



Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission

Joint Meeting of the Commission and the History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group

April 15, 2019, at 10:30 a.m.

Pocahontas Building, Senate Committee Room A

mlkcommission.dls.virginia.gov

The Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission (the Commission) and the History of Lynching in Virginia Work Group (the Work Group) met in Richmond with Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, chair, presiding.¹ 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).

Presentation: Equal Justice Initiative

Gabrielle Daniels, Kiara Boone, and Bre Lamkin reported to the Commission on their work at the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), based in Montgomery, Alabama. EJI, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting poverty and racial injustice, has focused heavily in recent years on documenting and commemorating victims of lynchings in America, specifically through its Community Remembrance Project. EJI's report, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, has documented over 4,400 lynchings in the South, including 84 in Virginia. To publicly document these lynchings, EJI has erected historical markers at lynching sites and has supported local groups working to do the same. The Community Remembrance Project also involves communities in collecting soil from lynching sites, and the jars of collected soil form an exhibit at EJI's Legacy Museum.

In 2018, EJI's National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in Montgomery. The site of the memorial includes more than 800 corten steel monuments representing every locality in the United States where lynchings occurred and engraved with the names of lynching victims. The site also includes a field of 800 identical monuments, which EJI is inviting communities to claim and install locally.

Senator McClellan emphasized the Commission's intention to support EJI in its work in Virginia.

¹ **Commission Members Present:** Senator Jennifer L. McClellan (chair), Senator Frank M. Ruff, Jr., Delegate Betsy B. Carr, Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, Delegate Thomas C. Wright, Jr., Reverend Ricardo Brown, Dr. Ronald L. Carey, Dr. Matthew S. Gibson, LTC Wesley H. Motley, Jr.

Commission Members Absent: Senator Mamie E. Locke, Senator Rosalyn R. Dance, Delegate C. Matthew Fariss, Delegate Robert M. "Bob" Thomas, Jr., the Honorable William C. Cleveland, Kirk T. Schroder, J.D., Ph.D., Charles Withers, Juanita Owens Wyatt

History of Lynching in Virginia

Passage of Lynching Resolution

SJ 297 (McClellan) and HJ 655 (McQuinn), acknowledging with profound regret the existence and acceptance of lynching within the Commonwealth, passed the Senate and House unanimously during the 2019 Session of the General Assembly. The resolution was created and recommended by the Commission and the Work Group. Senator McClellan noted that Virginia is the first state in the nation to pass such a resolution.

Lives Left Behind: A Proposed Collaboration

Greg Crawford of the Library of Virginia (LVA) shared selected resources from LVA's archives related to lynching. LVA has a large collection of primary sources documenting lynchings that are currently unavailable to the public that will eventually be digitized and made publicly available.

Dr. Gregg Kimball of the Library of Virginia and journalist Samantha Willis spoke about a proposed collaboration with the Work Group and partners, noting that LVA's resources might be particularly useful to Dr. Gianluca de Fazio's Racial Terror Project. Ms. Willis, working with LVA, plans to interview residents of communities affected by lynchings to shed light on the history and its continued impact on communities today.

Racial Terror Project

Dr. Gianluca de Fazio presented updates on his Racial Terror Project at James Madison University. Dr. De Fazio and students at JMU have created a database compiling documentation of every recorded lynching in Virginia from 1877 to 1927. Since Dr. De Fazio first presented to the Work Group in September 2018, he and students have documented nine more lynchings and two events that are likely to have been lynchings that took place in Virginia. Dr. De Fazio added that he would welcome a collaboration with the Library of Virginia.

2019 Programming

Members discussed localities in which the Commission might plan 2019 programming related to Virginia's lynching history. The Commission has already participated in a community dialogue on Loudoun County lynching memorials at George Mason University on March 14 and in the unveiling of the first Virginia historic marker dedicated to a victim of a lynching in Charles City on April 7. A program in Culpeper, led by Work Group member Zann Nelson, is planned for later in the year. Members also discussed Charlottesville, Alexandria, and Harrisonburg as potential locations, noting that in each of these communities, groundwork within the community to address the history of lynching has already begun. Dr. De Fazio reported on recent visits to Wise and Wythe Counties and recommended Southwest Virginia, where a significant number of the state's lynchings took place, as an important place for the Commission to visit. Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander stressed that each event should have, in addition to community involvement, involvement from state and local government and law enforcement.

Members also discussed hosting an event in Richmond that would feature a screening of the documentary *An Outrage* followed by community dialogue. The Richmond event would serve to initiate a broader statewide discussion.



Emancipation and Freedom Monument

Several updates on the status of the Emancipation and Freedom Monument (the Monument), dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the fight for freedom, were presented to the Commission. Work is currently in progress on the Monument, which will be installed on Browns Island in Richmond.

Life-Size Clay Models and Update on Current Progress

Amigo Wade presented a slideshow of photos from the Monument's artist, Jay Warren, of the final life-size Monument figures. The six-foot male and female figures, sculpted in clay, were approved by the chair on behalf of the Commission in March 2019. The final figures included changes to the size of the baby held by the female figure that were requested by the Commission at its December 11, 2018, meeting. Mr. Warren has begun the process of 3D scanning the figures, which will be enlarged and 3D printed as 12-foot figures, sent to the foundry, and cast in bronze.

Site Development Updates

Drew Harrigan of Four Winds Design presented revised schematic design drawings for the Monument. Original schematic design documents were sent to the Commission for approval in January 2019, but it was noted by Venture Richmond, which maintains Browns Island, that the existing site was in the path of a major vehicular thoroughfare on the island, and relocation of the site would be required to prevent the obstruction of traffic and to protect the Monument.

The new site, set back from the pathway, is on a slight hill and requires additional grading that was not part of the original site plan. Mr. Harrigan's revised drawings include a granite retaining wall that will partially encircle the plaza to account for the change in grade. The wall will also function as seating around the plaza. The sculpture itself and its orientation with respect to the pedestrian bridge leading onto Browns Island remain unchanged.

The change in site also necessitates changes to the deed transfer, which was previously approved by Richmond City Council, to place the Monument site and access easement under the ownership of the Commonwealth. The City Council approval process is in progress.

The chair has been delegated authority to approve the final schematic design documents in consultation with the Department of General Services once they are submitted. The Commission's counsel will review and amend the contract with the artist to account for changes to the project's cost and timeline resulting from the site relocation.

Fundraising

The Commission is receiving donations through its fiscal agent, the Virginia Capitol Foundation, to cover expenses outside of the \$500,000 allotted for the Monument by the Commonwealth. The Commission has raised \$57,895 in its early fundraising efforts, including a \$25,000 grant from the Dominion Foundation. Several other requests to major donors are pending, and the Commission is continuing to encourage community members to make donations of any size.

Maquettes of the Monument continue to be on display at the Valentine in Richmond. The maquettes were originally loaned to the Valentine from June 5, 2018, through January 20, 2019, but the loan was extended to continue display of the maquettes and bring further awareness of the Monument to the community.



HBCU Storytellers Project Preview

The HBCU Storytellers Project, a project of the Nate Parker Foundation, has created a five-part documentary that aims to encourage dialogue surrounding racial reconciliation. Commission members watched a four-minute preview of the series, which features discussion of the Emancipation and Freedom Monument and footage of the Monument's maquettes at the Valentine. Commission members agreed to host a screening of the documentary in October. Dr. Newby-Alexander noted that the documentary will also be screened at Norfolk State University on September 25, 2019, as part of the 2019 Commemoration's *1619: Making of America Summit* and invited participation from members of the Commission.

Updates on 2019 Programming

Senator McClellan updated the Commission on the progress of additional programming for 2019. An event on September 10, 2019, is planned at the Moton Museum in Farmville in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Prince Edward County school closings that took place in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, and an event is tentatively planned at the Jefferson School in Charlottesville to mark the 60th anniversary of the Charlottesville school closings. The Commission will support these programs jointly with the *Brown v. Board of Education* Scholarship Committee.

The Commission will also host programming on October 8, 2019, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Virginia's ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

In 2019 the Commission will hold the final two programs in its series of 13 Beloved Community Conversations, part of the Commission's King in Virginia Project, held in each of the locations in Virginia that Dr. King visited in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. The final programs will be held in Hopewell and Dinwiddie.

Next Meeting

The Commission tentatively planned to meet in late spring or early summer to review and approve site design documents for the Monument.

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

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