



Our Edwardsville Continues Education /Advocacy Efforts To Relocate Ninian Edwards Statue From City Plaza

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EDWARDSVILLE – Our Edwardsville is continuing its education and advocacy efforts to relocate the Ninian Edwards statue from its place of veneration in City Plaza in Edwardsville's downtown to an educational setting. January 1, 2021 marks the 203rd anniversary of Ninian Edwards' veto of legislation adopted to ban the practice of indentured servitude in the Illinois territory. On this anniversary, Our Edwardsville released a video containing interviews with three historians that provide education and context around this veto. The video is available at VetoHistory.OurEdwardsville.com.

Our Edwardsville co-leader Eryn Coppersmith interviewed attorney Frank Cicero, Jr., author of the 2018 award-winning book *Creating the Land of Lincoln: The History and Constitutions of Illinois, 1778-1870*. Cicero discussed Governor Edwards' position and role in slavery in Illinois, and what Edwards' support for indentured servitude really

meant. According to Cicero, “Indentured service, in theory, was a voluntary service by the person signing the indenture. In practice, in Illinois and other places, the indentures were people who were slaves in other territories and states brought to Illinois. If they didn't become signed indentured within one month of getting here, then they were deported back to the slave state where they came from...It wasn't really voluntary. It never was voluntary.”

Our Edwardsville co-leader Emily Klingensmith interviewed Dr. Robert Paulett, an Associate Professor of History at SIUE, who explained what the system of indentured servitude means and how it relates to slavery and emancipation. Paulett explained, "If your freedom is contingent upon what others allow you to do, how free are you really? And that is the situation these so-called indentured servants, de facto enslaved people, experiencing in Southern Illinois.”

Our Edwardsville co-leader Asher Denkyirah interviewed Dr. Caroline Kisiel, an Associate professor and Director of the Center to Advance Education for Adults at DePaul University and an Illinois Humanities Road Scholar, who discussed the history of slavery in Illinois, why and in what form slavery existed in Illinois, and what this means for us today. Kisiel laid out why people like Edwards fought to keep a system of slavery in Illinois, explaining, “To think about slavery, we have to think about what slaves were used for? Why was slavery upheld? Why was it valued?.... The more slaves you had, the more work that could be done, and that translated to more money.”

These interviews build on similar education efforts in the area, including a December forum hosted by Our Edwardsville and the League of Women Voters of Edwardsville putting the Ninian Edwards statue in context and September and November Sankofa lectures sponsored by SIUE's Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation center.

Links to videos of these events are available at:

<https://ouredwardsville.com/education/>