

## **Reflective Reinvention: Addressing the Skeletons in our Past**

Many of our institutions of higher learning have a history that, when judged by current standards, is embarrassing and sometimes shameful. Slave owners, slave traders, confederate generals, plantation owners – are associated with colleges in both the South and the North. Institutions were founded and endowed by these historical figures. Some colleges bear the names of these individuals, others have named buildings in their honor.

As educators, concerned about reputation and integrity, how should we respond? Do we press on, unmindful of the past .... Do we remove statues, rename buildings .... Apologize for the sins of our forebears ....

The purpose of this session is to look for a balance – reflecting on our past while seeking to build a better future for our institutions.

On June 17, 2015 Dylann Roof murdered nine African Americans in a Charleston Church. On his website Roof identified as a white supremacist, neo-Nazi, carrying a Confederate flag. On August 13, 2017 one person was killed and 19 injured while protesting a white-nationalists rally in Charlottesville. These tragic events prompted colleges, schools, and governments to reflect on their past association with the confederacy, with slavery, and with other distasteful people and events.

Since we can't erase the past, what should be our response? Should we even be associated with such institutions? Can we discuss history in our classrooms dispassionately - without excusing the past or offending our students? What can we learn from history that will promote a more just and equitable society? What should we be doing to educate the next generation of leaders, educators, and citizens?

My plan for this roundtable is:

1. A brief history of some of our institutions of higher learning
2. The institutions' association with offensive historical figures and events
3. Recent attempts to address past associations
4. An open discussion of "what should we do?"
5. Can we reflect on our past without reinventing or revising it?

It is my hope that we will leave this roundtable with an action plan about how to address these controversial issues both inside and outside the classroom. About how to help our students build a better more just future without being unmindful about the past.