Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission Allegany County Hearing

Dr. David Fakunle: Greetings, everyone. It is a pleasure and an honor to be here in this historic moment in time. I am blessed and honored to call to order this public hearing for Allegany County of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Again, I thank you all for being here and I hope you all are prepared to participate in this process, because it will certainly involve you. This is an unforgettable experience and a perfect moment in time to see how legislature can turn into action. And we are going to do our part to make sure that this legislation turns into the action that is necessary. At this time, I recognize Madame Assistant Attorney General Kristin McFarlane who will cite the specific state statute that requires the hearing.

Kristin McFarlane: Thank you, Chairman. Good morning, everyone. My name is Kristin McFarlane, I am an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Maryland. The legislation that established the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission is House Bill 307. It was passed unanimously by the Maryland General Assembly in 2019.

It provides as follows:

> For the purpose of establishing a Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission; providing for the composition, chair, and staffing of the Commission; authorizing the staff member provided by the Office of the Attorney General to issue certain subpoenas; prohibiting a member of the Commission from receiving certain compensation, but authorizing the reimbursement of certain expenses; requiring the Commission to hold certain public meetings, receive certain recommendations, and make certain recommendations; authorizing the Commission to investigate research certain cases of racially motivated lynching; requiring the Commission to submit an interim report and a final report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before certain dates; providing for the termination of this Act; and generally relating to the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
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> WHEREAS, Lynching, or the extralegal murder of an individual in an act of mob violence, is a violation of the rights to due process and equal protection of the law; and
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> WHEREAS, At least 40 African Americans were lynched by white mobs in Maryland between 1854 and 1933; and
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> WHEREAS, No person was ever tried, convicted, or otherwise brought to justice for participating in these racially motivated lynchings; and

WHEREAS, Various state, county, and local government entities colluded in the commission of these crimes and conspired to conceal the identities of the parties involved; and

WHEREAS, These crimes far exceeded any notion of "justice," just retribution, or just punishment, but were intended to terrorize African American communities and force them into silence and subservience to the ideology of white supremacy; and

WHEREAS, No victim's family or community ever received a formal apology or compensation from state, county, or local government entities for the violent loss of their community members; and

WHEREAS, Restorative justice requires a full knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of the truth before there can be any meaningful reconciliation.

The Commissioners consist of representatives from the Maryland Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Maryland cultural organizations and museums, the Maryland State Archives, and four public members appointed by the Governor.

The statute further provides that the commission shall hold regional hearings open to the public in areas in which a lynching of an African American by a white mob has been documented. Received from the public including those from the families and communities affected by racially motivated lynchings, recommendations for addressing engaging and reconciling communities affected by racially motivated lynchings; including the erection of memorial plaques or signage at or near the sites of racially motivated lynchings and make recommendations for addressing the legacy of lynching that are rooted in the spirit of restorative justice.

In the hearings conducted pursuant to this statute, the commission may research cases of racially motivated lynchings for which there is no documentation, should those cases be brought to the commission's attention and the involvement of state, county, and local government entities and relevant news media in cases of racially motivated lynching.

On September 21st, 2020, the commission submitted an interim report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor. On or before December 1st, 2023, the commission shall submit a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor. Thank you, Chairman.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you Kristin and thank you for your diligence. Before we proceed, I would like to acknowledge another Commissioner, Commissioner David Armenti. David, thank you as always for your commitment to our work.

At this time, I will explain our code of conduct for today's hearing - our session, and present on today's agenda, and will also explain the process for testimonies and public comments.

Members of the public had the opportunity to submit testimony via email at mltrc@maryland.gov prior to today's hearing. During the hearing, questions and comments from members of the public should be submitted via the Zoom chat function. When you do provide your question or comment,

please provide your name, organizational affiliation, if any, and please limit your comment or question to no more than three sentences.

Questions and comments, as well as live testimony, must be limited to the topic of discussion for today's session. If your comment or question is off topic, it will not be included in the hearing, or your live testimony will end. Comments, questions, and testimony should be presented with decorum and respect appropriate for conducting this public hearing. Any comments or questions containing obscene language or language inciting imminent violence will not be addressed and any live testimony containing such language will end.

Finally, please note that members of the media may be present during today's hearing and, as such, public comments, questions, and testimony may be broadcast or printed by news outlets. So let us reiterate, please keep this moment as respectful as it deserves and operate accordingly. All right.

At this time, I would like to recognize Vice Chair Chavis, who will facilitate the first phase of the hearing, specifically concerning the history surrounding racial terror lynching in Allegheny County. Vice Chair, Chavis.

Dr. Charles L. Chavis: Thank you, Commissioner. At this time, I'd like to recognize Ms. Heidi Gardner, of the Allegheny County Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Committee, who will present the history concerning the life and death of William Burns a.k.a, Robert Hughes. Ms. Gardner provided key research and is here to share the research and methodology she used, and how we realized William Burns was Robert Hughes. She'll also share the details of the lynching that took place in 1930.

Heidi Gardner: My name is Heidi Gardner, and I am a genealogist, historian, and librarian. In June of 2020, I offered to do research finding additional details on the lynching for the Brownsville project and the Allegheny County Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Committee, which I subsequently joined. Within a couple months research, we had enough details to make what sense could be made of a senseless racial violence and were able to locate the Hughes family descendants.

Before I talk more about the research, methodology, and discovery of William Burns' identity, I'm going to read you an expanded summary of the lynching the committee has used this year to brief the public on the lynching of Robert Hughes and the events of October 1907.

Shortly after midnight on Sunday, October 6th, 1907, a large white mob lynched an 18-year-old African American man known as William Burns in Cumberland, Maryland. After being involved in an altercation with a local white police officer on October 3rd, 1907 that resulted in the police officer's death, Mr. Burns was arrested, driven to the local police headquarters, and held in a cell. The next morning, he was transported to the Allegheny County jail, also in Cumberland.

While he awaited trial, a mob entered the jail, abducted Mr. Burns, and beat and shot him to death. Although several local officials were present, no one would identify members of the mob and no one was ever held accountable for the lynching of William Burns, Robert Hughes.

Originally from Fauquier County, Virginia, Mr. Burns relocated to Allegheny County and had been living here for seven months, prior to October 1907. Before his death, Mr. Burns was employed as a

porter at Alpine Hall, at that time a hotel in Cumberland, and as a driver for a black man named George Palmore, who with his wife Mary, operated a local saloon and restaurant.

After work on Thursday, October 3rd, Mr. Burns and another local man, black man, named Jesse Page visited a couple of local saloons near the Canal Wharf in Cumberland. While at the second saloon, known as Kate Preston's, Mr. Burns was accused of disorderly conduct and thrown out. Shortly thereafter, August Baker, a local white police officer on the Cumberland Police Force, arrived on the scene to arrest Mr. Burns. Before the officer could take him into custody a struggle ensued wherein Officer Baker struck Mr. Burns with a mace, and reports stated that during the struggle, Officer Baker was shot in the abdomen by Mr. Burns, but was still able to handcuff Mr. Burns.

After calling for assistance, the officer had a black ice wagon driver named Humphrey Green and another witness, bartender, Abraham Speck transport Mr. Burns by cab to the Cumberland Police Station before he was placed in the local jail.

While Mr. Burns was incarcerated, words spread around Cumberland that Officer Baker had been shot, and on Saturday, October 5th, Officer Baker's death was publicly pronounced by a coroner's jury. Meanwhile, Jesse Page had fled in fear after being assaulted at the scene. In the confusion, witnesses had thought he was an accomplice to a crime, when in fact he had gone to phone the police. The next morning, he would go to the station and turn himself in and be held in a cell near William Burns at the county jail. Reports indicate that Mr. Burns feared retaliation from the citizens of Cumberland.

As anger rose in the white community, County Sheriff Horace Hamilton chose not to put extra guards on the duty at the jail, stating that he did not fear an uprising. In most cases of racial terror, lynching law, local law enforcement failed to intervene or use force to repel lynch mobs. even when the threat of lynching was evident and underway. Despite their legal responsibility to equally protect anyone in their custody, law enforcement were often found to be ineffective in preventing or even complicit in, the seizure or lynchings of black men, women and children by abdicating their responsibilities or yielding to mob demands.

That evening, Deputy Sheriff Noah Henley was the only person standing guard at the jail. Mr. Page had thankfully been cleared of any charges and released earlier that day, as the mob also sought to lynch him.

By midnight on October 5th, an initial group of approximately 50 white men gathered in the streets near the jail with their coats turned inside out and handkerchiefs bound over their faces. By the time the mob reached the jail, there were several hundred participants and spectators.

Contemporary reports described conflicting accounts of how the mob was able to enter the jail and abduct Mr. Burns. According to Deputy Henley, the mob stormed the jail and demanded the keys to enter, which he refused. He stated the mob then obtained a pole, which they used repeatedly in an effort to break down the door. Unsuccessful, the mob then entered and held him in gunpoint, stripped him of his clothing, and took the keys which they used to enter the jail.

Alternatively, other informants reported that Deputy Sheriff Henley gave them the keys, which allowed them to enter the jail. Other reports claim Henley's wife convinced him to give up the keys

or that the mob forcefully gained entry. After entering the jail and locating Mr. Burns, the mob beat and dragged him outside. Reports indicate that by this time the mob had grown to approximately 2,000 active white participants and spectators.

A local white attorney, Benjamin Richmond, who arrived as the mob was beginning to storm the jail, attempted to locate other officers who could intervene. Richmond later reported that after he left the jail, he managed to find one additional officer by the name of Goss. Richmond convinced Officer Goss to take him to the police station in search of more officers. Once there, they found four policemen with Lieutenant Schmidt among them sitting quietly with the door locked and lights low.

By the time officers returned to the jail, the mob had already dispersed. Benjamin Richmond stated that when he urged the officers to go after the mob, they moved in a rather leisurely fashion, and of course, they arrived too late. The mob had dragged Mr. Burns out of his cell, down the stairs, and outside into the street. Some members of the mob demanded Mr. Burns confess to killing Mr. Baker, but he would not. Other members of the mob were already convinced of his guilt.

Intent on proceeding with the lynching at approximately 12:40 AM on Sunday, October 6th, the mob beat Mr. Burns and shot him repeatedly even after he had already expired. The mob intended to burn Mr. Burn's body, but Reverend William Cleveland Hicks, the rector of the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, pleaded with the white mob to stop the mutilation of Mr. Burns' body.

Cumberland police officers failed to arrest any of the mob participants who had participated in the lynching after his lynching. After his lynching, Richmond strongly criticized the Cumberland Police force, stating, "The conduct of the police of Cumberland was simply shameful and disgraceful. Although the disorder was going on for more than half an hour, not one of them appeared on the scene until after the Negro was dead and would not have come then, but for my action." Reverend Hicks also spoke out against the lynching, delivering a sermon later in that day on Sunday that Mr. Burns was lynched. Reverend Hicks stated, "last night, a crime far worse was committed, committed in cold blood. The righteous anger of Thursday and Friday cast to the winds and license, vengeance. and savagery were given full sway. All my friends who are responsible for these awful crimes against civilization and against God is that band of men alone who dragged the criminal from his cell and who fired these shots. No, it is your fault, and it is mine. We must share in this disgrace. Also, we have a city have allowed the pest hole, the saloon to spring up everywhere in spring fourth, devilish offspring."

Although officials and community members like Richmond, and Reverend Hicks at the time, expressed condemnation of racial terror lynchings, this outrage rarely led to meaningful outcomes in holding white mobs accountable for lynchings.

On October 12th, Allegheny County commissioners offered a reward of $500 for the arrest and conviction of any responsible for the lynching of William Burns. Despite the fact that the mob that had lynched Mr. Burns had grown to at least 2,000 people, Deputy Sheriff Henley stated he was unable to identify anyone in the crowd, some of whom "seemed respectable, and others who were not." Other witnesses claimed they could not remember, let alone identify those who participated. Yet there were newspaper reports that stated it is said that several of the lynchers are known and that the mob included several prominent citizens who have never known to carry revolvers, but who did so upon this occasion. Chief Judge A. Hunter Boyd, who had been on the scene urging the crowd to disperse and recognizing spectators, directed a grand jury to investigate Mr. Burns'

lynching. The jury convened but returned a verdict on October 19th that no one could be identified for prosecution of the crime.

*The Afro-American Ledge*r, a Baltimore-based black-led newspaper, published an article on October 12th writing about the white mob that killed Mr. Burns stating that "without doubt, every one of them is guilty of murder in the first degree and justice will not be done until everyone implicated in it is brought before the bar and receives the penalty of his crime." This article also implicated Deputy Sheriff Henley stating that "without doubt the deputy sheriff should be immediately removed for he certainly failed in his duty if he did not connive with the law breakers in carrying out their deadly purpose. The idea of a man standing with a weapon in his hand allowed by the law to use it, and then failing to protect not only the prisoners under his charge, but the property of the government of the state. The sheriff heard that there were threats being made and took no interest in the matter saved to remove himself as far from the scene as duty would allow."

Mr. Burn's sister arrived from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania hoping to transport her brother's body back to Pittsburgh, but she was not able to acquire the funds to do so.

On October 10th, Mr. Burns was buried at Sumner Cemetery in Cumberland, Maryland. An announcement in the local newspaper stated that the funeral would be conducted quietly. Despite the mob's lawlessness and failures of law enforcement that resulted in the lynching of William Burns, no one was ever held accountable for his death. Robert Hughes, a.k.a William Burns is one of at least 29 documented African-American lynchings of racial terror lynching in the state of Maryland between 1877 and 1950.

Heidi Gardner: The prior awareness that I had of this lynching came from connections in the local history arena and previous discussion of William Burns in the public record all seemed based on the same two or three newspaper articles circulating since. A few obvious conflicting pieces of info of important information were included. Due to the pandemic, I was working with just digital archives, mostly newspaper records. I uncovered around 50 public primary and secondary sources. While many of them duplicated information sent from Cumberland to other sources verbatim, they did occasionally have additions that may come from a contact with someone local or police notes.

The initial details reported also changed some over time. For example, early on, Burns' companion was said to be Gus Little, which was actually a misprint of Bud Little, who it turned out was not at all involved. The way I initially found to investigate these discrepancies was to order the articles by publication date and log each detail from each article. However, we needed to see these reported and conflicting facts side by side, and begin constructing a story in order to attempt to discover what closest approximated fact with the keen awareness that only one of these sources found was an African American publication contemporary to the lynching.

So, I made a comprehensive color-coded timeline assigning each article that I had a color and font combination. I would place the details in chronological order, then conflicting details followed one another and were more obvious, and we had an order of events that allowed the story to be communicated in the least confusing manner. All that work was necessary, but it was not the primary goal.

We knew some descendants of Jesse Page's family were still local, and you will hear about them later today. With scant detail, we needed to find the descendants of William Burns' family. The

details we did have were the name William Burns, his reporting of his age as 22, that he had been in Cumberland six months, that he had a mother living in Della Plaine, Virginia, who he did not wish to be contacted. There were reports that a mother, aunt, or sister contacted local authorities and eventually his sister, Selena Johnson, would come to Cumberland hoping to return to Pittsburgh with his body, where she and his aunt lived.

From Selena, we knew his mother was 42 or 45 years old and that he was 18. It seemed simple enough that I would search near the mother's home area for a family with a William Burns between the ages of 18 and 22. The closest I found was a William Burns in DC, even connected to a man named Jesse Page, but I was able to determine that both of those families were connected in that locale. So, I searched using what would be Selena's family name for a Selena Burns who would marry a Johnson in Virginia. Researching Selena's husband's family also did not lead anywhere conclusive at that time. There is, however, an Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County and I combed every inch of what was available online, finding no Selena and no relevant Burns family. I did, however, note the staff names there, knowing that once it was safe, this would be a place and a people we might reach to for information about families in the Delaplane area with connections to Pittsburgh and Cumberland.

Being at a research brick wall and limited to digital resources, I decided to throw some money at newspapers that were behind a paywall, despite seeing that they were mostly what we already had with one or two additional mentions. Buried inside a *Washington Herald* article, that was mostly exactly worded from a Cumberland press release, was a casual but kind of sensational statement, likely intended and placed to there to put doubt on the victim's trustworthiness.

This editorial comment meant to imply one thing gave us the most important information we found today. One line said something to the effect of, “We don't even know if his name was William Burns. He left laundry that hadn't been picked up with the name James Hughes on the tag.” If his name was William Burns and he was a transient, there are many ways he might have ended up with clothing that wasn't his possibly. I have no idea why the name James was reported there, but thank goodness they reported any name at all and that they got the Hughes part correct. I did a search for James Hughes with no luck, but there were Hughes in Delaplane, in fact, I remembered the name from the Fauquier County website that I mentioned earlier.

When I placed his sister Selena's name with the family name Hughes, I found family in the area where his mother still resided and she in fact was from and had a sister still living in Pittsburgh. I researched all the children and found them all to have families or death records. Except a boy of the age of William Burns by the name Robert Wormley Hughes. Robert had disappeared from all historical records. I will also say that the information I found was easy for me to research and trust the sources because Robert's family is one of the most researched black American lineages in our country.

You'll learn more of that from the descendants, but it did cause us to be careful with the sharing of the research and the telling of the story because the focus belongs on the living Hughes descendants and on the life of Robert Hughes, who, unlike his family members, did not get the opportunity to become an adult and have direct descendants of his own due to his murder and lynching by our city and county residents 114 years ago this week. Thank you.

Dr. Charles L. Chavis: Thank you for your tireless work and research. At this time, I want to call on Commissioner David Armenti. Commissioner Armenti leads the research committee of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Commissioner, will you provide an update regarding the ongoing research and investigation into racial terror lynching in Allegheny County?

Commissioner David Armenti: Yes, thank you so much. I would like to say that the commission's research into racial terror lynching in Allegheny County and the case of Robert Hughes is ongoing and we don't have significant updates at this time. I would like to give a major thank you to Heidi, who we just heard from, as well as the many coalition members in Allegheny County who really led the charge and confirmed these various historical details.

Just very briefly, I would want to say that this was a case that was covered nationally much more than I expected to see. In the course of research within the committee, we were able to find newspaper records from as far as Arizona and Seattle acknowledging William Burns, at least in those publications. So it was certainly something that was acknowledged and recognized within the overall scope of racial terror lynchings across the country, what was happening in Allegheny County, Maryland.

And furthermore, just briefly, and folks can find this within the commission website, the death certificate for the gentleman listed as William Burns with the primary reason being listed as "killed by an unknown mob, taken out of jail and lynched." So, the death certificate itself officially acknowledged the events that occurred. But with that, again, I want to thank the Allegheny representatives for their diligent research work and sharing that with us as a commission. And with that, I will pass it back to Dr. Chavis.

Dr. Charles L. Chavis: Thank you so much, Commissioner Armenti. Mr. Chair, back to you.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you, Dr. Vice Chair. So, at this time, I will just explain how you can submit additional testimony after today's session. So, we encourage you to, as I was mentioned before, you can submit testimony to the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission via email to MLTRC@maryland.gov. Again, that is MLTRC@maryland.gov. Once again, we will be proceeding with our session with live testimony. Again, if you want to submit testimony during the hearing, you can do so during via the Zoom chat function or via the live stream via the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project.

Again, as always, we will emphasize please treat this moment with the respect that it deserves regarding your comments and your questions. So now I would like to recognize Ms. Clory Jackson, founder of the Brownsville Project and of the Allegheny County Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission committee, who will introduce two very special witnesses, the relatives and descendants of Robert Hughes and Jesse Page. Ms. Jackson is a dedicated activist and community leader who we have been honored to work alongside. So, I'd like to introduce Ms. Jackson and to thank her as I will many times for her commitment and her diligence to preserving this history and helping us to bring justice. Thank you, Ms. Jackson.

Clory Jackson: Good Morning. I am here and have the pleasure to introduce first Ms. Renee Page, who is the direct descendant of Jesse Page. Jesse Page was present at the time of Robert Hughes' arrest, and was also for a time briefly held and jailed, and then was released right before the

lynching. After hearing from Ms. Renee Page, we'll hear from two direct descendants of Robert Hughes, Ms. Angela Davidson, and Ms. Karen White, who are sisters, and are descendants of one of the siblings of Robert Hughes. So, at this time, I will turn it over to Renee Page.

Renee Page: Hello all, and thank you so much for the invitation to participate in this forum. As stated, my name is Renee Page and I am a descendant of Jesse Page. Jesse Page was actually my great-grandfather, and by all accounts, Jesse Page was a good man. He married my great-grandmother Gertrude. They went on to have several children, and I'm going to acknowledge them. So, James Page Sr., Frank Page, Sr., Gertrude Murray, author, my uncle Kenneth Page, Josephine Mayola Page, better known as my Aunt May, William Page, Marion Page, Fisher Page, Marvin Page, my aunt Tiny Page, and of course, there was a Jesse Page Jr.

So, I was in grade school when my great grandpap died. I remember going to the family home and he was present, but he was somewhat distant. He didn't interact with us much. I remember him to be small in stature. I am told that he regularly went to work wearing a suit. We are told that he worked cleaning a local church as well as working as what my family identified as a jailer, meaning that he cleaned the city jail. So, Jesse Page had a relationship with law enforcement through that interaction.

Of course, at the age of 24, Jesse Page's, life changed forever, because as you heard, he was with Robert Hughes a.k.a William Burns on the night that Officer Baker died. If not for Mr. Burns stating that Jesse Page was uninvolved in the incident, I'm not sure I would be here today. He surely saved my grandpap's life. Today, I'm imagining the terror that these young men must have felt. I'm imagining the pain that all families, all three families, senselessly endured. Jesse Page spent most of his life in here. Clearly, this was a traumatic event which shaped his life. My interactions with him were brief and distant. Where I knew most of my great-grandparents, I knew very little about Jesse Paige. He spent much of his life being distant and inwardly hiding. He used whiskey to escape and lived by the mantra of let it be, or let 'em be, because I've had two accounts of that. Clearly not wishing to have any conflicts, and who could blame him, because Jesse Page surely knew how they could end. One important thing I've discovered throughout this process is how important it is to share your family's history.

We have the luxury of having four in five generations walk this earth at the same time. We need to remember to share memories and stories, review pictures, pass down recipes and heirlooms and the stories that go along with them. We need to learn where our ancestors came from, what their trials and tribulations were, what did they have to overcome, what their accomplishments were, and of course, what dreams they had. It saddens me that I didn't know more about the man Jesse Page. What I do know is that his descendants went on to become nurses, doctors, social workers, teachers, business owners, architects, state employees, and retired servicemen and women. How ironic that every week I, a descendant of Jesse Page, walked the very ground where Robert Hughes took his last breath. It will never just be the entrance to the courthouse. It will forever be a reminder of the importance of equal justice.

What I would like to see come from these hearings is for us to tell the narrative and provide information in ways that resonate with people from all walks of life. I would love to meet the descendants of the retired attorney and the pastor who attempted to intervene. Their family should know their family members were heroes. It's imperative that training be provided to law enforcement. They need support. They need to be supported by mental health professionals. They

also need to be supported by the faith communities, and community leaders. We need to find a way to build relationships of trust.

We need programs like Operation Recess where law enforcement interact with elementary school children during their recess time. It allows them to learn about their home lives and their challenges, and that of course, could result in a more compassionate approach and also allow our young people to be able to see our law enforcement in a different light. They would see them not only in roles of leadership, but also those who serve and protect all people. I want to thank the commission for allowing us to tell our stories and assisting us in advancing efforts to not just the idea of equal justice under the law, but the action of equal justice under the law. Thank you.

Clory Jackson: Thank you for that testimony, Ms. Renee Page. We'll now hear from the sisters, Karen White and Angela Davidson.

Angela Davidson: Good morning. Today is October the 2nd, 2021. My name is Angela Hughes Davidson. I am the great-granddaughter of Wormley H. and Georgetta [inaudible] Hughes. Their son Robert W. Hughes is my great-uncle and brother of my grandfather, John Henry Hughes. I grew up in rural Fauquier County, Virginia, living within 10 miles of each other were many relatives. I was blessed to know my maternal grandmother, maternal great-grandparents, and paternal grandparents, John Henry and Mary Wanda Hughes.

Family stories were often a part of conversation where adults spoke and children listened. I think I was in my early teens when I learned of my grandfather's brother Robert, who was said to have gone away. I don't recall my father Lloyd speaking of him. At the time, I do remember thinking his disappearance held some sort of mystery. Our youngest brother Timothy often spoke to our granddaddy about the old days. Boxing and holidays are two of the subjects I know they talked about. In one of these conversations, our grandfather told him that Robert was executed. Our Aunt Annie, born 1917, told me that Robert's sister and my great-aunt Ethel would say that the truth never came out about his death. Thus, as an adult, I assumed Robert had been accused, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death for a crime that perhaps he did or did not commit.

Deeply involved in genealogy in the late 1980s, my sister Karen began looking for Robert through many resources. She founded Albemarle court records that perhaps Robert died before 1910 because he was not listed among the heirs in a settlement of the estate of his grandfather, also named Robert Hughes. Listed heirs were Robert's siblings and his mother Georgetta, who was widowed in 1901. That wasn't much of a clue, but it was something.

Periodically, Karen would search for additional clues of Robert's demise, but to no avail. It was not until this past summer when Karen received a call from Clory Jackson informing her of a lynching victim by the name of William Burns, that the mystery of what happened to our uncle Robert began to unfold. Evidence concluded that William Burns was indeed our great uncle Robert W. Hughes.

We are here today because Robert was the victim of a lynching. It has been described as horrific and yet not a lot different from other such events described and recorded in America's history. Our Uncle Robert's fate was like that of far too many African American men. The shock of the circumstances of Robert's death brought another portion of America's ugly history to our family's doorstep and was brought with a devastating finding. The death of any 18-year-old very young man pulls at one's heartstrings. Had Robert been allowed due process, being charged and arrested, being

afforded legal counsel, coming to trial with the choosing of a jury, having a jury trial, hearing from witnesses, reaching a verdict, sentencing. If guilty, serving out his sentence. If innocent, continuing to mature as a free young man. He might have lived to marry and raise a family. He might have lived a long life like his sister Ethel, 99 years old, and brother John Henry, my grandfather, 95 years old.

Had due process been afforded Robert guilty or innocent, today's hearing would not be necessary. Today's proceedings demonstrate the desire of many in our society to acknowledge our country's history, both the great and the terrible. We must listen to families who have experienced the results of lynching and realize it tears a community's residents, black and white, apart. When visiting a physician, you first ask questions. Where is the pain? How long have you had it? Describe how you're feeling today. The clinician reviews your answers, performs a physical examination, and correlates your descriptions with his findings and comes up with a diagnosis. Based on the diagnosis, a treatment plan is outlined for the patient.

Today, the Hughes family is one of the patients. You will be provided the location and circumstances of our 18-year-old uncle's death. We ask that you take the information and process it, removing speculation, but adhering to information proven by fact, and conclude the following. Robert Hughes was denied due process. Robert Hughes was lynched by a mob. Robert Hughes was denied the dignity of our traditional African American burial customs.

Robert Hughes's family was denied the opportunity to quietly mourn his loss, but was faced with published media accounts. Robert Hughes' mother and siblings did not receive an apology or compensation in compassion for the crime committed against brother and son. Robert Hughes' descendants until 2021 were denied the truth of the event surrounding his death.

We ask that today's hearing serve an example to others in this important work of truth and reconciliation, that this hearing serve as a platform that continues the healing process for this family and this community. Healing will not be instant, with continued discussions and with acknowledgement that what happened to Robert in 1907 unfortunately is not the only recorded case in our nation's history. Only with this knowledge and acceptance of truth can our family, our community, our nation, move forward in hope, knowing that all lives matter. Thank you.

Karen Hughes White: Good afternoon and thank you. I am Karen Hughes White and I am the granddaughter of John Henry Hughes, the younger brother of Robert W. Hughes. Growing up, I spent many Sunday afternoons in the home of my grandparents, John Henry and Mary Wanda Hughes, who we referred to as Granny and Granddaddy Hughes. I knew the large charcoal pictures that hung in the hall of their home were those of my grandparents of his, of our grandfather's parents. Wormley Hughes, the preacher from Charlottesville who met and married the school teacher Georgetta from Pittsburgh. I remember my great-aunt uncle who my siblings and I referred to as Oland Ethel. So not to confuse her with our father's sister, Ethel.

I don't recall hearing about her brother until my last years of grade school, and it was then and only then that I hear that he had gone away. I also recall hearing the name of an Aunt Selena, Granddaddy's other sister Selena, who lived in New Jersey, and that she often sent packages down to Asheville to Granddaddy Hughes's children, which would be my father and his siblings. It wasn't until the mid 1980s when I became interested in our family history that I started exploring and documenting the family's history. I was close to my grandparents, and I remember the night Granny Hughes died. Granddaddy called me at the nursing home. I worked there and it was very unusual

that I received a evening call, and this one was extremely rare because it was my grandfather calling to report the death of his beloved Mamie's death.

I often visited him throughout the weeks and years thereafter. On one of those occasions, he told me his brother was executed, and there was a pause, and I knew not to pursue additional questions. I assumed that it was too personal and painful for him. Following my grandfather's death, I did query my dad and his sisters, my aunts.

My Aunt Annie mentioned two white ladies riding on a Trailways bus with her on one occasion and asked if she was a Hughes. This was when she was much younger. She was the one that was born in 1917, and they expressed their sorrow over the death of her uncle as the conversation went on, and that the truth never came out, and it didn't happen like that. We all had our suspicions and we expected something had happened or something to do with possibly a white female, as this happened to be the customary thing that we had seen in our community.

My desire to learn the truth grew, and I faithfully tried to find information regarding Robert and his father Wormley in the court process. I was successful in finding accounts of Worley in Loudon, Fauquier, and Albemarle Counties, and at the Library of Virginia, which validated the oral history of Wormley and the court's system. But I came up empty handed regarding Robert's death.

Today, I appreciate the opportunity to share with you what we knew and what we know now about Robert W. Hughes, also known as William Burns. Robert Hughes was born at the Pot House in the village of St. Louis in Loudoun County, Virginia. His parents were Worley H. Hughes, a Baptist minister in Georgetta, verbiage of public-school teacher. Robert's father, Wormley, was born in 1848 and died in 1909. His grandfather, Robert, who was born in 1821 and died 1895, also Baptist ministers and their great-grandfather, Wormley, who was born in 1780 and died in 1858, were born in Albemarle County, Virginia. Robert's mother was born in Pittsburgh, and in the 12th annual report of public schools of Pittsburgh, 1880 to 188, Georgetta is listed as a pupil at Pittsburgh Central High School. Wormley Whitter and Georgetta married in 1885 in Washington DC. Robert's young siblings included the sister Selena, his twin sister, Ethel May, brother John Henry, and youngest sister Sarah Myrtle. At least one of Robert's relatives and an uncle lived in Covington, Kentucky, and all other relatives lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Albemarle County, Virginia.

As a young boy, Robert attended church services. His mother was an organizer of the association locally in our county and in Northern Virginia. She taught within three different school jurisdictions: Warren County, Prince William, Fauquier, four, and Loudoun County.

According to Cumberland's history, Robert arrived in Cumberland sometime in the spring of 1907. We don't know whether he visited any local churches in Cumberland, but we do know that he worked at the Alpine Hall Hotel and served as a porter, and that he worked as a driver for George Palmore, an African American saloon owner.

We know that at this time in his young age, he was no longer under the strict supervision of his widowed mother Georgetta. To our knowledge, at the age of 18 in 1907, Robert was not married and he had no children. Unfortunately, Robert was in a saloon, became rowdy, according to the accounts, and law was called to act. I won't go further into the research that has already been conducted and shared at this time. But I can say, looking back, in 1901, Robert's father, Wormley.

suffering from overall failing health and depression, was hospitalized, died in Barrack on Central State Hospital grounds in Petersburg.

At the time of his death, he was a watch care member at the Mount Nebo Church in Morgantown. Robert's mother, Georgetta, died May 15th, 1921 at the home of her son, John Henry, in the community of Asheville. At her death, the family received condolences from the Methodist and Front Royal, the latest place where she was teaching. With her children, Ethel and John Henry living in Asheville, it is most likely she was utilized at the first Asheville Baptist Church.

We know she buried on family property near Delaplane in Fauquier County. In 1900, the entire family was living in Marshall. Wormley was 49. Georgetta, 34. Selena Leslie was 14, and Ethel and Robert were age 11. John, 8 and Sarah, 1. Ten years later in the 1910 census, John Henry was 19 and Sarah, 11, and they were living in the same household in the Scott District, living with the family of William May Jones. This was Delaplane in 1910. Georgetta is not in the home at this time. She is listed as a widower in the home of Luisa Peterson in Prince William County.

We have records of Selena's marrying several at different timeframes. We know that she went by Selena Johnson as well, when she was married to Hayward Johnson, and she gave birth to a William Clark Johnson, who died in 1906 at nine months old, and a stillborn female in 1908, and then giving birth to Hayward Johnson in 1911. Following the death of her husband in 1911, she married William Francis Turner and that they had one son. Those are descendants that we had not been in contact with. Robert's siblings died. His youngest sister died in February of 1915 at the University of Virginia Hospital in Charlottesville. His brother John Henry Hughes, our grandfather died in 1986, and his twin sister uncle died in 1989 at the age of 99. And we have not located a death record for Selena Johnson Turner at this point. Today, Robert still has many grand nieces and nephews; his known living nieces and nephews are throughout the Northern Virginia and Fauquier County areas.

We are appreciative for this opportunity to have time of expressing our thanks, our understanding, and the research that has been done to bring closure to this. I have searched many years from information on my great uncle and out of the years of research, this has been and is the hardest one for me to handle. I thought I had it all together this morning when I was doing this, but evidently, I don't.

I do want to share with you that since this had first started, I did receive a phone call from one of our elders, first cousins, who shared the information of the best of her abilities in remembering conversations with Granddaddy Hughes and Granny in regards to his brother, Robert. She says she does not wish to testify, but she remembers some talk that Robert may have gone away and passed-passing as a person, not as a white person, and that he had been fooling around with a white woman, and that when it became well known, well, you know what happened.

I really questioned this because I wanted to know, well, did Robert resemble his twin sister? Was he physically, did he have the appearance where he could have passed? And was he using the name William Burns when he first went into Cumberland, or was this a name that was attached to him later? Was he living in a colored section of Cumberland? Was he living as a man of color?

These are all additional questions as we try to explore oral histories. There's always more to the various stories. I know Angela and I questioned this because of other oral histories on other

branches of the family. So, for this, we don't know, but I'm assuming that he was Robert Hughes who used the name William Burns at some point or time in Cumberland County. I'm going to close at this point because I can't go any further. Thank you.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you, Ms. Jackson, Ms. Page, Ms. Davidson, and Ms. White. We are grateful and honored for sharing your stories with us and entrusting us to tell the story so that people know.

Clory Jackson: At this time, we are proceeding to the facilitated testimony portion of today's hearing. We'll hear from individuals who represent the contemporaries of the different systems and organizations that were present and involved at the time of the lynching in 1907 of Robert Hughes. We have with us today Elliot Spillers from the Equal Justice Initiative. The Equal Justice Initiative has held community remembrance projects across the nation in counties where there is record of a racial terror lynching. We will also hear from Chief of Cumberland Police, Chuck Ternet. He has served in this community for almost 30 years and is here to be a part of this healing process. We'll also hear from Tiffani Fisher, the president of the Allegheny County NAACP, branch number 7007. We had also planned to hear today from Theresa McMinn, a journalist from *The Cumberland Times News*, who has worked with the local coalition here in Allegheny County to help uncover the history of journalism in the telling and unraveling of the story of Robert Hughes. Unfortunately, because of a technical difficulty with being able to dial in, we won't be able to hear directly from her today, but she is on the line listening and covering the story, and we'll make sure that she's able to provide a written testimony afterward.

So, at this time, I have a question for Elliot. Elliot, The Equal Justice Initiative has collaborated with communities all across the nation to memorialize victims of racial terror lynching, and most recently, you have continued to help us here in Allegheny County to have a series of remembrance projects for Robert Hughes, also known as William Burns. Now, as one of the individuals working closely with community members, can you tell us about some of the challenges and the rewards of working with local coalitions, and do you have any advice for local community organizers wishing to help restore equality and justice for their community?

Elliot Spillers: Yeah. Thank you, Clory. And I want to also acknowledge the other individuals or organizations representative here on this Zoom call. Dr. Chavis, thank you for your remarks as well as the entire Allegheny County Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Committee, as well the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project and the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A lot of different organizations right now in Maryland. And it's just really exciting to be here with you all today.

In 2019, I remember traveling to Maryland and actually meeting with Delegate Jocelyn Peter Melnick after the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project conference to talk about HB 307, and to hear more about just the legislative process to get the bill passed, and thought that it was an enormous achievement when the bill did pass that April, and have been following and keeping along with the coalitions - many of them across Maryland for the last several years. It's been a long time coming to get to this moment today to actually hold this first public hearing, which is very fitting for it to actually happen within Allegheny County, Maryland—a community wherein we memorialize the lynching of at least one black child who was lynched in this community in October 1907.

To the question about reward and challenges when it comes to CRP, as I was thinking about and processing during Ms. Karen White's testimony, which I am very grateful and humbled to be in the

presence of the descendants of both Mr. Page and Mr. William Burns, also known as Robert Hughes. As I was listening to her give her testimony, I think it was a beautiful analogy the way that she spoke about the, the, the process of healing and, you know, you, you going to the doctor, the doctors as, as a way of contextualizing just what the healing process actually should look like. And thinking about that, I thought about the body, you know, we all have different bodies and our body tells a story. The body is very, because it is very much so informed by the environments and also by the genetic coding and the, and the DNA, that that has been passed down and inherited by your family members and your loved ones.

And in thinking about CRP and Community Remembrance, and the acronym for Community Remembrance Project is CRP, for those that don't know. CRP is very much so like the body in that as an organization, we have continuously worked with communities to examine their histories and legacies of racial terror and violence. But each community that we work with is different.

Allegheny County, which is situated in a rural part of Maryland, is different from you know, a large city like Chicago or New York. So the rubric and the measurement, the metric for success and, the rewards for this community--for any community is very specific to that, their environment. And one of the ways the most rewarding aspects of community remembrance for me has come from an examination of the narrative and the humanizing of the victims that we actually memorialize. In this instance we actually had documented initially Mr. Hughes as William Burns. But it was only after a conversation with Clory that we learned about the connection that they had made with descendants of Mr. Burns as well as Mr. Page's descendants. And that was able to allow us an opportunity to collaboratively come to craft a humanizing narrative about the circumstances related to Mr. Burns' lynching and update just our internal data.

Another aspect I think also of CRP are the challenges that we face. Each community faces its challenges. I think that one of the challenges that I see most often working with communities is a lack of awareness by our coalition members sometimes about the ways in which their racial, gender class, and geographic backgrounds and identities form the structure of the coalition, but also the scope to which community remembrance should and could happen locally in their community.

I'm very inspired by the work of this coalition specifically in Allegheny who has taken this concept of a caucus style conversation to actually allow their partners to have conscientious training around the ways in which their race and their gender and all those other identities informs who they are and the work. I think that hopefully that answers a, a part of the question. With that, I pass.

Dr. David Fakunle: Alright, thank you Ms. Jackson, and thank you Mr. Spillers. At this time, I recognize my fellow commissioner, Simone Barrett Williams, who would like to present a question to Ms. Tiffany Fisher of the Allegheny County in NAACP number 7007, Commissioner Barrett Williams.

Simone Barrett Williams: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. Fisher. My question is as follows: The NAACP has supported the uncovering and telling the true story of Robert Hughes. How do you see his story impacting the community as we continue to learn, discuss it in a public forum, such as this hearing?

Tiffani Fisher: Thank you for your question, and again, thank you so much for allowing me to sit in this space. It has already affected our community and has brought awareness to a situation within

our history that has pulled us all back together to understand. It has explained some of the relationships that we have here in our community, and particularly with the black community and the police force. It explains the divide.

I often tell people that although the laws have changed, we live in a separate but equal space in Allegheny County, where the black community holds tight to our bubble and stays close with each other and only reaches outside to the white community when necessary, and the white community only reaches into that bubble when necessary. But in this experience, as we grew, we were able to be examples of how bursting that bubble and being vulnerable with each other and listening to each other's oral history and truth, and working together, we can bring true change and impact.

One of the things to be mindful of is that while we are dealing with this history, we are also dealing with what's going on right now. And we see across the country this change in mindset of policing and what policing should be. And this change in mindset of how the history of Black America and the trauma, the racial trauma that we have gone through for generations affects the relationships that the police officers have with us and that we have with the police officers. And that how the community responds to when someone whose skin is deeper in color is attacked is different. So, we can use this history in uncovering not just the story of Robert Hughes and William Burns, but the legacy that he intentionally left behind in those moments, and how hiding that, we have created a generational curse, not just within the descendants, but within the community.

Ms. Renee spoke about how Mr. Jesse Page would say “let it be” and didn't speak about this racial terror that he lived through. And to sit and think about him holding onto that for the rest of his years of his life and how that changed how he interacted with his children and his grandchildren, and a small community where we are so closely-knit, a wonder what a difference it would've been if Mr. Page himself would've not experienced that, and what kind of grown or young man he would've grown into to give back to his community. So, learning that, we now need to unlearn those behaviors of holding that trauma inside. One of the beautiful things about the caucusing tool that I have learned is that it's okay to have safe spaces to be able to process such heavy things. And as we continue in this community to work towards racial healing, I hope that we can continue to work with the Brownsville Project and ACTRC and continue to grow. Thank you.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you. Thank you, commissioner Barrett Williams. And thank you, Ms. Fisher. At this time, I recognize Vice Chair Dr. Charles Chavis, who will present two questions to Chief Chuck Ternet of the Cumberland Police Department, Vice Chair Chavis.

Dr. Charles L. Chavis: Thank you. Chair. Can everybody hear me? Thank you so much, Chief for joining us at this time. I will be asking a question to Chief Ternet, my question is as follows, Chief, you served the local community as a police officer almost 30 years. What role do you think the police department can play in helping communities heal from racial trauma and assist communities as they strive to realize justice?

Chief Chuck Ternet: Thank you, Mr. Chavis. As you know, policing has changed a lot since 1907. Back then, officers were chosen just based on honesty, and if they were big, it could fight, but they really had no training. So fast forward to present day, officers are much more educated. They undergo immense training, and the expectations of them are much, much higher. Policing has been adjusted over the years. Every effort has been made to remove the biases, and it's, it's worked.

I think overall policing is a much better place now than it was in 1907, but we all know there's more work that definitely can be done. I'd like to mention that crisis management's my life, and of course I know from being in my position and the August Baker and William Bryant stories, and I've often thought good thing I wasn't Chief back then. I would hate to have to work through that mess. But as I sat and listened to Heidi and the others, I kind of wish I was around back then. I know that today's police officers, if they were working on that day back in 1907, there would've been a different outcome and we would not even be here today. I hope you would all agree that this is kind of an example of the advances in the policing the past hundred or so years.

So today, what can we, as police officers do in helping communities heal from racial trauma? I know that today's discussion pertains to racial trauma primarily, and, and it does, but I just want to note, as many of you local participants know, I've had these same conversations when it comes to mental health trauma in our community, addiction trauma in our community, and other crime and quality of life trauma throughout our community. So, it kind of pertains to all those areas. And as you also know that there's no magic answer.

I very much agree with Mr. Spiller's and feel that just like every person is unique, every community is unique. What works in one community may not work in another. It's kind of like when the doctor assesses a patient on a patient basis and figured out what's wrong. I think Mr. Spillers hit it on the head where he said that each community has to be looked at differently and then figure out what works there.

But how can police officers help in that community to promote healing? Overall, I feel strongly about this, just being really good role models. When someone sees one of my officers, they should generate the image of fairness and partiality in a community, just like when you see the liberty statue, a lady justice with a blindfold on, and that's supposed to represent fairness, impartiality, seeing a police officer should invoke those same feelings. Now we all know that occasionally officers do screw up some intentionally and some unintentionally, and the nature of our work is tough. And when an officer does betray public's trust, it cuts deep. So, policing as a police leader and all police leaders, we're going to continue to do all we can to try to promote fairness and partiality and be good role models. So, the officers being above reproach are only one piece of the puzzle and bringing the community together.

So, this is where our other partners come into play. Here locally, I think we're doing pretty good job in helping spread values of fairness, impartiality with our community partners. We need buy-in from the community to help spread these values, and we do have a lot of support. Reaching out to groups and organizations is good, and we do that a lot. But working beyond those group and organizations down to the people who are not involved in those groups, organizations, that's where the work is needed. Going beyond those groups to the street level, and hopefully officers, police officers can help with that.

We are the ones that are out there going into people's houses and going into the communities on a more individual one-on-one basis. So, hopefully through our conduct, we can help influence people on that level and help heal the community as much as we can. I also think that another important aspect is looking forward and digging and forward thinking. It's important to acknowledge the past mistakes, just like William Burns situation so we don't make those again. But our community needs to look forward how everything's going to be better. I know, I feel better and I think you guys all do too, and you think tomorrow will be a better day and there's hope. So, I think if we ever try to get

everybody thinking this way, it'll increase the optimism in the community and it'll be contagious and help the community to heal and make it healthier. So, I appreciate you taking the time to let me talk today.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you, Commissioner Chavis and thank you Chief Ternet. We have received a written statement. Ms. Clory Jackson will deliver that written statement, Ms. Jackson.

Clory Jackson: Thank you. I have a prepared statement from Theresa McMinn. The question that we posed to Teresa McMinn for this panel was, "What do you think journalists today, can do to avoid shaping public perception as presumed guilt?" And Teresa McMinn writes:

Written Statement from Teresa McMinn as read by Clory Jackson: Journalists need to study publications by organizations, including the Equal Justice Initiative. They need to be clear in the reporting that allegations are just that, and introduce that fact very early in the story, and then repeatedly throughout the report. Also, rather than simply repeating the contents of a police report, journalists can dig deeper, research evidence, and try to talk to all parties involved in alleged crimes. Journalists can also research and write about the history of the press, particularly the late 1800's and early 1900's and it's biased reporting of alleged crimes that promoted violence and led racial terror lynchings. When researching crimes of the past, particularly as reported in late 1800's to 1900's newspapers, journalists should also recognize that reported confessions of guilt were likely either forced or fabricated by people in places of power.

Journalists need to understand the pressures of an interrogation, the confusion that people being interrogated are experiencing, the terror that they're feeling, and that they're likely to say whatever they think is needed to improve their immediate situation. Truth and healing across races in America begins with the formation of groups such as the Equal Justice Initiative, the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Allegheny County Truth and Reconciliation Committee to open dialogue. Journalists can partner with organizations like these and report the work they're doing to help people in the community, including voters, understand the history that led to events such as racial terror lynchings, and how those events over time have grown racism and discrimination in society today, including everything from policymaking to education.

Clory Jackson: The next question that we had was, "How has your experience reporting on Robert Hughes changed the way you work?" Teresa's response to this question is as follows.

Written Statement from Teresa McMinn as read by Clory Jackson: Reporting on the lynching of Robert Hughes has been a very powerful, emotional, and painful experience for me. It's made me think deeper about how injustices of the past have carried through and impacted the present. It's made me think about how the family of Robert Hughes carried the pain of his murder and yet weren't free to discuss it or later share their family history.

Inconsistencies are found in numerous 1907 newspaper reports about Robert Hughes, including his name, which was reported as being William Burns. There was little to no accountability of accuracy of reporting at that time period. Bylines were rarely, if ever, used. My experience and learning of what happened to Robert Hughes has sickened me.

My research has shown that lynchings of black people, primarily black men, were a form of entertainment in many white communities. Researching racial terror lynchings has taught me to

consider the bigger picture that the murder of Robert Hughes in an event that changed the ways generations of people have lived. It's made me search for more information, talk to more sources, and study research methods that experts such as historians in other parts of the country have found successful.

For my reporting about Robert Hughes, I interviewed a doctoral student named Edwin Grimsley at the Graduate Center, the City University of New York, who also worked for many years for the Innocence Project and wrote a report titled "African American Wrongful Convictions Throughout History." He said, "We can't change our current system without understanding how it was built and some of its worst functions." I think of that sentence now all the time when I'm working on various assignments.

I also interviewed Margaret Vandiver in Shelby County, Tennessee. She's a researcher and retired professor of criminology and criminal justice for the University of Memphis. "There is still much that we just will never know about individual cases," she said of racial terror lynchings. Vandiver also said, "Collective violence, particularly when it involves the defiance of law, like breaking into a jail or the collaboration of law enforcement officers, is a breakdown of law and order, and it's a breakdown of the whole framework of justice that we have in society."

Clory Jackson: Thank you, Teresa McMinn for your written statement. When we come back to our next question that we have for the panelists, I will also read a statement on behalf of Teresa.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you, Ms. Jackson. And thank you Ms. McMinn. I will now recognize Vice Chair Chavis.

Dr. Charles L. Chavis: Great. Thank you so much. Commissioner and Chair. I have a question that I want to raise. The concluding question to Ms. Tiffani Fisher. And the question is as follows: What does truth and racial healing in America look like to you?

Tiffani Fisher: So again, thank you for the question. I think in order for us to get to truth and reconciliation and healing, we have to stop stopping at identifying who the oppressor and the oppressed are. We know that, and I think what happens is we spend so much energy trying to figure out just those two things and justify that someone is being oppressed and that someone is the oppressor that we miss the space to move forward.

Once we figure out and identify who has been oppressed and who the oppressor is, the next step is for us to talk about how we move past that. And we do that with changing laws. And yes, we do that with having conversations. We also do that with creating relationships. It's important for us as African American and black people to have some understanding of how generational racial trauma is affecting how we respond, but it is equally, if not more important for those do not look like us to understand that although this may not have happened directly to us as an individual, seeing people that look like us, hearing stories about people that look like us, having the oral history passed down, about people that look like us being lynched, terrorized, and not held up in the same way within the system changes how we see things. It creates a prejudice of a system that was built to oppress us, and it creates white privilege.

So to move forward, we have to own our stuff. Each player has to take accountability for where we drop the ball. Everyone has to be open and vulnerable to be honest about how their history affects

how they respond to situations today. And then once we get there, we can talk about healing with each other. We can't get to the reconciliation if we haven't healed. We can restore, but we can't get to reconciliation. True reconciliation is when both parties understand each other and have grown past the issue and can stand together and walk into equality.

Dr. Charles L. Chavis: Thank you so much, Ms. Fisher. Chair Fakunle.

Dr. David Fakunle: Thank you, Vice Chair Chavis. I would now like to recognize Ms. Clory Jackson.

Clory Jackson: Thank you so much. So, the same question that was posed to Tiffani we will also pose to the rest of the panelists, and we'll start with Chief Chuck Ternet next. Chief, what does truth and healing across races in America look like?

Chief Chuck Ternet: Thank you, Clory. So ideally, simply when bias just disappears from everybody's thought process, that would be ideal. But we know that's wishful thinking. So maybe we get to a place where a person recognizes their personal biases and kind of acknowledges them and then ignores them and works through them so their thoughts do not interfere with their actions.

Again, I agree with Mr. Spiller's theory about every community is unique and that we can't react to each community. Strategies used to promote healing togetherness here in Cumberland may not work elsewhere, and those elsewhere may not work here. In Cumberland, the first steps to treatment healing would be to identify the stress points that cause these biases, acknowledge them, and then work towards eliminating them.

The big challenge is how to identify these biases, and they may be evident in the community or they may be unknown, and some of these biases run very deep in our local communities. Maybe generations of families have established these negative values upon our people, their family members. So it will take participants on all levels from the family, to the schools, pastors, community groups, government officials, including the police, to help identify and educate and get people to work through these biases. Then hopefully when you get acknowledged, they can work through them and we can promote a healthier community.

Clory Jackson: Thank you very much for your response. Next, I have a prepared statement again from Teresa McMinn, answering the question: What does truth and healing across racism in America look like? And I will read this on Teresa McMinn's behalf.

Written Statement from Teresa McMinn as read by Clory Jackson: I'm Teresa McMinn, a reporter at *The Cumberland Times News* in Cumberland, Allegheny County, Maryland. Truth and healing across races in America looks like bringing diverse groups of people together to discuss the impacts of racism in their communities. It looks like having honest conversations no matter how difficult and painful they are. It looks like acknowledgement by white people, that lynchings by white mobs against black people were real and frequent and used not as punishment for a crime, but as a method of power and control. And that vigilante lynchings were used by white audiences as a spectator sport.

There must be acknowledgement by all people that those atrocious white mob crimes of the past have never gone away. They've haunted and terrorized generations of people. There must be

acknowledgement that systemic racism is a major problem today in this country. There must be acknowledgement that people who are new to a community or different in some way can be blocked from holding leadership positions because people in control fear that change will dwindle their power. We must acknowledge these things in order to move forward.

Clory Jackson: Thank you. And finally, for this question on what does racial healing look like in America? I will pose this question to Elliot Spillers.

Elliot Spillers: Thank you so much, Chloe, for that question. It's a great question. And I thought about a quote by a scholar, activist and poet, Sonya Sanchez, and I'll read it real quick. It says, "I cannot tell the truth about anything unless I confess being a student. Growing and learning something new every day. The more I learn, the clearer my view of the world becomes." I think that where we're at right now as a nation, but also collectively currently in in Maryland, is we're at this stage of truth. And if you've heard Brian Stevenson, our Executive Director, talk in public before, he always talks about the importance of truth telling, the importance of first reckoning with the truth before we can then move into a reparative process that gets us towards true justice.

When I think about our work in communities, you know, in 2015, we actually released our report called Lynching in America, and this report actually talks about, it contextualizes the legacy and the history of racial terror lynching and violence in America. In the report, we document at least 4,000 black people to include Mr. Robert Hughes and William Burns to have been lynched in the time period between 1877 and 1950.

What do we know about this history? What do we know about this legacy of racial terror, lynching, and violence? We know that this time period between 1877 to 1950 must be situated first after the era of enslavement. A time period wherein chattel slavery was, was legitimized and codified in the American in the American consciousness. We know that we have to then situate this era and legacy of racial terror and lynching and violence. Also, after the era of reconstruction in America, a time period that came after enslavement you know, informally was, was prematurely ended. And then federal troops fled the South, leaving black people vulnerable to white mob violence and, and aggression.

During the era of reconstruction, we know that between 1865 to 1877, before this era of lynching and racial terror lynchings, over 2,000 black people were actually lynched across America. And so between 1865 to 1950, we know that over 6,500 African American men, women, and children, were lynched in communities where there were functioning court systems and functioning justice systems that did not work to protect and defend the people in those communities. What else do we know about this history?

We know that during this era and legacy of racial terror and violence between 1865 and even before that time period to this time period 1950, we know that there was a presumption of guilt and dangerousness that was assigned and characterized to black communities and people. We know that during this time period, lynchings were used as a tool of racial and economic control to preserve and maintain white supremacy. We know that during this time period and during this legacy of racial terror, violence, and lynching, that between starting in the time period of 1920, outdoor public spectacle lynchings began to phase out. And indoor sanctioned lynchings through the usage of capital punishment actually began to pick up. In the communities where we document lynchings to have happened between the eras of 1877 and 1950, these communities where we

document black people lynched most prominently in the deep south, primarily in Alabama, Georgia South Carolina, North Carolina, Louisiana, the states of the former Confederacy, these are states that today are, that have the highest rates of executions.

When we think about the uses of capital punishment in our country today, both the past and the present merge to meet us here in this entire moment. It's important for us to not denounce and to not reject the ways in which racial bias continuously, even today, informs the way that we envision and examine our criminal justice system.

When we look at institutions in our country, when you think about the media, when you think about education, even hospitals. These are institutions that must examine and go through a process of truth telling. They must examine the ways in which they themselves and their institutions have historically been complicit in this record of racial bias and terror that has been allowed to sustain with impunity in this country.

And so, I think that what my hope and my expectation is of this commission, but also of the work that we do in communities, is for each of us to actually move into a process of repair that gets us to a moment where we can then begin to at least reimagine what true justice can look like here in our society.

Dr. David Fakunle: Again, thank you Mr. Spillers of the Equal Justice Initiative. Ms. McMinn of *The Cumberland Times News*, Ms. Fisher of the Allegheny County NAACP, and Chief Ternet of the Cumberland Police Department. Thank you all for your testimony. It is hereby accepted as a part of this hearing. At this time, we would like to transition to the final part of our hearing today, and that is the time for a public comment. So, at this time, I'd like to recognize my fellow commissioner Maya Davis, who leads the Logistics Committee of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Ms. Caroline Hann of the Allegheny County Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Committee who will read the public comments submitted via email and during the course of this hearing. Commissioner Davis.

Maya Davis: Our first question comes from Donna Holly, and her question is, was Burns related to Anthony Burns, who was also from Fauquier County?

Caroline Hann: Our second question is from Nicholas Creary. How can we hold institutions such as the police department and local newspapers accountable for their actions or lack thereof and their roles in perpetrating the lynching of Robert Hughes? What responsibility do these institutions have to the Cumberland African American community today?

Maya Davis: At this time, Chair, those are the only two questions we have.

Dr. David Fakunle: So, thank you once again, as well as Ms. Hann for providing us with the public questions as well as public comments. So, at this time I would like to move that we accept the testimony that we heard from our community on this day. Is there a second?

Unnamed Speaker: I'll second.

Dr. David Fakunle: All right. All those in favor, please say aye.

Group: [Several Ayes]

Dr. David Fakunle: Are there any that oppose? All right. Thank you very much.

The testimony from the public has been accepted, so I would like to conclude this historic day with just a few thoughts. First and foremost, I would like to give immense gratitude and honor and praise to the Allegheny County Lynching Treatment Reconciliation Committee as well as the descendants of Jesse Page and Robert Hughes, also known as William Burns. It cannot be said enough how much we are grateful for your willingness to tell the story. We could feel the emotions. We could imagine what it must have been like for Mr. Hughes at the time, as well as Mr. Page. Kids. I know we say 'Mr.', but they were kids having to experience that terror. I would not have been strong. I will say that now. So, I honor them and honor their lives and the strength that they showed and the bravery of Mr. Hughes to essentially sacrifice his life for Mr. Page and making sure that he had the chance to do what Mr. Hughes did not: live. So, we thank the descendants of Mr. Page, as well as Mr. Hughes for your vulnerability, your courage, and giving us the honor to hear those stories. So, thank you.

Again, I'd like to thank the Allegheny County Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Committee for all of their hard work and diligence with making sure that this story has been remembered, elevated, and crystallized into the history of the state of Maryland. Not just the history of Cumberland, not just the history of Allegheny County, but the history of the State of Maryland. That is why we are here to tell these stories and to make sure these stories are never forgotten.

I would then like to thank my fellow Commissioners, Commissioner Chavis. I can't say enough about his hard work and diligence, right? Clap it up, snap, snap, snaps. Anything you got to do. I don't know how this brother has any time to do anything, let alone, you know, be a husband, a father, and all that stuff, as well as all the incredible work that he does with his day job. This is the public calling. But I'm, I'm so grateful to him as well as I'm going just, I feel like I need to just go down the list right now, seriously, Commissioner Armenti, Commissioner Davis, Commissioner Haley, Commissioner Barnett Williams… all of you, if I don't say your name, it's not because I don't love you. You know, I love y'all.

I'm so glad that we have gotten to this point where we can have this moment, where we can tell these stories, because the first step in healing is to tell the truth. And as human beings, we know how hard it is to tell the truth sometimes. It can hurt a lot, especially when you're bringing up a story of pain and trauma. But let's also think about the triumph, the strength of Robert Hughes family to deal with that and to make sure his story was never forgotten, so that we in this position, can elevate that story for all of Maryland, all of the United States, and certainly all of the world to know.

So, I'm grateful to you all, the public, for supporting us, supporting the MLTRC with this work. We've never meant to do this alone. We never wanted to do this alone. We always needed you. And we're so glad that you have been here to support us. A huge shout out to Clory Jackson and all the incredible work that she has been doing while she is doing the ultimate work of creating life, I must give a shout out to that. We can't thank you enough again for being such an ardent supporter of what we are doing and what you all are doing, and I'm so glad that we've been able to collaborate and elevate each other in this work.

I feel like I'm not forgetting anybody, man. I forget. I got everybody? Okay. So again, this is just the next step. We will have other sessions around the state of Maryland. As you see, we have some things to work out, but it's always a teachable moment. So, we will continue to get better and navigate this as we navigate a once in a century pandemic. So, I say that to say, stay safe. You see the mask, we're on the whole time. Stay safe, stay smart.

We want you to be around for all of the sessions as we navigate this state and navigate this history for the point of bringing healing and bringing justice. So, I know there's reconciliation in our name as the commission. It's not about reconciliation, it's about healing. It's about justice. And we can tell the truth and acknowledge the pain, and acknowledge the trauma, and acknowledge the teachable moments that history provides us. We will heal and then we can move forward with justice. And that comes in a form of not just words, but actions. And I'm talking about the P word, policy, alright? Policy.

So, we will do our best with this opportunity that we have as a commission to make sure that we tell the story so that the descendants can heal, so that the communities can heal, that we can all heal. Because yes, we are all affected by this trauma, whether you admit it or not. And then as we heal, we can move forward with justice.

So, with that, I thank you once again on behalf of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Again, I am Dr. David Fakunle. I'm honored and privileged to be in this position to help make history. You are all a part of history. Pat yourselves on the back. Thank you for being here. And we look forward to seeing you again. Take care. Peace.