



## Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

### Work Group 3: History of Lynching in Virginia

December 19, 2019, at 2:15 p.m.

Pocahontas Building, Senate Committee Room A

[mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov](http://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 in Richmond with Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, chair, presiding.<sup>1</sup> The meeting began with introductions and opening remarks followed by presentations and discussion. Materials presented at the meeting are accessible through the [Commission's website](http://mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov).

### 2019 Statewide Efforts to Recognize Virginia's Lynching History

*Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, Chair*

Senator McClellan reviewed work that took place statewide in 2019 to acknowledge Virginia's lynching history. Members of the Commission and the Work Group were present at several events recognizing the lives of lynching victims in localities around Virginia. In Loudoun County, on March 14, a community dialogue was hosted to discuss the placement of historical markers at the sites of the lynchings of Page Wallace, Orion Anderson, and Charles Craven. On June 19, the first of these memorials was dedicated, commemorating the life of Orion Anderson, who was lynched in 1889 at age 14. In Charles City County, on April 7, the first Virginia Department of Historic Resources historic marker to memorialize the site of a lynching was unveiled, dedicated to Isaac Brandon, who was lynched on April 6, 1892. In Albemarle County, on July 12, a historic marker dedicated to John Henry James, lynched on July 12, 1898, in Charlottesville, was unveiled as part of the Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project. These events were organized locally within each community.

On September 16, 2019, the Work Group hosted a program organized by Dr. Gianluca De Fazio at James Madison University. The program included remarks and discussion on the history of lynching in Harrisonburg and in Virginia and focused specifically on Charlotte Harris, who was lynched on March 6, 1878, in Rockingham County.

### Discussion: 2020 Programming

At the Work Group's previous meeting on July 24, 2019, members tentatively planned to host local programming in 2020 and beyond in every region of Virginia, as well as a central,

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<sup>1</sup> **Work Group Members Present:** Senator Jennifer L. McClellan (chair), Delegate Betsy B. Carr, Senator Mamie E. Locke, Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, Dr. Edward Ayers, Hannah Ayers, Dr. Matthew Gibson, Dr. Laurant Lee, Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Lance Warren

Richmond-area program to address the history of lynching statewide. Members gave updates on their progress in planning these events. Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander is planning an event in Tidewater in 2020 that will focus on the history of lynching locally, as well as on the prevalence both locally and statewide of acts of violence that took place in the mid-1800s, earlier than most documented lynchings, and that were not recorded as lynchings.

Hannah Ayers is working with Karisse Luck of History United to arrange a program in Danville in April 2020. The event is tentatively planned as a community dialogue and screening of the documentary *An Outrage*, created by Hannah Ayers and Lance Warren, and would be the first event to take place in Danville acknowledging and addressing the community's lynching history.

Senator McClellan plans to arrange programming in Alexandria and will communicate with members of the Work Group who were not present at the meeting to receive updates on their plans for other regions, including a program planned for Culpeper in 2020 to be arranged by local historian Zann Nelson. Senator McClellan noted that the programs need not follow a specific format but instead can be adapted to suit the different communities where they take place.

Dr. Luranett Lee asked if, in addition to programs for the general public, the Work Group might also host programs for teachers. Dr. Edward Ayers suggested that the Work Group's statewide event, possibly hosted at the American Civil War Museum, might function well to draw in teachers. Dr. Lee and Dr. Ayers agreed to look into the possibility of arranging a summer event in Richmond.

### **Goals of the Work Group**

Senator McClellan reviewed the general objectives of the Work Group as are outlined in SJ 297 (McClellan) and HJ 655 (McQuinn), passed by the General Assembly in 2019, acknowledging with profound regret the existence and acceptance of lynching within the Commonwealth. The Work Group is charged with:

- Making as complete a record as possible of each documented lynching that occurred in the Commonwealth;
- Developing programming to bring awareness and recognition of the history of lynching to communities across the state;
- Coordinating with the Department of Historic Resources to identify sites for historic markers to recognize documented lynchings; and
- Assisting the Equal Justice Initiative in its Community Remembrance Project in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Newby-Alexander suggested that the Work Group support the creation of a book in order to record and provide an overarching guide to the history that the Work Group addresses. Senator McClellan asked members to work on a proposal to submit to the full Commission for consideration and asked staff to research other aspects of any such project, including whether publishing a book would require that a request for proposals be issued by the Commission.



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

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