



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

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

July 24, 2019, at 12:00 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).

#### **Presentation: Library of Virginia Collaboration**

*Dr. Gregg Kimball, Library of Virginia*

Dr. Gregg Kimball of the Library of Virginia (LVA) updated the Work Group on LVA's efforts to research and document lynchings in Virginia through its collection of primary sources, which include archives of local newspapers and state records. LVA has coordinated with Dr. Gianluca De Fazio of James Madison University to expand the database of the university's Racial Terror Project, which documents every known lynching in Virginia from 1877 to 1927. The Work Group will provide a link to this database through its webpage. LVA is also working with journalist Samantha Willis, who will interview residents of communities affected by lynchings to shed light on this history and its continued impact on communities today.

To further document Virginia's lynching history, members suggested conducting additional research into archives of NAACP publications, as well as working with the Virginia Municipal Clerks Association to facilitate access to local government records.

#### **Update on Statewide Efforts to Recognize Virginia's Lynching History**

In 2019, 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 11, a historic

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<sup>1</sup> **Work Group Members Present:** Senator Jennifer L. McClellan (chair), Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, Hannah Ayers, Dr. Gregg Kimball, Dr. Laurant Lee, Zann Nelson, Lance Warren

marker dedicated to John Henry James, lynched on July 11, 1898, in Charlottesville, was unveiled as part of the Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project. These events were organized locally within each community.

The Work Group will host a program organized by Dr. Gianluca De Fazio in Harrisonburg at James Madison University on September 16, 2019, and a program organized by Zann Nelson in Culpeper in November 2019. The Work Group has made preliminary plans to host additional programming in other regions of the state, including in Richmond in early 2020. In discussing regional programming, members emphasized the importance of coordinating with existing grassroots efforts to recognize lynching history within communities.

### **Discussion: Goals and Message of the Work Group**

Zann Nelson led a discussion to solidify the Work Group's goals, message, and role within communities. Senator McClellan noted that the general objectives of the Work Group 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 initiated this resolution ahead of the 2019 Session of the General Assembly. The resolution charges the Commission 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.

Ms. Nelson suggested that a handout summarizing the Work Group's purpose might aid members of the Work Group in connecting with community members. Members also discussed adding a statement of purpose to the History of Lynching in Virginia webpage and a guide to resources that communities can access as they work locally to recognize lynching history. Specifically, the Work Group intends to provide a resource to facilitate community connections to the Department of Historic Resources and the Equal Justice Initiative.

Ms. Nelson also suggested that, as the Work Group participates in or hosts programming in communities around the state, members present copies of SJ 297 or HJ 655 to families of lynching victims or to designated organizations within communities.

### **Next Meeting**

The Senate Clerk's Office will poll members for a meeting in late summer or fall 2019.

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

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