**HFNT #7: Pump the Breaks**

**Episode Transcript**

[INTRO MUSIC]

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas! I'm Scott.

Alicia: And I'm Alicia.

Scott: And today is Friday, June 14th. And we've got a wide-ranging episode for you today. What are we going to be covering, Alicia?

Alicia: Well, we have a couple of longer interviews in today's episode. The first one is about Juneteenth, specifically with a food researcher talking about some of the food traditions associated with the holiday. Our second segment is the next installment of Scott's Democracy Primer series, dropping some Electoral College knowledge. Last but not least, we'll have a segment about the UNT System’s shared core values that we try to exhibit in our work every day.

Scott: Sounds like a hearty episode. But first, I think we have some catching up to do, Alicia.

Alicia: Yes, we do.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Alicia: Scotty!

Scott: Alicia!

Alicia: What's new?

Scott: Well, we kind of got a new president.

Alicia: That's right. For anybody who missed the news, the UNT System Board of Regents named a sole finalist for the UNT presidency. And now there's a 21-day waiting period required by state law before it's officially official. That finalist is Dr. Harrison Keller, who's currently the commissioner of Higher Education at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Scott: This is a little bit inside baseball, but the THECB kind of oversees all public higher education in the state. So, when we want to offer a new degree, for instance, they have to sign off on it. So, Dr. Keller should bring an interesting perspective to UNT based on that experience. Maybe we can get him on the show when we come back from break. Also, for anyone who missed last week's shorty episode, I had a stroke a few weeks ago, so this will be our last episode for a couple of months. The podcast will be taking the summer off so I can have some time to recover.

Alicia: Speaking of which, are you comfortable talking about how your recovery's going so far?

Scott: Yeah. Fortunately, it appears to have not been too severe. I had some evaluations last week and physical therapy gave me a pass so I get to skip that, but my speech is still a little bit slow and I'm making a few more typos than usual with my left hand. So I've got some speech and occupational therapy ahead of me to hopefully get back up to speed.

Alicia: That's so great to hear, Scotty.

Scott: Yeah, and I've been cleared to drive and made it back into the office for the first time this week. So, it's been good to see everybody and start to get back to normal again.

Alicia: Yes, we are so happy to have you back. You want to tell the people why you insisted on putting out one more episode before we go on break?

Scott: Yes. So, this episode was scheduled for last week, but by the time I was able to start working again, it was too late to pull a full episode together. Our first segment is about Juneteenth and it's a really good interview, so I wanted to make sure we could put it out before the holiday and not end up having to hold on to it until next year.

Alicia: That's fair, because it's a really good interview. Our very own Heather Noel spoke to food writer and UNT history doctoral student Deah Berry Mitchell about her research on Black Texan foodways to learn more about Juneteenth food traditions. Deah also talked about how she's lending her historical expertise on some exciting new projects under development, including the National Juneteenth Museum planned for Fort Worth.

Scott: And, it's worth noting that UNT has ties to the museum and to the holiday itself. UNT alum Jerrod Howard is leading the development as the CEO of the National Juneteenth Museum, and alumna Opal Lee is known as the grandmother of Juneteenth for leading the successful charge to make it a national holiday. All that work also earned her an honorary Ph.D. from UNT in 2023 and the presidential Medal of Freedom this year.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Heather: You are a food history researcher. Tell me a little bit about what that means and what kind of work you do with that.

Deah: Great question. It's funny because originally, when I began this kind of love affair with food history, I really didn't expect to have to -- I was naïve, you know? So, I didn't really expect to have to go backwards and really look at things from a bird's-eye view perspective and understand all of history and how all of history can impact the foods that we eat. And so that's one thing that has been surprising for me. But I started on this road, ironically, I used to be a culinary instructor years ago -- and because I didn't have, I didn't attend culinary arts school, and I think to kind of overcompensate for my lack of formal culinary training -- I wanted to know everything there was to know about the food dish that I was preparing for people. So, I started looking into the history of different foods and the origins so that I could give people a little bit of background information while I was preparing them and showing them how to prepare the foods and really appreciate them. So, that's how it started. That was maybe like a decade ago.

Heather: Yeah. And how can food help us understand our culture, its people and its history?

Deah: A great question. I think for me, from my understanding, it really helps you to understand what was important to that group of people that you're studying -- what was not important by what they left out, perhaps. So, say, for example, with holidays, just like with us, when we're preparing holiday dishes, we want something that's tasty, but maybe you want to feed a large group. And, so, that's going to determine what type of foods that you choose to serve as well. So, it's pretty similar in that respect.

Heather: Yeah, and maybe also availability?

Deah: Availability is a huge one.

Heather: How much money you have?

Deah: How much money you have is another one, definitely. How many people you're feeding. All of that plays into it. And, on top of that, you can also tell a bit about their spirituality, religious meanings behind some food, if there is any or, you know, if there isn't any. You can tell all of that by by the food.

Heather: And so, with your Ph.D. research you're doing here at UNT, what does that entail? What are you looking at with that work?

Deah: I'm actually looking at what black Texans ate from the antebellum period, which was before Civil War through modern day. So, that's been exciting. And I have a chapter of it that will focus specifically on Juneteenth foods and foods that were eaten primarily during emancipation celebrations.

Heather: Yeah, which is exactly why I wanted to talk to you. You know, obviously that holiday is coming up here, June 19th. Can you tell, I guess, before we kind of get into your work and looking at the foods around that holiday, could you tell me about Juneteenth and its historical significance?

Deah: Absolutely. So, I guess a crash course kind of reminder is what I usually tell folks is that we all know that the Emancipation Proclamation was effective January 1, 1863, but after that time, it only applied to the states that were in rebellion. After that time, it took maybe about two-and-a-half years or so before General Granger's folks -- he rallied up his not only the naval folks, but army. And they really sent them to first Galveston Island. And then, when they arrived in Galveston, is when they began spreading the word to Texans. Texas, we were pretty removed from, you know, civil war. It wasn't a location that people came to fight, so it wasn't involved in that capacity, even though we did have obviously Texans who fought in the war who left to fight in it. So, because we were so far removed in terms of proximity, it took that long to get folks to say, “Hey, we need to go and let those people know that we're going to enforce this.” And so, it was enforced. The date that it was signed was prior to June 19th, but the date that it was actually addressed to folks in Texas was in Galveston on June 19th.

Heather: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. And so, with your research looking at Black foodways in Texas, what made you want to include special focus on Juneteenth and the foods?

Deah: So, originally when I started looking into foods that Black Texans eat, Juneteenth always played a really major role in that, but probably not for the reason that most people would think. Now there's, like, everyone's talking about Juneteenth foods and red foods and red drinks and all of the symbolic romantic reasons behind those things, and I really felt a disconnect because being a fifth-generation Texan, I had not ever heard of any of these reasons for eating like that, and I grew up celebrating Juneteenth. So, for me, I wanted to study it because I felt like, what do I know about Juneteenth? If this is not, you know, not real. So, I wanted to study it to find out why I'd never heard of some of these things. And I hope I'm not bursting anyone's bubble, but a lot of those are myths. They've been romanticized for different reasons. We do eat a lot of red foods, but a lot of the reasons behind that are really just coincidental. So, for example, refrigeration was hard to come by and a lot of people did not even have access to it because it was just too early. And so, things like eating what's accessible to you and eating what is seasonal to you. So, things like strawberries, fresh watermelon, things like this, they are at peak season during end of May, early June and sometimes July. So it makes sense when you think about that, that our major holidays that we're celebrating during this time period that we're eating foods like that. And, as far as barbecue, that's a red sauce basw for most of us. And so, that's red. And then, do you want me to burst any bubbles about the red velvet food cake myth?

Heather: Go ahead, now I'm interested.

Deah: So there's been a lot of conversation about red velvet being like this iconic food or cake that we eat during Juneteenth, and we have. But that only started probably about in the late 1920s, early 1930s. And it wasn't just Juneteenth. It was eaten across the state of Texas because there was a little company, big company, called Adams food coloring.

Heather: I think I’ve heard of them.

Deah: Yeah, they're pretty major. They do a lot, like the vanilla flavorings and things like that.

Heather: I was joking. I knew it. Yeah. As a native Texan, I definitely know about Adams.

Deah: Sorry, I don't pick up on social cues sometimes. But yeah. So, Adams food coloring they actually had created, they were the first ones to create this red dye in food that didn't occur naturally. And so, the red dye they used to kind of heighten that hue of of some different foods. Red velvet cake was one of them. And so, when they began to market this product, they placed it on the back of the box. And then they sold it. But, because it was a Texas company, they sold it primarily to people in Texas. And so it began to be pretty widespread during that time period. But again, red velvet cake wasn't invented in Texas. It was just that we started preparing that a lot because we had this this great red dye that was now available to us in this amazing, I guess, recipe that they were distributing on the backs of boxes. And so, red velvet food cake, red velvet cake became really popular in Texas around that time. So, Juneteenth was no different.

Heather: Yeah, and I'm interested because you were saying you grew up celebrating Juneteenth. What did the celebrations look like for you and your family?

Deah: Oh, boy. Fun. Lots of barbecue, outdoor events, things like that. I grew up in Sherman, so parade culture wasn't necessarily a part of anything that we did. We had very small parades. So, it probably back in my day, back in my day would have been maybe, I don't know, less than 10 cars parading down the street. So that wouldn't have been much fun. But we did have things, like, there was a lady named Miss Lorraine, gosh, I think I'm mispronouncing her name, but I see.

Heather: Lorraine, if you're listening …

Deah: I know. I’m sorry. You were very impactful on my life. But she was, she really was instrumental because I remember, I don't remember how old I was, but I was a little girl and she used to have these kind of classes where she would take us to East Street Park, which was a popular park in Sherman at that time. And she used to tell us, she gathered us all in this room, and she told us about Juneteenth, the history of Juneteenth. And then, after that, I just remember celebrating inside Austin College Chapel -- Austin College is in Sherman -- and we used to go in the chapel and have, like, different programs that were pretty similar to, like, Easter programs. I had a Juneteenth speech. We would sing songs and things like that. So, that's how I grew up celebrating. And, of course, food.

Heather: Of course, food. Always food, right?

Deah: Yeah.

Heather: And so, these celebrations, these events and educational program that you're talking about, what was kind of the makeup of the people there were? You know, it was a kind of a cross-section of the community who usually kind of attended those events -- like, age ranges.

Deah: Yeah. So, primarily this was back in the ‘80s, don't want to date myself, but it was in the ‘80s. And so, at that time, Juneteenth was still celebrated by primarily only by African-Americans. And so, for us it would be a wide range of ages. I would say a lot of us, a large portion, they were young. So, I would say maybe youth till around high school age only because it was kind of geared towards us to participate. And then, of course, our parents and everybody would come. And so, we ended up getting a good range of people, a good swath of folks that would come and listen to us.

Heather: Yeah. And what does the celebration look like for you now as an adult?

Deah: So, there's still a lot of eating -- that's never going to change. But, really, today I do go to different things like parades and things like that, but primarily I go to a lot of food-based events, and so, barbecues are still huge, especially in Texas. So, I attend those and also rodeos, also.

Heather: So I'd like to take a step back in time again. Yes. What have you found so far about maybe some of those earlier celebrations and kind of what, what those look like, what you’ve found?

Deah: So, what I have found is that the earliest celebrations, emancipation celebrations, they didn't just kind of crop up with no rhyme or reason to them. So, the earliest ones were actually celebrated on church grounds and they were very almost solemn in a sense, like, they had order. You were inside of the church. And so, there was always going to be an order when you're inside of the church. And so, it was very structured, I think, would be a good word for it. There was also a need to address people about policies and different governmental issues that were going on at the day, at the time. And so, it was a good way to kind of spread the word to a large group of people. So, that's how it started. And then, after that, it kind of grew to this celebratory occasion, which is what a lot of us know it for today. I wanted to add, though, I've also just recently in my research noticed that there were different ways that people celebrated just emancipation holidays regionally and going into different states and things like that, because in Florida, for example, it's celebrated on May 20th is their celebration. And then, Kentucky, I believe, is May 8th. And so, there are different dates of emancipation that are celebrated amongst groups of black folks. It just so happens in Texas, it's June 19th, but across all of those different dates that are kind of gathered under the umbrella of emancipation holidays for Black Americans, they always have things in common. One of those things is they could be celebrating, as I mentioned before, in a very solemn, more kind of formalized structure, like at church or things like that. Another way that's pretty consistent is that we have celebrated in, like, this kind of celebratory, jubilant kind of atmosphere. And, another thing that kind of ties us together is that we have found ways to incorporate athleticism. So, rodeo culture would fall under that. In other parts of America, they may be doing different things. And, like, if rodeo culture isn’t big, it could be foot races and things of that sort. So, in Texas specifically, rodeo culture has always been a part of that. And so, they would also have people racing around on horses, even if it wasn't related to rodeo. Just that was kind of how they they showed their athleticism back in the day.

Heather: Yeah, have you found any kind of significance on incorporating athleticism in this event?

Deah: So, there is still, as I mentioned in Texas, rodeo culture is is still really large, hugely large. And so, that continues to be a tradition, but it's still very much a part of the culture. And then, as I mentioned before, food is always a factor that has kind of unified us. In Texas, we eat differently than, say, people who are celebrating their emancipation days in different places. So, we eat a lot of beef here. You know, you spoke earlier about access to foods and how you're going to eat what's closest to you and what you have availability of and what you have the most of. And, for us in Texas, it was beef. And so, we barbecued a lot, but we're not going to barbecue like someone in South Carolina is barbecuing because they have a lot of pork. And so, we had a lot of beef-based products. When I was younger we also used to eat hot links a lot. I never liked hot links. Yeah, but hot links were really big as well. Also, there is also lately -- I hope I'm not jumping the gun -- I think you wanted to talk about red drinks, too.

Heather: Yeah. We already talked a little bit about the red myth and I realized we probably should have addressed exactly what that myth was. Yeah, can you do that for us now?

Deah: So, I will do that. Yeah so, basically, there is this kind of a narrative -- I won't call it a push -- but there's a narrative being told by a lot of people when they have this conversation about foods that Black Americans eat. There is usually some significance of the color red. And so, many food writers and historians, you will see that they talk about the hibiscus being one plant that was used in order to prepare a drink or a tea, hibiscus tea. And, the way that they link it is that they are saying that in West African culture, because this drink was prepared, and it was like a reddish hue, that that somehow carried over to places in America and southern parts of America where we also wanted to maintain that connection. And we absolutely, we as as black Americans, do have a large number of ways that we still connect back to our West African roots, if we have any connections to that. But there's been really this narrative that the drinks that we consume on holidays like Juneteenth are directly tied back to our West African roots. One of those drinks is, they always call it like red drink, like, this this mythic red drink that no one knows what it was. And, in Texas, we obviously have Big Red, you know, and so that's a big, big part of our culture -- again, not just for Black Texans, but as just Texans. You know, I love Big Red. I don't know about you, but we also drink other drinks as well that are usually not mentioned. So, Dr Pepper, obviously, for obvious reasons. And then, in addition to that, some of the earliest known drinks that were consumed on Juneteenth, or any other holiday for that part in the late 1800s, there was a whiskey, kind of whiskey-like substance that was consumed, alcoholic beverage. And, do you know what they called it?

Heather: I don't know. What is it?

Deah: They called it red liquor, because of its color. It was, like, this brownish-reddish hue. And so, everyone called it red liquor. But again, not just Black Texans -- everyone called it that. And it was a pretty popular drink during, again, the late 1800s, which is, which would have been the time that we would have been celebrating very early. And so, there is, there have been some, some of my research reveals that they have made things or prepared things like red liquor for celebrations during Juneteenth. And I think that may be what other people are referring to. Red lemonade was prepared as well. But again, that was a way to kind of jazz up your drink that you're drinking. And again, not just for Black Texans, but a lot of people. It was a pretty refreshing drink and we still drink it today. You mixed fruit with your lemonade. You know, I do, too. So they were no different. They they did it for the flavoring. So, not necessarily for any spiritual connection or at least that I am aware of and that I've been able to find any, any research to back up that. But they had other ways that they were still connecting to their roots. You know, oral history was one of them, just by passing along stories. And when you would gather with your family, they would tell you oral history. You know, oral history is a huge part of kind of extending that spiritual connection with your ancestors that's not really spoken about a lot. Another way that, I guess, you could say that it was really connected or tied to their past and not necessarily with the food -- as with the with the food symbolism aspect or the color symbolism, I should say. But another way that they connected to their past was just by being able to… the dances they did with one another. You know, those were kind of symbolic because they were pretty similar to dances that were done in West Africa as well. And so, I say similar, but I'm not much of a dancer, so I can't really show you. But, yeah.

Heather: You got me interested. I'm wondering, I mean, can you tell a little bit more about the dance?

Deah: Yeah, so, and some of the other research that I’ve been reading, it’s been really interesting to hear about, kind of they would put their hands behind their backs and do like these dances. But the thing that I found most telling to me was the fact that they are saying in the revealing, rather in these oral histories, that white people would come in, like, just so they could watch them dance. And so, because this wasn't being done in other, like, celebratory occasions, not like they were doing. And so, the fact that they were gathering crowds around to watch them dance lets me know that it was something going on that was pretty different and you weren't going to be able to see that in, like, a regular 4th of July celebration where everyone is celebrating. And so, this was pretty niche, the fact that dance was a way that they were able to do something different. But the description that I've read was you would put your hands behind your back and then, like, dance to the beat from there. So, in my head, I think of it like this dance that the kids do nowadays where they, and then they explained that they would shuffle their feet backwards. So, if your hands are behind your back and then you're shuffling backwards, like if you are a dancer again, which I am not, there is a dance that kids do today that's pretty similar to that. And I wish I could think of the song that I usually see it on.

Heather: I'm afraid to, like, guess if I'm like way off.

Deah: And I'm afraid to show you how I'm thinking it would look.

Heather: Luckily for our listeners, this is a podcast, so you can only hear and there's no video.

Deah: Should I show you, actually.

Heather: Sure. OK.

Deah: Well, probably it was like.

Heather: Ah, OK.

Deah: She does not know, audience, what I'm doing. But, yeah, that was fun. Thanks.

Heather: Anything that, you know, gets you to laugh and smile and have fun is, is, you know, something on par for the jubilant nature of Juneteenth.

Deah: This is the first for a podcast interview, so thank you.

Heather: Oh, my gosh. Well, you know, I, I would like to kind of segue into you know, you're also on the exhibitions committee for the upcoming National Juneteenth Museum that's going to be right here in Fort Worth, Texas. And it's being developed by one of our UNT alums, Jarred Howard. So, I guess, could you tell me about your role with the museum and how you got into that?

Deah: Yeah, sure. I believe it was a little over a year ago. I was nominated to join the board because of my background in speaking about Juneteenth history. And so, I got the call and they asked me if I was interested and I was, like, `Heck yes, I am interested. Where do I sign?’ So, that's when it began. And, as far as my involvement with the exhibitions committee, I used to be the chair, but I had to resign my role because I got this other great, amazing opportunity that, I guess, we'll come back to. I'm also on the, newly appointed to the Dallas County Historical Commission, and so I've been working with them and also named the City of Dallas historian in residence.

Heather: Wow. Well, congratulations. I did not know that. That's amazing.

Deah: It's a lot. And so, sometimes it takes a minute to remember everything.

Heather: She is a woman of many titles and, you know …

Deah: Hopefully, yeah, hopefully I'm excelling at those. But back to the national Juneteenth Museum. It's really been wonderful to work with them. And Kathryn Conaway, is the newly appointed chair of the exhibitions committee. And so, essentially, we have all been charged with helping gain material culture, so that, it will be held at the museum or showcased -- I should say, at the museum -- once it's ready to be opened in 2025. So, in about a year. That's going to be exciting. So, we actually have a call out right now, so that if anyone has any cultural artifacts or just anything that you think would be a good fit to tie into the theme of freedom, whether that ties into Juneteenth celebrations, whether it be what you think freedom means to you, we're definitely open to it. And we have a wonderful strategist who's able to kind of look at those items and see if that would be a good fit for our exhibitions. Her name is Dr. Lauren Cross, and she also, I don't know if she was a UNT alum, but I think she taught here.

Heather: She did, yeah.

Deah: So, she's amazing and she's really been helping us kind of pull things together to make sure that we're right on, on trend to opening and that we have something that people will want to be very excited about to see. So, if you have any artifacts or items, please email us and Dr. Krauss will look at it and we'll take a vote and see if that's something we can use.

Heather: Yeah, and where can they email?

Deah: That's a good question. If you go to info@thenjm.org, there should be a link that will direct you there. So, I don't have the exact email memorized, but I know if you go to info@thenjm.org, it does have a page that's devoted to, `Hey, are you interested in having artifacts come our way?’ And so, you can do that. The museum, National Juneteenth Museum, rather, is also, has developed a newly established relationship with UNT as well. And so, UNT will be housing the artifacts for us in the collections and all of that great stuff. They're going to be storing it for us.

Heather: And that's going to be in our UNT Special Collections?

Deah: Yes, UNT Special Collections.

Heather: Great. Yeah. You know, talking about this museum, this National Juneteenth Museum, why do you think it's important that we have a place like this where we can go and learn about this holiday significance and maybe stop to reflect on what it means? What it has meant and what it means.

Deah: Sure. Well, one thing I'm excited about is that one of the questions I think that people ask a lot is why Fort Worth? You know, why? What's the significance of putting a Juneteenth museum, a National Juneteenth Museum in the City of Fort Worth? And to those questions, while I understand where they would be coming from, I think they also come from a place of really thinking that Juneteenth only impacted Galveston and it didn't you know, the message was delivered in Galveston, but it was also delivered in Marshall, and it was also delivered, like, there were different places that the troops went to to deliver these messages. But because Galveston was this huge port city, it reverberated on a much larger scale. But the document number three is the one that applied to the state of Texas, Black Texans. We it it applied like blanket to all of Texas, all of Black Texans here, emancipation did. And so, it made sense that we would celebrate in Fort Worth or you know, why not get a museum? That's something that hadn't been opened yet and there was definitely plenty of opportunity. So, I appreciate the fact that someone like Jarred and Miss Opal got together and had the foresight to create this museum that stands for freedom. And, I love that they also have been very, very vocal about the fact that this is not only what freedom meant for Black Texans, but what it meant to everyone. And so, I love that we're going to look at different aspects of slavery, not just as it occurred in Southern American, or I should say, America, but we're going to look at enslavement from different aspects and what that means to people and what freedom means today to different people. Juneteenth is a part of that narrative and I'm really happy that they're using this as a platform to talk about other issues that are very important.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Scott: Man, I loved all the good information in that interview. I never learned about Juneteenth growing up. In fact, I don't think I even heard of it until I started going to school here, and didn't learn what it was actually about until I started working here a few years ago. It's awesome to see it becoming more well known so future generations can be more culturally aware.

Alicia: For sure, we love a good educational interview around here. Speaking of, what do we have up next, Scotty?

Scott: That would be the next installment of our Democracy Primary Series that we launched back on Episode Three. The idea here is we want to provide basic explainers of various components of the American election process and overall government to help listeners understand how it works. And the reasoning that went into it in Episode Three, we talked about primaries, and for this segment I interviewed political science associate professor Gloria Cox about the Electoral College.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Scott: I wanted to start out with you talking about the Electoral College. Can you give me just kind of, like, a basic explainer of of what it is and how it works?

Gloria: Well, when the guys got together to write our Constitution, they didn't necessarily agree on how to elect a president. Some of them thought that the voters – and, of course, there were very few people qualified to vote in those days -- but the voters should directly elect a president. What a premise, right? And others felt that the common person could not be trusted. And so, they suggested that there be an indirect way of electing a president. And so, that meant that they ended up with this odd thing called the Electoral College. And in the Electoral College, we actually vote in our states as to who will get the electors that we have. And those will all be totaled up by Congress and a winner will be declared. The Electoral College is a system whereby we vote in our state for who’s going to be elected president of the United States. And I bet if I'm on the street and I talk to ordinary voters, most of them think that when they pull the lever or bubble in for Biden or Trump, they are actually voting for that person. But that's not the way the system works. What they are actually voting for is a set of what we call electors who, in total, make up what we call the Electoral College. And there are 538 electors in the Electoral College, and each state has a certain number of electors. People are always wondering about how you know how many electors your state has. And, the thing is, there's a formula for it. Every state has at least three electors, because you get two electors for your two members of the United States Senate. But then, you also get as many electors as you have representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives. So, with 435 House members and 100 in the Senate, everyone would probably say, `There must be 535 members of the Electoral College.’ But that's not quite right, because a couple of decades ago, it was decided that the District of Columbia deserves a vote, too. And so, the District of Columbia has three electoral votes. In fact, I was working for a member of Congress way back when, and it was before the District of Columbia had any electors. And I rode the train home to South Carolina so I could vote in the presidential election. I just thought I would throw that in for you.

Scott: Yeah, no, that's really interesting. And so, before that, then it was it was 535.

Gloria: Well, if you look at a website that shows you the Electoral College, in every presidential election, you will not see 535 or 538. What you will see is how many electors they had at that time. And so, after each census, the Electoral College changes, but before that, new states were added to the union all the time. And so, that also changed the number of electors in the Electoral College. So this is kind of a shocking thing when you look at a table that shows you the electors in every election. Those are freely available online, by the way. And it's shocking that we have 538 now. But, but, go back to 1800 or, you know, 1820 or something and, and maybe, you know, 1910. And, of course, I remember when the last two states were added to the Union, Alaska and Hawaii. So, that also changed the Electoral College. So, there are 538 electors that make up the Electoral College. So, here we are in the state of Texas. And, of course, everyone will want to know, well, how many electoral votes does Texas have? So, Texas actually moves up from 38 electoral votes last time to 40 electoral votes in 2024. That's because there was a census in 2020. And Texas has grown so much that Texas got two more members of the House of Representatives, which gave Texas two more votes in the Electoral College.

Scott: Interesting. And so, and that's something else I didn't, I never really thought about. But now that you say it, makes perfect sense that the number of electoral votes that each state has changes as populations shift. And that's based on the census, is that right?

Gloria: It is. And, of course, the Constitution requires a census every 10 years. And so, going into the 2020 census, I would talk about this with my students because there were projections that Texas would get two or three additional members of the House, which meant new or additional votes in the Electoral College. And, it turned out that Texas got two more members, which brings our number of electoral votes to 40. Well, one thing that's important to remember is that the 538 stays the same. So some state or states had to lose the electoral votes so that Texas could get two more electoral votes. There are two states that actually divide up their electoral vote on a proportional basis.

Scott: I wanted to ask about this. I'm glad you're bringing it up.

Gloria: There are two states, Maine and Nebraska that divide up their electors proportionately. A lot of people think this would be a good idea. For example, there were millions of people in Texas in the last election who voted for Biden, who felt like, `Well, what happened to my vote? This is a democracy, what happened to the voice I was supposed to have?’ And the interesting thing about Maine and Nebraska is that they have a formula where they give a couple of electors to the overall winner, but then they divide the rest by congressional district. And if this were to be done nationwide, it would be perfectly legal. Constitution doesn’t say anything about a winner-take-all system. So, every state could actually divide up their electors just the way Maine and Nebraska divide theirs. But in all the other states, the winning candidate gets all the electoral votes in that state. And in fact, one thing I didn't say is that if the Electoral College fails to select someone -- in other words, if no one gets 270 electoral votes, which is what's unnecessary -- then it goes to the House of Representatives, who picks from the top three candidates. But in the House, each state has just one vote. So, Texas has a lot more Republicans than Democrats among its House members. So, if the election went to the House of Representatives in 2024, Texas would have, like every other state, just one vote. But our one vote would go to the Republican candidate. And, of course, many people analyze this all the time. It's fascinating. And I love talking about the Electoral College because it's odd. But, in fact, everyone has sort of a stake in this. Yes, this is our voice in who becomes the president and vice president of the United States. And, if we don't understand how it works, it's hard to participate in conversations or understand what's going to happen down the road.

Scott: Yeah. And so, in an instance like that, if it's, you know, nobody gets the 270 and then it goes to the House of Representatives, so then it becomes a winner-take-all for Maine and Nebraska, too, as opposed to being able to split their votes based right?

Gloria: That's a great observation. They cannot split their vote. Their delegation would have to decide and they cannot say, `You get half a vote and you get half a vote.’ It's one for whichever candidate, which is sort of a fascinating thing. Isn’t American government wonderful? I just love it!

Scott: And, I'm assuming that's never had to happen. The electoral, has it ever gone to that?

Gloria: Oh, yes. In 1824, there were multiple candidates and John Quincy Adams ended up being elected because, of course, he was more politically acceptable. But Andrew Jackson had the most votes and he was utterly infuriated by not being given the presidency. So, he immediately started his campaign and he was elected in the next presidential election. But we don't want that to happen. We talk about being the world's greatest democracy and there is no greater factor in democracy than people being able to cast their votes. So I think voting is not a privilege, I regard it as a privilege in my own life, but I think it's a right that people have. And, I say truthfully that, in this country, you don't have to look around the world, but in this country, the United States of America, people have died trying to win the right to vote. Who am I to sit one out when I could make my voice heard? But well before an election, the parties in the state -- the Republicans, the Democrats, the Green Party, maybe the Libertarians -- each party select as many electors as it has in that state. So there will be 40 Republican electors in Texas and 40 Democratic electors in Texas and so on. And, so even parties that are very tiny will still have 40 electors. So, when I go to vote, when you go to vote, we are actually voting for the set of electors pledged to the candidate we like. So if we're voting for President Biden to be reelected, we're voting for the 40 Democratic electors pledged to him. If we're voting for Donald Trump to be elected president again, we are voting for the 40 Republican electors that are pledged to him by the Republican Party. And so, this is a winner-take-all system in almost every state. So, let's say the election is over. It was yesterday. We stayed up last night and we watched. And so, today we know really who won the election, except there's a very formal process that has to be implemented before that person is going to be sworn in as president. And so, the next step is we know who won our state. And so, since I'm here in Texas, I'm using Texas as my example -- and so, I will know who won the 40 electors pledged to a candidate. And that means that all these other slates of electors can go to lunch and go to a movie because they are done. They have nothing else they have to do. They have done their service. And this is sort of a prestigious thing. OK? It's really a prestigious thing to be named an elector. And these are long-time loyalists to the party. But, if your candidate didn't win, then you were done on the day after the election. But the electors pledged to the winning candidate in this state, and in every state will go to their state capital in December. And what they will do -- and it's different in every state -- you can actually watch these online and they're exceedingly boring. So, most people wouldn’t want to do that, but sometimes they have some speeches or a lunch, sometimes they just meet. But, whatever else they do, they actually cast their vote and literally they actually write the name that they're voting for on a card. And these become part of our nation's history because when they are finished with writing their votes, all of these are packaged up and, of course, they do multiple sets. But one set goes to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and many people will have been to the National Archives to see these copies of our historic documents, which are carefully preserved, hoping that people in generations to come will be able to see them. But that is the next step. The winning electors go to their state capitol and they actually cast their ballots, and one set is sent to Congress. Now, when a joint session of Congress is held, it is always held in the House chamber because the Senate chamber is way smaller than the House chamber. So, they meet in the House chamber and the vice president of the United States presides. And what they do is they actually officially open the ballots that the electors in each state cast in December when they met in their state capitol. And the votes are counted right there in this joint session. It is a dramatic kind of thing, especially for those of us who love American government and are happy to see this unfold time after time. Well, I was thinking maybe you would like to know what happens if a person dies between the time that the vote takes place and that person is sworn in as president? And that has only happened one time, but it leaves the electors free to vote for whomever they wish. There's also something called a faithless elector. A faithless elector is someone who goes against their commitment to vote for whomever their state voted for. And in 2016, there were several faithless selectors who failed to vote for Hillary Clinton. They changed their mind, and no faithless electors has ever changed the outcome of a presidential election. That's reassuring, isn't it? The Supreme Court, a number of months ago, said it is OK for a state to punish a faithless elector. They can have a law that fines them $1,000 or allows them to be replaced. And, about half the states have such laws. Most states require that if you are an elector, the very least you can do is raise your hand and say, `I promise to vote for the person that my state votes for.’ It doesn't always happen, but I thought anyone who's listening, may think that's important. But the thing that gets our attention these days is what happens if the person who gets the most votes from the public doesn't win the electoral vote. And that's a frightening thing in a democracy, because it has happened twice in the last five elections. In the year 2000, we had to wait for months to find out whether Al Gore or George Bush won the election. And, of course, finally Bush won. And that's a long story in and of itself. But let me just say that Al Gore had more than 500,000 votes, more than George Bush. That's a lot of votes in a democracy. And then, in 2016, Hillary Clinton had more than 3 million votes, more than Donald Trump. And so many people are saying, `Well, we need to do something.’ But I don't know what they're planning to do. It's not likely that we will amend the Constitution to get rid of the Electoral College. So, there we have it. That's how it works.

Scott: Yeah, and I was curious about that. So, that was one of my questions, is could we ever move away from the Electoral College and what would that take? And, you say it would require an amendment to the Constitution itself.

Gloria: There are proposals, and have always been over many years, proposals to change or even do away with the Electoral College. I don't see it happening. It takes two-thirds of both the House and the Senate to propose a constitutional amendment. It takes three-quarters of the states to ratify a constitutional amendment. And, there are a lot of small states that have more than their share of representation and thus, small states, I can tell you, are not going to ratify an amendment that strips them of an important political power.

Scott: That makes sense. And then, I think my only other follow-up question was, so obviously the Electoral College is a is a fairly, you know, it has its idiosyncrasies. In terms of other democracies around the world, is our system entirely unique? Do most other democracies go by popular vote or does it vary pretty widely from country to country?

Gloria: It varies widely, but most of them go with popular votes. Many countries in the world have newer constitutions than ours because they became independent more recently, or countries like France and Italy just decided, `Well, we're going to adopt another new constitution.’ And so, popular vote is the preferred method. But, in so far as I'm aware, no other country in the world uses something on the order or the model of our Electoral College.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Alicia: Wow, what a great interview. But, you know what you forgot to ask?

Scott: What’s that?

Alicia: Why is it called the Electoral College? I get Electoral -- that's obvious. But where does the College come into play here?

Scott: You know, that's a good question. I’ll ask Gloria and I’ll let you know.

Alicia: OK, cool. I'm glad. Thank you. Good stuff, though. I feel like I have a much better understanding of how it all works now.

Scott: Yeah. Gloria was great to talk to. Just a wealth of information. Hopefully our dear listeners are finding it useful, too, especially during this big election year. If you have any other topics you want us to cover, email us at podcast@unt.edu.

Alicia: Our next segment might require a little bit of background info for some of our listeners. We know you're all familiar with UNT, but you may not know UNT used to be part of a wider UNT system, which includes other institutions like UNT Dallas and the UNT Health Science Center in Fort Worth.

Scott: And, no judgment if you didn't know that already. I didn't even know it until I worked here for a while. I thought us, Dallas and HCC were like one, big, spread-out college, but it's like how UT Arlington is part of the University of Texas system, but it's not the same university as UT-Austin, their sister institutions under the parent system.

Alicia: Yep, that's right. A couple of years ago, UNT System Chancellor Michael Williams got a bunch of faculty and staff members from across the system together to help define our shared core values. Think of them as principles we all try to live by and exhibit in our day-to-day work.

Scott: Alicia, can you share with us what those values are?

Alicia: Why, of course. They are courageous integrity, be curious, we care, better together and show your fire.

Scott: Nailed it. Back in April, we hosted our first annual Values Summit, where once again we gathered faculty and staff members from all across the system to talk about our values, why they're important to us, and the role they play in our work. Afterward, I spoke to one of the event organizers, Dr. Dwan Bryant, interim director of Organizational Development and Engagement for UNT system HR, about the values and how the idea for the summit came to her in a dream.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Scott: Coming off of the first Annual Values Summit, it was said in there this started off as a dream of yours just three months ago. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Dwan: So, one of the things that we've gone through is restructuring. We're just trying to figure out how we were going to do a complete facelift with ODE, thinking about what are some some fresh ideas and thoughts that we could really integrate into what was already moving. How could we normalize the values? What can we do so that we can get values at top of mind? And so, I just literally -- and I'm a woman of faith -- that I was like, `OK, God, what can we do? What can I do to help us to move?’ And so, I literally saw it in a dream -- us coming together, interconnection, all campuses across the enterprise, coming together and celebrating under, in one room. And, I said, `Let's call it the Values Summit.’ It was like literally like 12:30 at night because my brain was just rotating and moving. And I was like, `I need something fresh. I need an idea to help support our department. And so, I came up with it. I wrote it out right in the middle of the night. I wrote it out and I wondered, I was so tempted to send Donna Asher a text and but like,’ I guess I’ll wait until like 7:30 in the morning to send it.’ And, even then, she didn't respond right away on Saturday. And so, I had already wrote the framework. I had came up with the run of show, the schedule, everything. And so, when I sent it to her, it was in a very rough form and she liked it right away. She was like, `What is this?’ I said, ‘a Values Summit? This is how we're going to bring the people together so that they can believe in what we're doing.’ They don't understand how to use the values, especially if you don't have a value that you stand by. So, now you have to come to the table with something that you believe in, maxed in, married with what already exists here, and that's how you become unstoppable. That's how you become powerful. That's how you become inspiring. So, that's that's kind of I'm getting excited now thinking about it.

Scott: And that was just a short three months ago, and now it's really happened.

Dwan: Yes.

Scott: What's the feeling now, now that you've actually seen it brought it to life?

Dwan: You know, we brought it to life. We had a lot of partnerships out there. We had the branding team. UNT branding team. We had MarComm. We had a lot of our HR colleagues that really stepped up, people that volunteered on their own. We really didn't even have to ask who would serve on the committee. People just, you know, stepped out. We had a Lindsey Vandergriff where she was able to secure our speaker. She's just one of many people we had wanted that was able to help us to refine our table discussions scenarios. I don't want to just start name dropping, but there were so many people that wanted to help, so it didn't really take a lot of effort or marketing or saying, you know, people were like, `Hey, I want to be on board.’ This is something fresh or something new, but we don't want it to just stop there. We want people to be attracted to it because it's going to be an annual event. So, each year is going to get better. At this point, we only had 16 weeks to to plan for it. But imagine the magnitude of this summit if we had even more time. So, we're looking forward to this being something monumental that's going to outlive all of us. It's going to get better with the next set of fresh eyes and ideas that comes down the pipeline of people that we secure through the workforce. And, they're going to make this even better than we have even started, in this process.

Scott: And then, you kind of touched on this, but first annual. So, that implies there will be a second and third annual.

Dwan: Absolutely.

Scott: What's your vision for that? Do you see it kind of going to the different campuses, kind of like a touring show and going around different years, or what do you have in mind?

Dwan: I like that. I like that -- a tour. So, right now one of the things that we're looking to do is to integrate the rewards and recognition program into the summit, where we recognize people for what? Living the values, giving them a runway and a platform where we can celebrate people publicly during the summer. So, next year, those are one of the things that we're looking to integrate. But, I love that idea, too. Now, I'm going to pocket that one. So, I hope that was free because I'm going to I'm walking away with that one. I love the tour. I love the tour. The only thing with the tour, we just want to make sure that it's not individualized. We want people to still feel that interconnectivity. But can we do values pop ups? Can we do things that's going to draw people to the values, reintegrate some of the things that we've learned here? Absolutely. But, I still like that tour, I’m going o figure out how I can I can use that as a tool to advance the values.

Scott: Obviously getting all this put together and working on this for the last three months, you've been living and breathing the values pretty heavily at this point. What do the values mean to you?

Dwan: When I show up with a value like we care -- just using it for context -- if I say I care, I'm not just asking you if you are OK. I'm looking to see how I can support you if you're not. Versus ‘are you OK?’ And then I keep moving on, keep eating my slice of pizza, I keep eating my slice of pizza as if I had not heard you say that you were struggling.

Scott: Yeah. Not just checking the box to say that.

Dwan: Not just checking the box, absolutely, when I say we care, that means there is an action. For me, that's what value is. Actionable is how you treat people, how you show up for people, how you support people and how you humanize people. And they're not just a number. They're not just a role. They're not just a position. They're not just a clocking in and clocking out. Well, when we say we care about people, man, we got to, we got to show it in our actions. So, no more of `Are you OK,’ but not following through. People don't want to be responsible for other people's pain. That's why they don't ask follow-up questions, because they're in pain to say they don't know how to show up for others. But sometimes, just simply listening helps a person to feel like you care. Yeah.

Scott: It might be asking you to pick a favorite child, but is there any one value that kind of, like, has special meaning to you or, you can think of a story that like you've seen it, lived in your role.

Dwan: I would say better together. And this value summit is the epitome of that. Better together. People I didn’t even know coming out the woodwork wanting to help bring this … This is not my vision. This is our vision. This is an enterprise vision that happened to slip through a dream of mine, because if I hadn't pulled it out, somebody would have came up with it, right? Somebody would have came up with it, I would say better together because people selflessly gave up their time. We all are overwhelmed with the the things that we have to do daily in our in our positions. But people selflessly giving of their time and wanting to see this succeed. So, when I'm looking at the people that are that, walk these halls, coming in through the Gateway here, 7:30 in the morning, they all have to be there making arrangements for their children to be taken to school because they want to be here. To me, that breathes better together. It does. What better way can you illustrate that?

Scott: Yeah, this might be a stretch. Obviously, the values are very important for, like, the faculty and staff. It's kind of an HR-type of initiative. How do you see that or envision that extending to the students or the alumni or the community?

Dwan: So, I ran into a student worker that mentioned that, you know, `This is great. I had an opportunity to come because I was a student worker,’ and I just wanted to backpedal. So, it's not an HR initiative, it is a system-wide initiative. I just have to say that because --correction – it’s a system-wide enterprise initiative. So, for all of us, it just happened to come out of, come from under HR. So, in the future, we're looking to fold students into this experience because those students are our future. Future in our future directors, future vice chancellors, future chiefs, you know. So, if we take them under our wing, while they're still young and while they are pliable, then we can show them how they can bring their gifts and talents to an organization that believes in living their values. And so, next year -- I'm glad you brought that up – so, next year, we are looking to extend this invitation for students to be a part of this, because not only do we want them to be a part of it, we want to become it. They are our legacy in this process because once we all retire in the next 15, 20 years, we have to look at our successors. Who is going to carry the baton? Who is going to continue the legacy of our values that we've established here today? We will not establish, bu reestablish you say that.

Scott: Yeah. And, you mentioned establishing and reestablishing. Obviously, this will be an annual thing, but for people just kind of day to day, obviously we don't want them to just think about this once a year. What's a good way for people to kind of look at and live the values kind of on a day-to-day basis in what they do?

Dwan: So, one of the things that we did during the summit, we -- I think I should share -- we had table discussions around different scenarios. We have six different scenarios that range from change management, how to address anxiety and depression in students, how to help support remote workers. So, we had a range of scenarios that we talked about. And so, what you'll see in the near future -- and this is our to-be-continued, those scenarios and in those solutions that were given to us -- we are going to repurpose those. We're going to change them and turn them into blogs. We're going to turn them into programs where we're saying, `Here we are showing you how to not only live the values, but how to integrate the values during times of trouble, during times of suffering, during times of, ‘Do I belong here?” During times of where you feel isolated?’ So, we're looking at looking to repurpose those, that data, that information where people, and some -- actually when I was leaving out a faculty member asked me what are we going to, what we are going to do with that? And I said, `We're going, we're going to create some type of toolkit, some type of informational where you can go back to it, right?’ So we don't want it to just be a one and done, check the box. But, we did something fun and cute. No, we did something that was going to make an impact, that was going to shift the UNT System enterprise in a way where people are not forced to live the values, but want to live the values because they believe in it. When you believe in something, you behave differently.

Scott: Yeah. And the scenarios are interesting because it's, you know, it's easy to say we care and do better together, you know, when everything is going well and everything's going smooth. But when trouble hits and kind of, the rubber meets the road, that's when you see if you really live the values for sure.

Dwan: That's true. That's true.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Alicia: Man, it sounds like the summit was a pretty good time. I was bummed I couldn't make it, but hopefully I'll get to go to it next year.

Scott: Yeah, it's always nice when we get the chance to check in with folks from across the system and build those connections.

Alicia: For sure! You know I love a good networking opportunity. Alright, time to wrap things up with our Q&A segment. You all know the drill: Scott and I take turns answering a question and then y'all join the conversation by emailing us at podcast@UNT.edu \ or calling 940-565-4341 and leaving us a message. Scotty, what's our question today?

Scott: Same question that I asked Dwan, what’s your favorite value or do you have any stories of one really being exhibited in your time at UNT?

Alicia: Yes, I would say my favorite and value is better together. And you want to know why, Scotty?

Scott: Why is that, Alicia?

Alicia: You know, because not everything has to be done alone. Sometimes you can do it alone. And that's always, that's always great. You know, it's great to be an independent thinker, independent person. But, when you're working as a team, so many things can be accomplished with all the ideas that are ruminating, you know, it's just a great opportunity to feed off each other's creative juices and kind of just make what you're doing better. And that's why better yogether is my favorite value. Scott?

Scott: Yeah, for me, I mean, I don't know if it's a favorite, but definitely one, like, I see in our office all the time is we care. I think I think we live that really well. Just for example, you know, in the time I've worked here three times where I've really needed some extra care. Four years ago, my son was born prematurely and had to spend a couple of weeks in the NICU. A couple of years ago, when my dad passed away. And then, just a few weeks ago, when I had my stroke. Like, those are three times in my life when me and my family have needed extra care the most and people in this building have stepped up to do that for us. They've set up meal trains, they've donated money to help us out. It's just been amazing. Like, they've taken such good care of me and my family like, it's pretty incredible. I think it's something we do really well, at least in our little corner of UNT.

Alicia: I couldn't agree more, honestly. Alright, well, now that you've heard our answers, we want to hear yours. So email us at podcast@UNT.edu or call us at 940-565-4341. Faculty and staff listeners should be more familiar with the values already, but for our student and alumni listeners, we’ll have a link to more info in the show notes. So, let us know if any stand out to you from your time at UNT. We want to hear from you.

Scott: Yes. And, don't forget to tell a friend about the show, share it on social media or leave us a rating and review wherever you listen.

Alicia: Five stars only, people.

Scott: That's right. Well, that does it for us today. So until we come back in August, we hope you have a bunch of Happy Fridays in North Texas.

Alicia: And, Go Mean Green!

[OUTRO MUSIC]

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas is a production of the University of North Texas. Today’s show is produced and edited by Scott Brown with original reporting by Heather Noel and Scott Brown. For more information, visit UNT.edu/podcast.

[BLOOPER REEL]

Alicia: Mic Drop.

Scott: Not so many bloopers today.

Alicia: That was great, he said with no stutter. Wonderful. I heard that.

Scott: Speech therapy -- let's go. Let's go.

Alicia: Or call us at nine forty... Or call us at 940.

Scott: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And, don't forget to tell a friend about the show, share it on social media or leave us a rating and review the review. Alright, here we go.