group of partners that built one of the largest cotton mills in the world.

Sarah McConnell: Was it quite a going enterprise for him?

Jeffrey M.: It was. Yeah, it was incredibly successful and it very much put Danville on the manufacturing map. It effectively transforms the economy of Danville for many years into one that focuses on cotton production, so it goes from a place in which the vast majority of people, both white and black, would have focused on agriculture to... while continuing to have an important agricultural component to really being an industrial town, to being a mill town, so it's a pretty significant change.

Sarah McConnell: Even though Sutherlin had owned many slaves in this plantation or system of farms, after the war, he's still wealthy or quickly acquires new wealth. A lot of people, you write, appealed to him for money. They wrote letters to him asking for help.

Jeffrey M.: Yeah, they did. His wealth is why people would have written to him. He was known as one of the wealthiest people in town. He continues to play a prominent role in railroads. He continues to play a prominent role in tobacco processing and then, of course, his role in the cotton mill, so people looked to him for support, and so, for the most part, these are white people in the area. For the most part, these are people who have been damaged in some way by the war, but they're looking to him for money. They're looking to him for his influence. They're looking to him to try to help them try to achieve some kind of goal, and they're really tapping into an older kind of relationship between elites and working class or even poor men and women in the south, and so they're playing on personal relationships. They're trying as much as possible to address those connections.

Sarah McConnell: Was it just white Americans that appealed to him for money, or did African-Americans also appeal for money?

Jeffrey M.: It's hard to tell from the petitions exactly the race of everyone who appealed to him, but the vast majority of those I was able to identify were in fact white, and most of them actually were veterans or the families of Confederate veterans.

Sarah McConnell: He was good to them?

Jeffrey M.: Yeah, and from what I can tell from petitions and the responses to the petitions, he favored Confederate veterans and their families over other petitioners.

Sarah McConnell: After the Civil War, what happened to Danville in terms of reconstruction? In the '70s and '80s, what was going on to reshape the political climate there?

Jeffrey M.: Virginia's completely different when it comes to reconstruction politics because it has a unique emergence of a biracial political party known as the Readjusters, and what they want to readjust is all the debt that was accumulated during the Civil War. They want to just waive all of that debt off and they want to invest money in the state's schools. They want to invest it in railroads. They want to invest it in industry, and so the Readjusters, whites and blacks working together in state government, managed to take over the state government in the late 1870s and early 1880s, and that plays out in Danville, too. Sutherlin is very much on the side of the opponents of the Readjusters. Before the Civil War, he is a Whig. In the aftermath of the Civil War, he becomes a Democrat.

Sarah McConnell: Back then, the Democrats were different from what we think of now.

Jeffrey M.: Absolutely, so the Democrats at that time would have been very much on the side of conservative government, would have been very much on the side of opposition to racial equality. It was very different. The parties have changed pretty significantly over the 20th Century, but in the 1880s, in the late 1870s and in the 1880s, the Democratic Party very much opposed this biracial coalition of Readjusters, and Sutherlin was one of these, was one of these Democrats in Danville.

Jeffrey M.: In fact, one of the moments that is pointed to as ending the Readjusters rule is a race riot that happens in Danville in 1883, and Sutherlin chairs a committee of Democrats known as the Committee of 40 that puts out their own version of the account for this race riot and effectively creates a story about an aggressive black mom that initiated it.

Sarah McConnell: Sutherlin was so close to the confederacy that, in fact, his house for a very brief time, for one week right at the end of the Civil War, was called the White House of the confederacy, or the Southern White House of the confederacy.

Jeffrey M.: One of the things about Danville, being where it is on the railroad line meant that when Jefferson Davis fled Richmond as Union Troops closed in, it made sense for the Confederate government to leave on trains that went through Danville, and, in fact, they retreat and stop at Sutherlin's house, and Jefferson Davis resides in Sutherlin's house for about a week before he heads on further south out of town, and so Danville does have this reputation as being the last capital of the confederacy. It's the last place where Davis actually set up and the government of the confederacy attempted to reset to see if there was any possibility of continuing the war. It turned out that there wasn't.

- Sarah McConnell: While Jefferson Davis was staying in the house that week in Danville, he didn't realize that Lee had fought a losing battle.
- Jeffrey M.: There was so much that was still up in the air that week. It wasn't clear whether Lee would be able to escape. It wasn't clear whether other Confederate forces might be able to reform or to come support Davis and the Confederate government, so it was a moment of confusion. It was a moment of anxiety for confederates, and Danville was at the center of that, and, even more specifically, William T. Sutherlin's house was at the center of that.
- Sarah McConnell: Jeffrey McClurken, thank you for talking with me on With Good Reason.
- Jeffrey M.: Thank you very much, Sarah.
- Sarah McConnell: Jeffrey McClurken teaches history and American studies at the University of Mary Washington. He's the author of *Take Care of the Living, Reconstructing Confederate Veteran Families in Virginia*. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.
- Sarah McConnell: Welcome back to With Good Reason from Virginia Humanities. I'm Sarah McConnell. Earlier on the show, you heard Charlottesville City Councilman Wes Bellamy. He spoke out in response to a Danville museum's portrayal of William T. Sutherlin, a wealthy Virginian who owned slaves before the Civil War.
- Wes Bellamy: There was no mention of him getting basically all of his income off of the backs of black people and the whitewashing of history is truly what [inaudible 00:28:30] sets us back.
- Sarah McConnell: To understand why stories of people like William T. Sutherlin have been whitewashed, as Councilman Bellamy put it, we take a closer look at the history of reconstruction in small southern cities. During reconstruction, civil rights for African-American men took a few tentative steps, but those small steps toward political equality also created a ferocious white supremacist backlash in places like Danville.
- Sarah McConnell: Historian Caitlin Verboon teaches at Virginia Tech. She says, "To understand the reconstruction and why it failed to bring justice to African-Americans in the south, we have to start by understanding President Andrew Johnson."
- Caitlin Verboon: He actually is very lenient. He basically in effect reinstates all of these white southerners who had financially, militarily, intellectually supported secession, and he makes them eligible to go back and hold the offices they held before the Civil War. When these old planters come back into power, basically, what they do is they try to reinstate slavery without using the actual word slavery, so they take their slave codes and they turn them into black codes.

Caitlin Verboon: Mississippi does it almost immediately. Several other states follow suit, and what this does, these codes say things like, "Black men are not allowed to carry firearms." It says, "If you leave your place of employment, you will be arrested for vagrancy," and most galling perhaps is laws that basically mean that, if you are arrested for anything, you'll be charged or fined, so a misdemeanor comes with a fine rather than jail time, but if you can't pay your fine, they will give you to anyone who can pay your fine, so that means that white southerners can go to the courthouse and basically purchase people to work for them because, then, once they have paid your debt, you have to work for them until they say your debt has been repaid.

Sarah McConnell: This doesn't sound like reconstruction.

Caitlin Verboon: Exactly, so a lot of moderate northerners start to support a more radical reconstruction, so, in 1866, the midterm election, they see all this happening, they elect a much more radical slate of congressmen who come back to Washington in late December 1866, early 1867, and they pass a number of laws, I mean, acts that we... collectively, we know as the beginning of radical reconstruction, and that's when the sort of real revolution of reconstruction really starts to take off, because they divide the south into military districts and, importantly, they enfranchise African-Americans, so, for the first time, African-American men are able to vote, and what that means, there are so many black men that they can sweep all of these old guard out and they can elect new politicians in the statewide elections of 1868.

Sarah McConnell: Roughly how many African-American men were voting when they now had this vote under radical reconstruction, or is there a lot of, "No, not me. I'm too afraid of the violence that might come to me if I tried to vote?"

Caitlin Verboon: We have inherited this narrative because of what happens later that 1865. African-American are granted their freedom and it takes them several generations to get off the plantation, get into cities and agitate for their rights, but that's not what happened. There's this period after the Civil War when the radical Republicans are in charge of figuring out how to put the country back together where African-Americans are seizing the opportunity. They're asserting their rights to vote, their right to get an education, their rights in very bold ways, and that's been lost, and that makes it easier for us to dismiss reconstruction as a failure rather than as a revolution that was consciously dismantled.

Sarah McConnell: Right after slavery ended and in those early years, where were African-Americans living in the south? Were they building their own new homes? Were they moving in with free relatives? Were they going back to the places they lived before and making new deals?

Caitlin Verboon: Many African-Americans, many free people, many formerly enslaved people take advantage of the fact that, for the first time, they are not confined to their plantation. They take advantage of that and they leave their plantations. Some

go in search of lost family members because, remember, at the moment of emancipation, your family might be scattered around the south because your family had been broken up through debt and through sales, so some hit the roads looking for their family members. Some head to larger town and cities because there's safety in numbers.

Sarah McConnell: Those small cities grew after the Civil War. The black population moved in.

Caitlin Verboon: Exactly. Of course, there is a black population in these cities before the Civil War because there is urban slavery. It's not the kind of slavery that we think about, but what happens after the Civil War in these smaller cities is that the white population remains pretty steady, but the black population grows, which means that, proportionately, there are more and more African-Americans in these small southern towns.

Sarah McConnell: How did the white people respond to that?

Caitlin Verboon: I don't think that we can understate the impact that had on the mindset of white southerners. Newspapers are full of reports about how white southerners are so upset to see, and these are their words, hordes of Negroes clogging up the byways and the highways, sitting on the steps of the courthouse, hanging out in the markets. They are suddenly this very, very visible presence in these southern cities, and that is alarming and threatening to white people who are used to being able to dictate their movements. They're used to being able to be the ones who allowed or prohibited the presence of these African-American people on streets and sidewalks and markets.

Caitlin Verboon: One way we know how threatening white southerners found this mass movement of African-Americans is that we can look at the city council in Augusta. In 1865, they decided to have every single African-American in the city register with the city council. They literally tried to number every single black person in the city, and they had to have with them a white person who could vouch that they were okay and who could vouch that they also were who they said they were.

Caitlin Verboon: Of course, it fails because that's a huge bureaucratic nightmare of trying to number and place every single African-American especially in this chaotic post-war period where people are in and out of the city all the time, so it ends up being a nightmare and they can't sustain it, but this is an attempt made to put African-Americans back in an ordered place that white people can keep track of.

Sarah McConnell: How were African-Americans after decades of slavery acting in front of white people? Were they being deferential or were they being proud and bold?

Caitlin Verboon: They were absolutely not being deferential. That is what white southerners wanted, and African-Americans on the other hand are asserting their freedom. They're asserting their mobility. One of the, to us, seemingly sort of trivial

complaints is that African-American women are acting the lady and they're wearing nicer clothes, they're insisting on being addressed as madam, being referred to as ladies. We think of that as not that big of a deal, but, for these African-American men and women, being treated with the same dignity and civility that any other person on the street would garner mattered a lot.

Caitlin Verboon: One way of thinking about this is that white supremacy is a project. It's not an established fact in the 1880s. White southerners are constantly building it, and that means that these small [slights 00:37:39] can't be allowed to stand because that is going to knock this house of cards over, so, even these, what seems like to us crazy minor infractions, have to be dealt with swiftly and they have to be dealt with dramatically and, oftentimes, they have to be dealt with violently in order to make sure that this white supremacy project stands.

Sarah McConnell: When it comes to race relations, do you see threads today that you can trace back to how black and white Americans interacted in places like Augusta, Georgia, and Danville, Virginia, in those years after the Civil War ended?

Caitlin Verboon: Yeah, I think that this is a really relevant question and one that I never hoped would be relevant, but we have been as a nation policing behavior in public since the very moment of black freedom in the United States. It has been a project of white authorities to police black behavior in public spaces. We can see that very clearly in what I mentioned before with the slave codes becoming black codes. That's policing how African-American are allowed to behave in public, and what it does is it makes... It legally criminalizes African-Americans who are doing anything other than working, and I think that the ways that we interact in public space and the ways we police each other's behavior is often seen as divorced from political action, but it's not. It is an essential part of our politics and how our nation operates and how citizenship and freedom can either be curtailed or be broken wide open.

Sarah McConnell: Caitlin Verboon, thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

Caitlin Verboon: Thank you.

Sarah McConnell: Caitlin Verboon is a postdoctoral fellow in history at Virginia Tech. She's writing a book called Making Space, which explores the ways black and white southerners used public city space to remake citizenship after the Civil War. Laws were only one way. White southerners reasserted their power after reconstruction. They also used violence. Sometimes the method was gunfire like in Danville in 1883. Other times, it was lynching.

Sarah McConnell: Tom Costa is a historian at the University of Virginia College at Wise. He's part of a team working to memorialize Wise County's three lynching victims.

Tom Costa: Yes, Sarah, the three lynchings in Wise County in 1902, a man named Wiley Gwynn was lynched at a place outside the Coeburn called Bondtown. He was

accused of attacking a 12-year-old white girl. They were going to hang him from a tree, but he ran away, and they ended up shooting him.

Tom Costa: In 1920, a man named David Hunt or David Hurst supposedly attacked a 60-year-old white woman at her home, and hanged him from a nearby rail bridge trestle, and then, in 1927, Leonard Woods was accused of shooting a white man from Coeburn. They were both mineworkers. A mob of whites from Coeburn and some from Kentucky broke him out of jail in Whitesburg, took him right across the border in neighboring Virginia and hanged him from a platform that had just been erected the week before for the ceremonial opening of the road between Virginia and Kentucky.

Tom Costa: Because Leonard Woods' lynching attracted a lot of national attention, it spurred Virginia Governor Harry Byrd to convene a meeting, and he had a legislature passed, the first state anti-lynching legislation, the following year. The Leonard Woods lynching in November of 1927 is the last recorded lynching in Virginia. It doesn't mean there were no more lynchings, but they were probably private, not public hangings, and the spectacle, the feature of lynching was the torture and public spectacle, that went away after 1927.

Sarah McConnell: When were most of the lynchings in the nation?

Tom Costa: The period from the 1880s through World War II is generally the highpoint of lynchings. The height is probably the 1880s and 1890s, early 1900s, and then there was a bit of a lull, and then there was a resurgence in the 1920s. I think the estimates are over 4,000 documented lynchings.

Sarah McConnell: Was there a pushback by other white citizens? Any horror on their part?

Tom Costa: Yes. Over and over again, you see newspaper editors and, of course, especially people all across the northern states would condemn these lynchings. Even officials in the southern states would regret, but they felt powerless to do anything because of political reasons and the feeling that southern communities had a right to defend themselves by these means.

Sarah McConnell: Are the lynchings in your area related in any way to the so-called Danville Race Riot of 1883?

Tom Costa: Oh, that's an interesting question because, of course, the Danville Race Riot is seen as a turning point in post-Civil War Virginia political history. The conservative Democrats who were trying to regain power after the Civil War had been in a sense forced to admit blacks to political and civil liberties and the opposing party, the Republican Readjuster Party had made tremendous gains.

Tom Costa: Danville was a case in point. Danville had blacks on the city council. They had black police officers, and the white citizens of Pittsylvania County really were uncomfortable with that, and so they issued a circular condemning black

participation in politics, and the interesting thing is, of course, that these white conservatives at the time considered any black participation to equate to black taking over.

Sarah McConnell: What was the Danville Race Riot of 1883? People were killed.

Tom Costa: Yeah, it was really an argument between a couple of black men and a white man. They argued and then they departed, and then the whites came back in greater numbers and restarted the controversy and shots were fired, and I believe four blacks and one white were killed. I don't think it was ever more than 30 or 40 people at the time.

Sarah McConnell: Why did it send such a shockwave through the white community?

Tom Costa: Because, to the whites, this is what they were arguing, that any black participation in politics, any black officials elected would result in violence and lawlessness, and so they turned what was seemingly a minor incident into a giant controversy for political purposes.

Sarah McConnell: Four blacks were killed and one white.

Tom Costa: Right, but the statistical validity never bothered folks when they're using stuff for political purposes. The Democratic Party, the conservatives who were attempting to regain power from the Republican Readjusters used the violence. They made speeches using the violence as examples of what would happen if you allowed these Republican Readjusters who attracted black voters, "This is what would happen. If you voted for the Republican Readjusters, you would have violence in the streets." In essence, that's what they were saying.

Tom Costa: This is the period that lynchings began to increase in Virginia, and lynchings could be seen as part of this overall pattern that free blacks in our community are incitements to violence, and so the white community members performed these terroristic acts in order to prevent blacks from what they saw as naturally violent behavior.

Sarah McConnell: Do you think that the fear on the part of white people was more of losing power and, therefore, income or more an actual fear of retribution on the part of African-Americans for slavery and cruelty?

Tom Costa: I think it was a combination of those things. I think that whites always projected their fear of blacks onto themselves. When slaves were emancipated, a lot of whites feared that they're going to rise up, they're going to remember all the oppression that they had suffered under slavery, and they're going to rise up and attack us, and so lynchings in a sense might be considered preemptive strikes against that fear of violence from blacks, and every incident, even the relatively minor ones such as the Danville fights could have been, was

exaggerated because the purpose was to reinforce an already existing misperception that blacks were prone to violence.

Sarah McConnell: In the years after Danville, there came to be in Virginia more and more racist laws designed to keep African-Americans from voting.

Tom Costa: What we know is the Jim Crow legislation is a statewide set of laws. An example would be the use of the whipping post which was primarily used against blacks for any kind of offense, a public punishment holdover from the slavery days. They made a law that said anyone sentenced to a public whipping would be disqualified from voting.

Sarah McConnell: These racist laws and laws designed to prevent the black vote were enshrined legally into a new Virginia constitution in 1902?

Tom Costa: Yes. The constitution of 1902 was specifically called to limit black participation in politics. It's the constitution of 1902 that contains those notorious understanding clauses, for example, where when you went to register to vote, you were presented with a document or part of the constitution and then asked to explain it, and the person who evaluated whether you qualified or not was always a white person. The delegates at the convention, one of them even said, as they were debating this understanding clause, he even said, "We don't intend this to be administered fairly or equally at all." They knew going in whites would be passed through and blacks would be treated differently.

Tom Costa: The other notorious aspect of the constitution of 1902 was the poll tax. Not only did you have to pay it before the election, you had to have it paid up for the three previous years prior to the election that you intended to vote in as well, so it's not just simply, "Oh, I forgot last year." If you forgot last year, you are ineligible to vote in the current year as well.

Tom Costa: I remember. I was raised in Norfolk. Virginia still had a poll tax on into the '60s, and I remember how angry my father used to get at the idea of having to pay to vote. He thought it was every American citizen's right and was really resentful of the fact that we still had to pay a poll tax.

Sarah McConnell: This year, the Virginia legislature became the first lynching state in the country to pass an expression of regret for this dark chapter of racial terror.

Tom Costa: Yes. That's very important, and, of course, there is a growing interest in these kinds of reconciliation projects across the state and across the nation. I think it's something that's time has come, and we really do need to look at these horrible incidents in our past and try to understand that they have connections with the current situation, with the current injustice. This is the whole point of the Equal Justice Initiative. It's to try to establish the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. It has a bearing on our current situation of injustice towards the African-American community.

Sarah McConnell: Tom Costa, thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

Tom Costa: You're very welcome. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you so much.

Sarah McConnell: Tom Costa is a professor of history at the University of Virginia College at Wise. This show is one of three episodes produced in partnership with History United. The next one in the series will look at Danville during the Civil Rights era.

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Sarah McConnell: With Good Reason is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities. Our production team is Allison Quantz, Elliot Majerczyk, Kelley Libby, and Cass Adair. Jeannie Palin handles listener services. We had studio help from Mark Simpkins at the University of Mary Washington, [Rose Abad 00:51:26] at the University of Virginia College at Wise, Bill Floyd at Virginia Tech, and Eric Fey at the University of Chicago. For the podcast, go to withgoodreasonradio.org.

Sarah McConnell: I'm Sarah McConnell. Thanks for listening.