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The African American Museum's Long Road to Completion

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

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THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM'S LONG ROAD TO COMPLETION



February 28, 2017

After the film *The Birth of a Nation* premiered in 1915, with its racist endorsement of the KKK, protests from African-Americans sprang up around the country.

A national movement began one year later in 1916, whose primary goal was the building of a monument to black history in Washington, DC.

On Monday Feb. 27, an audience at Cardozo Law was given an opportunity to understand the long journey that culminated with the opening of the Museum of African American History & Culture last year. According to the three-person panel that visited Cardozo Law Monday night, the building was the fruition of a movement to preserve black history that had been going on for nearly a century, amidst turbulent racial relations in the U.S.

The panel included Dr. Andrea Burns, historian at Appalachian State University; Dr. Arica Coleman, historian, professor of African American studies and *Time* magazine contributor; and Judge Robert Wilkins, United States Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and author of *Long Road to Hard Truth: The 100-year Mission to Create the National Museum of African American History and Culture*.

More than 36,000 artifacts are housed in the newest addition to the national mall in Washington, DC. Timed-entry tickets to the museum are sold out through the end of March.

Dr. Andrea Burns, historian at Appalachian State University, provided historical context for the museum, noting that “neighborhood museums” focusing on African-American culture

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July 8, 2019

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Cardozo School of Law is proud to recognize 27 members of the

and memorabilia, started appearing in the middle of the 20th century. These were the first public venues for preservation of African American culture.

Judge Robert Wilkins was instrumental in the museum's planning and construction, said a movement to form a national African-American monument gained notable momentum after the premiere of the film *Birth of Nation* in 1915. The National Memorial Association was then formed in 1916 with the primary goal of building a monument to black history in Washington, DC. "People wanted the memorial to rebuke the movie," Wilkins told the audience. And so began the long road to the National Museum of African American History. Congressional battles over the idea of the museum ensued, with racism of the time playing a central role. In 1929, a bill was finally passed to build a monument, but provided no funding.

Wilkins was an integral part of the museum's development and construction, as he formed a non-profit in the 1990s to further the endeavor. After battles over location and funding, in 2006 the site plan was approved to construct on the mall in DC and ten years later, the museum finally opened with President Barack Obama presiding over the opening ceremony.

Wilkins said, "the journey to create the museum parallels the black journey to citizenship."

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