



Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

Work Group 3: History of Lynching in Virginia

October 19, 2020, at 1:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov

The History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group (the Work Group) of the Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission) met virtually with Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, chair, presiding.¹ The meeting began with introductions and opening remarks followed by discussion. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's website](#). Video of the meeting is archived on the [Virginia Senate Video Stream](#) page.

2020 Statewide Efforts to Recognize Virginia's Lynching History

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Work Group was unable to hold several public events across the state that members had tentatively planned for 2020. However, some local groups hosted virtual events recognizing Virginia's history of lynching. On September 26, a Virginia Department of Historic Resources historic marker was unveiled in Harrisonburg and dedicated to honor the memory of Charlotte Harris, the only African American woman lynched in Virginia. Dr. Gianluca De Fazio, associate professor of justice studies at James Madison University, described the event, which was livestreamed from the location of the historic marker and hosted by the Harrisonburg Community Remembrance Project Committee. The marker is the third historic marker in Virginia dedicated to a lynching victim, following the installation of markers in Charles City County and Charlottesville in 2019.

Senator McClellan noted that the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project also hosted a virtual remembrance on August 8 for Benjamin Thomas, a 16-year-old victim of a lynching in Alexandria on August 8, 1899.

Dr. De Fazio updated the Work Group on the *Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia* project that he leads at James Madison University. The project has compiled documentation of every known lynching in Virginia between 1865 and 1932 in a publicly accessible database. In 2020, Dr. De Fazio and his students began expanding the database by compiling documentation of threatened lynchings, finding over 600 events in Virginia. Dr. De Fazio is also working with colleagues to develop K-12 curriculum on lynching.

¹ **Work Group Members Present:** Senator Jennifer L. McClellan (chair), Senator Mamie E. Locke, Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, Hannah Ayers, Dr. Gianluca De Fazio, Dr. Andrea Douglas, Dr. Matthew Gibson, Dr. Gregg Kimball, Dr. Laurant Lee, Zann Nelson, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Jalane Schmidt, Lance Warren

Dr. Gregg Kimball noted that the Library of Virginia has shared information from the library's archives with Dr. De Fazio's project and that the Work Group may want to begin a project of its own to digitize, contextualize, and archive these materials on the Commission's website.

Delegate Delores L. McQuinn asked whether the Work Group intended to collect oral histories relating to Virginia's lynching history, and members expressed interest in housing a collection of oral histories on the Commission's website. A subgroup of Work Group members led by Zann Nelson will propose plans for further development the Work Group's website.

Discussion: 2021 Programming

After postponing all 2020 events, members of the Work Group chose several locations across the state as sites for 2021 events, as follows:

- Richmond, spring 2021, led by Lance Warren
- Hampton Roads, late summer, led by Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander
- Culpeper, November, led by Zann Nelson
- Danville, timing to be determined, led by Hannah Ayers

Due to the unknown status of the COVID-19 pandemic in the coming months, the events will be planned as virtual events or hybrid events with mixed virtual and in-person components.

Other Business

Members of the Work Group expressed interest in connecting the group's efforts to K-12 education in the state and proposed hosting an essay and art contest for the 2021–2022 academic year. Dr. Laurant Lee noted that 2022 will mark the 100th anniversary of Claude McKay's poem "The Lynching." Dr. Andrea Douglas has worked on similar successful essay contests with high school students in Charlottesville for the past two years, and the Commission previously hosted an art and essay contest in the 2012–2013 school year to mark the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, on which a new contest might be modeled.

Members also discussed connecting the Work Group's efforts to efforts in Southwest Virginia, where many communities are already working to address the region's lynching history.

For more information, see the [Commission's website](#) or contact the Division of Legislative Services staff:

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