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Alabama Myths and Public History

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RCEU 2023 Project Proposal

Project Title

Alabama Myths and Public History

Faculty Information

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Proposal ID RCEU23-HY-CES-01

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I. Project Description

This project will identify and research myths about public history, myths that are not historically accurate, but widely held as truth. If this RCEU project, and Dr. Saunders' RCEU project on "Alabama Myths & Public Memory" are both chosen and funded, then Dr. Saunders and I will work collaboratively with our RCEU students to select specific myths that my student will research the historical origins of to account for what is historically accurate and what is not. His student will focus on the same narratives from when they become myths to current day narratives that are acting as public memory. If we are able to work in tandem, the scope and outcomes of both of our RCEU projects will be magnified.

II. Student Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes

a. *Specific Student Duties*

Jeremy Bailey will be working on this project, if it is funded. He and Dr. Sears will reach out to 3-4 public historians in the area, like Donna Castellano, the Director of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, to identify a few historical myths on which to focus. The student (with support from Dr. Sears) will identify appropriate primary and secondary sources to research the chosen myths. The student will be trained on reading and interpreting historical documents and researching regional background information. Jeremy will give input on the final product(s), and will write a paper for *Perpetua* and/or work with Dr. Sears to arrange a public event to share his research with UAH and the public.

b. *Tangible Contributions by the Student to the Project* (10% of Review)

The student will work with Dr. Sears to identify 1-3 historical myths to investigate, myths that can be researched in the historical record. One myth that could be investigated is the issue of whether or not enslaved individuals from Alabama fought for the Confederate States during the Civil War. The student will be trained to do historical research, and then will research the 1-3 myths identified. The final project will consist of a *Perpetua* article and/or a public presentation. The student will thus be practicing clear, supported, and well argued writing along with revising and editing skills. If Jeremy does a public presentation, Dr. Sears will work with him on giving presentations.

c. *Specific Outcomes Provided by the Project to the Student* (30% of Review)

The student will learn how to focus and narrow a research project, how to read and analyze primary sources, and how to contextualize and present his research to the public.

III. Student Selection Criteria

Minimum 2 history classes. We needed a student with some familiarity with historical methods for this project. Jeremy Bailey met this criterion and was enthusiastic as well as somewhat knowledgeable about historical research.

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IV. Project Mentorship

(30% of Review)

Dr. Sears will be working closely with Jeremy through this project. Jeremy and I will meet daily the first week (either in person or on zoom) as we determine who to contact about Huntsville historic myths. Once Jeremy has a list of 3-4 people to contact, or other leads, we will set up a plan for calls or visits and the best way to elicit information from each person.

I'll ask Jeremy to construct a list of possible myths to explore, and then he and I will discuss which are research-able and how, thus narrowing the list to a few topics. I will work with Jeremy to determine where and how to conduct research. Jeremy will do that research largely on his own, but he and I will touch base regularly to see how the research is going and plan what changes might need to be considered as well as other options to find information, as needed.

I'll ask Jeremy to draft a paper analyzing his research, then he and I will meet to review that paper and projected revisions. We'll go through this process at least twice before final edits and submitting his work to *Perpetua*. We'll also plan out an appropriate public venue for him to present his work; once that is planned, Dr. Sears will work with Jeremy on public presentation skills.