Q: In your research, have you seen other formal apologies made to the women whose stories you have told in At the Dark End of the Street? If so, what if anything makes the apologies effective?

A: I have not seen any other formal apologies for any of the women I write about in my book. Ms. Taylor is the first to receive one.

An effective apology is one that is sincere and is rooted in an understanding of the history and the wrongs that were committed. Any apology offered in haste or because of politics can seem insincere. I also think that effective apologies often prompt further action—whether it's material compensation or it's further historical exploration and truth-telling. Because a formal apology is part of the historical record, it helps to rewrite history from the perspective of the survivors of violence. And I think an effective apology speaks to all the victims who chose to remain silent as well.

Q. What drew you to Ms. Taylor's story? What has been your reaction to the house's approval of the apology?

A: I was drawn to Taylor's story initially because her testimony in 1944 sparked a national and even international campaign for justice. I was struck by her courage to speak out during a time of endemic racial violence. And I continue to be awed by her willingness to speak out today, at the age of 91.

I have been surprised and grateful for the House's approval of the apology. I was surprised it passed so quickly and that the language is fairly strong. On the other hand, I am disappointed that the AL senate has not yet taken up the resolution and passed it, so we are only 50% of the way there. And I think that city officials in Abbeville, AL and in Henry County need to pass an official resolution apologizing to Taylor as well, since it was Abbeville and Henry County sheriffs who were the chief instigators in obstructing justice for Taylor and harassing her family after she spoke out. Their personal apologies were moving, but were not official—in other words, they did not really acknowledge the complicity of the city and county in Taylor's mistreatment.

Q: From your discussions with Ms. Taylor, what would you imagine "justice" would mean to her at this point?
A: I am not sure what "justice" would mean to Taylor at this point. Because her assailants are dead no one can be prosecuted for the crimes they committed. That is a shame. In that vein, she has asked for an apology—and that's all she's asked for. She has had offers by attorneys to sue the state and she has turned them down. And, of course, I cannot speak for her--

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