

I arrived at the Peabody Hotel unsure of what I would find at the 2015 AAAM conference, but I left inspired and determined. Wandering through the conference, it was so impressive to have so many of the pioneers of the black museum world right there and be so forthcoming with their experiences and eager to provide advice. Attending the conference, with occasions to interact with established professionals in the field, was an opportunity unlike any other.

In his keynote address, Dr. Hasan Kwame Jefferies stressed the importance black history for our national consciousness. Dr. Jefferies asserted that the American understanding of certain historical events and realities is inadequate. That, "if [the public] doesn't know [about history], they'll find it somewhere else," and that somewhere is a labyrinth of misinformation. "I am not here to change your mind, I'm here to open it," he emphasized. Jefferies' assertion extends to museums of the African American experience. African American museums must not become mausoleums to the past, but have been and continue to be the center of our communities, a safe space to engage the public on multiple fronts. As Dr. Jefferies said, "museums make the past present," and in the age of Black Lives Matter, institutions of African American history show that the past is often not past at all. In this moment, the position that our museums hold in society has never been more important.

An important sub-theme that permeated the conference is the lack of people of color in position of power within museums. Furthermore, the lack of students of color in graduate programs across the nation, including my own program, is staggering. In order to involve people of color in the field, it is essential for those who already established to reach back and provide opportunities for the next generation. For students, strategic positioning and networking is a must.

I emerged from Memphis in a state of renewed determination and perseverance. It is in the spirit of Burroughs-Wright Fellowship that I have returned to Indianapolis for my final year of graduate studies fully prepared to rededicate myself as an advocate for both the study of African American history and for greater representation within the profession.