

News

Heart of Dixie? Alabama Presenting Diversity in Bicentennial

Celebration includes frank discussion of the horrors of slavery, history of Civil Rights Movement along with Civil War re-enactments

By Jay Reeves
Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — In 1961, Alabama marked the 100th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War with white women dressed in hoop skirts parading through a coliseum and a re-enactment of the inauguration of the Confederate president at the state Capitol.

The state’s 2019 bicentennial celebration is very different, with a frank discussion of the horrors of slavery sharing space on a schedule with a Civil War re-enactment promoted by a Confederate heritage group and scores of other events, many focused on civil rights.

The departure from

years past is intentional, officials who helped plan the program say.

Although Alabama license plates still carry the words “Heart of Dixie” and the state even today has three holidays linked to the Confederacy, organizers say they wanted to present a balanced view of history for the bicentennial.

“The idea was that we want to celebrate the scope and range of Alabama history,” said Ed Bridges, who directed the Alabama Department of Archives and History for more than three decades and now chairs an advisory committee overseeing the bicentennial.

“The really big idea is to find ways to make Alabama better as we enter our third century.”

Unlike other states that have marked bicentennials with yearlong programs or single events, Alabama planners laid out a schedule of nearly three years’ worth of events culminating with a ceremony in Montgomery on Dec. 14, which will mark the 200th anniversary of the state’s admission to the United States in 1819. As part of the program, more than 1,200 educators are getting new materials and supplemental training for state history lessons.

Bertis English, who teaches history at historically black Alabama State University and participated in some of the early planning, said the expanded schedule allowed more time to include diverse perspectives on the state’s past.

“I am seeing a much more inclusive body of participants and events than I probably would have seen two or three decades ago,” English said.

The result is a statewide program that includes everything from



In this Feb. 28, 2019, photo a worker adjusts a banner celebrating Alabama’s bicentennial outside the Department of Archives and History in Montgomery, Ala. Alabama is the latest state trying to balance a painful past with other parts of its history as it recognizes its 200th birthday as a state.

the state’s pre-Colonial history to its role in developing the first moon rockets. Country music legend Hank Williams is being recognized; so is R&B singer Wilson Pickett.

Alabama, like other one-time Confederate states that have celebrated bicentennials, included its years outside the United States in calculating when to mark its 200th birthday. Neighboring Mississippi staged events in 2017 that included opening a civil rights museum in Jackson. Tennessee’s bicentennial included the opening of a Civil War heritage trail in 1996, and Louisiana’s 2012 bicentennial featured traveling exhibits and school educational programs.

So far, Alabama is getting generally positive marks for its bicentennial, which is operating on about \$10.5 million in government funding over three years and has raised another \$3 million in private funds, Alabama Bicentennial Commission Director Jay Lamar said.

Doris Cooper Anthony, 71, of Montgomery attended a bicentennial program that coincided with Black History Month about the legacy of slavery at Alabama State in Montgomery and was pleased to see

the state’s warts being presented along with more positive aspects.

“It’s not history unless you tell the whole thing. History has been fragmented selectively to paint a picture that is delusional really,” said Anthony, who is black.

Marvin Dulaney, a retired University of Texas historian who spoke at the event, said it’s vital for any Southern state to present its full history, including the antebellum period, the Civil War and beyond.

“That Confederacy period is still part of that history. Criticize it and indeed tell the truth about it, that it’s about slavery and not state’s rights and so on,” he said.

The model for the bicentennial program was based in large part on a series of events nearly a decade ago marking the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the bicentennial of a bloody dispute called the Creek War and the 50th anniversary of the civil rights movement, Bridges said.

Rather than simply highlighting battles or civil rights demonstrations, he said, organizers back then said, “Let’s look at this as a process of how we became who we were.”

“That was a testing ground for what we are doing now,” he said.

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CareOregon 315 SW 5th Ave, Portland Apr 3..... 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Apr 10 9-11 a.m. Apr 17 9-11 a.m. Apr 24 9-11 a.m.	Department of Human Services SW 50 SW 2nd Ave, Portland Apr 2..... 9-11 a.m. Apr 9..... 9-11 a.m. Apr 16 9-11 a.m. Apr 23..... 9-11 a.m. Apr 30 9-11 a.m.
Clackamas Service Center 8800 SE 80th Ave, Portland Apr 9..... 10 a.m.-12 p.m.	Head Start Clarendon Early Learning Center 9325 N Van Houten Ave, Portland Apr 15 1-3 p.m.
Department of Human Services Alberta 30 N Webster St Ste A, Portland Apr 2..... 1-3 p.m.	Head Start Kelly Center 9015 SE Rural St, Portland Apr 4..... 1-3 p.m.
Department of Human Services SE 8129 SE Malden St, Portland Apr 9..... 1-3 p.m.	Hope International Church 11242 SE Holgate Blvd, Portland Apr 22..... 1-4 p.m.
WASHINGTON COUNTY	
Beaverton Library 12375 SW 5th St, Beaverton Apr 10 1-3 p.m.	

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