

An Open Moment for Ernestina-Morrissey and for all of us

As we approach the celebration of our Nation's beginnings 244 years ago, we must consider where we are now. The statement below, shared by Laura Pires-Hester, past Chairwoman of the Ernestina Commission and Julius Britto, President of Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey Association, reflects on Ernestina-Morrissey's place in history, and her place in the present and in the future.

An Open Moment

Most Americans today would agree that this is a momentous period for us—as individuals, as a country, and as a people. We have seen too many senseless deaths of African Americans, especially African-American males, at the hands of police officers.

While several of these names are now well-known, we have also been reminded of the names of those less well-known or totally forgotten. We have seen how this moment has brought to the forefront our country's centuries-old "Black/White" challenges, and how the phrase and movement Black Lives Matter has crystallized those challenges. Corporations, community organizations, educational institutions, sports associations, faith leaders and faith-based institutions and others have acknowledged the painful reality of this moment and the need for change, including within their own walls. Some have also declared their own specific action commitments. Different sectors of our society are not only demanding "what must be done" but also resolving "what we will do."

What does Ernestina-Morrissey have to do with the age of Black Lives Matter? What can this 1894 Gloucester Schooner now being reconstructed to resume active sailing tell us?

Ernestina-Morrissey returned to the state of her birthplace as the extraordinary gift from newly-independent Cabo Verde in 1982, in explicit acknowledgement of the centuries-old ties between the African country and the “people of the United States”. Her return crew, composed of a diverse crew, citizens of Cabo Verde and of the U.S., men and one woman, and led by Cabo Verde’s Captain Marcus Nascimento Lopes, demonstrated and honored the diversity of her history and future.

Over the decades between her birth and repatriation, hundreds of people and organizations played significant roles in her history. Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey is alive today because Black People and White People listened to and learned about each other’s histories, hurts, and aspirations; challenged each other; acknowledged their similarities and differences; and collaborated with each other.

We believe that at this critical moment many are seeking opportunities for bridge-building, boundary-crossing, and more authentic listening to each other, especially toward the goal of building a more just society for all. We believe that Ernestina-Morrissey’s return to sailing can help provide such opportunities, especially for young people of all ethnicities but also for people of all ages.

This conviction comes not from wishful thinking but from actual experience of utilizing Ernestina-Morrissey as educational platform, cultural ambassador, intercultural and interracial relations educator, youth developer, etc. In the fast-changing environment of 2020 and beyond—with issues of social justice and local and global survival concerns at peak level—Ernestina-Morrissey’s powerful potentials are limitless.

This is a powerful “open moment” in our nation when people from all perspectives and histories are listening to, and hearing, other people and experiences perhaps for the first time. There is much to be done and no one person or entity can do it alone. But everyone and every entity can do a part. We

are excited about Ernestina-Morrissey's sailing again, educating again, bringing people together again, telling her distinguished story again, and playing her part to help unite people of all colors around the world.

This Project to rehabilitate Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey, the official vessel of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is being supported by a public/private partnership with funds from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The Lenfest Foundation, the Hildreth Stewart Charitable Foundation, The Manton Foundation, the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts – Mary Morley Crapo Hyde Eccles Fund, the City of New Bedford's Community Preservation Act Program, the Carney Family Foundation, the Island Foundation, other grants and many individual contributions.