

Commonwealth of Virginia
Commission to Study Slavery and Subsequent De Jure and
De Facto Racial and Economic Discrimination
Against African Americans

Wednesday, August 23, 2023, 1:00 p.m.
Library of Virginia
Conference Rooms A & B

Members present: Delegate Delores McQuinn (Chair), Senator Mamie Locke (Vice-Chair), Dr. Jody Allen, Dr. Edward Ayers, Dr. Andrea Douglas, Dr. John W. Kinney, Dr. Newby-Alexander (virtual), and Dr. Karen Sherry.

Call to Order & Commission Business

Commission Chair Delegate McQuinn called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. and confirmed a quorum of Commission members present in person. The Commissioners unanimously approved the meeting agenda and the July 2023 Meeting minutes.

Chair's Report

The Chair provided an overview of the upcoming reporting obligations of the Commission. Delegate McQuinn clarified that the report due to Legislative Services in January 2024 is an interim executive summary, not the final report. The Chair further informed that the final executive summary would be due in January 2025. This timeline aligns with the Commission's June 30, 2024, sunset date, and the report submitted in January 2025 will encompass all activities and findings from 2024.

Public Meeting

The Chair discussed the proposed public meeting scheduled for November 1, 2023. Dr. Ayers expressed the view that postponing the meeting until spring, following the submission of the 2024 interim report, would yield better results.

Afterward, Dr. Ayers asked the Project Manager for a presentation of a historical overview of significant research that falls outside the scope of the designated subcommittee areas. The suggested deadline for this submission was February 2024, providing ample time for the Commissioners to review and offer feedback. Dr. Newby-Alexander recommended collaborating with institutions such as the Encyclopedia of Virginia and Virginia Humanities to enhance the dissemination of the research.

Reporting

The Commissioners agreed on the necessity of a more extensive and detailed report, apart from the yearly executive summaries. The discussion then transitioned to the ideal length for the extensive report. The consensus leaned towards a comprehensive report of approximately 50 pages. Dr. Newby-Alexander stressed the significance of externally reviewing the report, particularly by institutions such as the Virginia Humanities. The intent is to ensure the report's relevancy and utility, especially for educators.

Updates by Project Manager:

Ms. Luster announced a change in the Commission's calendar. She confirmed rescheduling the next meeting for November 1, 2023.

The Project Manager presented a report that focused on the requested tasks. The mapping inequality work discussed in the previous meeting was incorporated into the project. The process of compiling socio-geographic data, as recommended by Dr. Newby-Alexander, was underway. At Dr. Ayers' request, the bibliography was reorganized to highlight key points rather than subcommittee breakdowns. Updates were made to the website, including all minutes, agendas, and public materials linked through the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall. Recordings of meetings were available on the Library's YouTube channel and accessible through the website. A new resources page was added to the website. All resources mentioned in the report had corresponding links. During the discussion, Dr. Ayers proposed highlighting one or two essential readings per session.

Reviewing the Commission's Mandate

The Chair highlighted the Commission's responsibilities as per their establishing legislation:

1. Identify and compile documentation on the institution of slavery within the U.S. and Virginia and determine the content and rollout of the final report.
2. Examine systemic inequities in various sectors, including housing, employment, education, voting rights, and the criminal justice system.
3. Recommend strategies to raise awareness about these issues and address historical implications that impact the quality of life of African American families in the Commonwealth.

Following, the Chair highlighted the necessity for practical suggestions, such as the provision of scholarships and the investment in schools that lack resources.

Continued Conversation

Dr. Newby-Alexander highlighted the misallocation of tax dollars intended for Black schools in Virginia during the 1940s. She noted the historical foundation of this problem could be traced back to the 1868 State Constitutional Convention, which established a segregated public school system.

Dr. Newby-Alexander also mentioned the impact of Virginia's highway system on Black communities. She noted that older highways near Black communities do not have sound barriers. This absence of sound barriers adversely affects these communities' health, housing values, and overall well-being.

Finally, Dr. Newby-Alexander emphasized the need to reconsider how historical timelines were approached, suggesting a move away from narrow, traditional narratives and noting that the Commission's timelines should not homogenize or erase parts of history.

Public Comment

The Commission welcomed two members of the public to speak. The speakers underscored the importance of clarity on the intended beneficiaries of the Commission's work. The terms used, like "people of African descent," could be broad and may not capture the unique experiences of Black Americans whose ancestors were enslaved. One speaker emphasized the need to differentiate between Black groups to ensure equity and address specific historical wrongs. While acknowledging hardships faced by various groups, the speaker asserted that reparations should address the unique injustices suffered by Black Americans descended from enslavement. The speaker stated that direct cash payments were vital as they could address many issues if the community had the necessary resources.

Closing Remarks and Adjournment

The Chair expressed profound gratitude to the members of the public who had taken the time to attend the meeting. She also thanked the Commissioners for their dedication, acknowledging their tireless efforts in navigating the complexities of the topic. Then, a motion to close was called, and the meeting adjourned.