



Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture and Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission



**Joint Statement
of**

**The Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture (MCAAHC)
&**

**The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLTRC)
on**

Racial Injustice & Social Equity

Fifty-two years ago, amid uprisings across the nation following the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, Verda Freeman Welcome, Maryland's first African American female senator, introduced legislation to create a commission to initiate, direct and coordinate projects that furthered the understanding of Black history and culture. With renowned historian and Morgan State professor Dr. Benjamin Arthur Quarles as its inaugural chair, the now Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) was established as the nation's first ethnic commission.

Today, the MCAAHC continues to lead in preserving, promoting, documenting and protecting African American history and culture across the state of Maryland. Yet, the deaths of Freddie Gray, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Anton Black, Jonathan Price, Breonna Taylor, and the unjust shooting and maiming of Jacob Blake among countless more, propelled us to include to that mandate - the preservation of Black lives by doing more to explicitly promote racial equity and justice. This *desire* was enhanced by joining forces with the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the nation's first commission charged with chronicling and bringing justice to the descendants and communities still impacted by racial terror lynchings.

Protests around the world have shown us that it is no longer possible to ignore our nation's and state's roots in systemic racism that has created and continues to preserve White power and White supremacy. This begins with unapologetically expressing truth such as this: **Maryland is the South** and one of the nation's earliest birthplaces of anti-Black legislation, with the enacting of slave laws in 1664. U.S. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who was from a slave-owning family in Calvert County, wrote the majority opinion in the 1857 *Dred Scott vs. Sandford* case determining that the "inferiority" of African Americans meant they were not entitled to constitutional rights including freedom. Additionally, slavery did not officially end in Maryland until November 1, 1864, nearly two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Almost three hundred years later after its founding, Maryland was a "Jim Crow" state where school desegregation was not fully instituted until the 1970s, and redlining, race covenants, and

inequitable access to FHA loans devastated Black communities. Now in 2020, Maryland has the highest incarceration rate of Black men aged 18 to 24 in the United States with the next-highest rate belonging to Mississippi, a state especially known for its deep historical adherence to White power. From food deserts and inadequate access to proper healthcare to the preservation of subpar educational systems, the list of disparities for Black Marylanders demonstrates the evolution of anti-Blackness from overt hate to methodical oppression.

These are the tendrils of systemic racism, the building blocks of a diversified industry built upon intentional social inequity. Centuries ago, slavery was an economic industry built upon racial injustice, and today's injustice industry is predicated upon racial subordination and exploitation, with fear serving as the primary catalyst. As centuries ago, law enforcement's primary role was to subordinate, demoralize and keep servile, enslaved Black people, it must be understood that today's law enforcement continues that function to intimidate, demoralize and conserve the subordination of black people. Law enforcement is used as a foundation for the preservation of a vast economy developed around the commodification of Black suppression, Black incarceration, Black vilification, and Black death. For these reasons, the MLTRC will explore the role of law enforcement and other systems of power regarding racial terror lynchings. In most cases now, as it certainly was then, many White individuals recruited to reinforce that economy never financially benefit from it, as that is reserved for the select few. Instead, they are given this fallacious reward known as "Whiteness" and are unwaveringly convinced that it will protect them from all the challenges and stressors of the world. Unless you have significant wealth, it does not. 2020 has made that abundantly clear.

Today's injustice industry is dividing, tearing apart, revealing our country, just as the slavery industry did over 170 years ago. This is not limited to police brutality and includes gross disparities in the treatment of Black and Latinx people in the U.S. legal system, such as the lynching of 20-year-old Townshend Cook in 1885 for whose murder by a White mob was neither investigated nor condemned. These disparities – intentionally exacerbated in modern times through the War on Drugs, admittedly a war on Black, Brown and impoverished people – led to mass incarceration and the proliferation of a privatized prison industrial complex whose very existence is dependent upon the incarceration of more People of Color. The damage caused by a punitive criminal justice system extends beyond incarceration, as returning citizens – especially if they are non-White – become second class citizens with the reality that their prospects for jobs, and even the right to vote, are severely impaired.

A major lesson from history is that those who do not learn from the past are destined to repeat it. Financial and political power built upon systems driven by racial oppression does not make a sound foundation on which to forge and advance a humane, sustainable future for the United States, and the majority of people in this country are voicing that statement. Maryland, like the United States, has a profound and tortured relationship with systemic racism, and as a result, this state has been an epicenter for protests and calls for Black liberation: from the abolitionist movement to innovations in the arts, education, and civil rights legislation. The legacy continued in 1969 with the MCAAHC, and in 2019 with the MLTRC.

Therefore, as Commissioners of these two bodies, each charged with providing a framework in which equity, healing and justice may be secured in the state of Maryland, we recommend the following as starting points towards a more just society:

- Address the problem of systemic racism that has consistently manifested in the abhorrent actions of law enforcement officials by ending police militarization and criminalizing police brutality.
- Assure the satisfaction of the Department of Justice consent decree against the Baltimore Police Department, regardless of federal enforcement.
- Promote anti-racism and economic anti-oppressive best practices for all people on all levels of society.
- Assure a racial and socioeconomic equity lens for all future public policies in Maryland jurisdictions at the local, county, and state levels through the enactment and repealing of legislation.
- Create and support spaces to preserve this new era of civil rights, including protests, key figures, and calls to action.
- Increase funding for African American museums and cultural institutions as they chronicle ongoing civil rights protests and the materials produced as a result.
- Support the revision of Maryland's public school curriculum to include a more accurate representation of Maryland's history and previous movements in the struggle for racial equality and equity, the current civil rights movement, and the work of these very important Commissions - the MCAAHC and the MLTRC.
- Removal of monuments and/or memorials that promote an incomplete history and a history of hate, while erecting monuments and/or memorials that promote healing and a fully accurate history.

Amid one of the largest civil rights movements in world history, it is our collective hope that you will agree to the implementation of these recommendations as a means of creating a society capable of being great by growing from the pain of past ignorance, exuding the virtues for which this country claims to stand.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the MCAAHC and the MLTRC

Addendum to the MCAAHC-MLTRC Joint Statement

The attack on the Capitol by far-right domestic terrorists at the behest of the former President of the United States was an extreme display of treason, and it was also the epitome of White privilege. While the violence committed on January 6th was witnessed by millions in real time with horror and disbelief, many people viewed the atrocities on that day with somber vindication, because they knew it was only a matter of time until dangerous rhetoric would become dangerous actions.

Among them were Black people who are too familiar with the consequences of latitude given White people in the U.S., while their own calls for genuine adherence to a proudly proclaimed ideology are often silenced before words can be spoken. How else can you explain the reality that a mob of White men and women – driven to **rage** by perpetual manipulation – easily overpowered the law enforcement of a federal building, caused irreparable damage to the prestige of a symbol of American democracy and for many, *walked out the door untouched*? There was solace in the increased awareness of the hypocrisy exuded that day, especially when juxtaposed with the aggressive tactics used by the same U.S. Capitol Police upon peaceful protestors against the history of brutality toward Black lives. Images of automatic rifles, Confederate flags and nooses invoked a clear message to the country of the mob's desire for times when White power was supreme rule, and oppression of perceived inferiority and opposition was as simple as having a lynching. However, their feelings are not unfounded for that is what the United States has been for over 400 years. So of course, to them true American democracy equals absolute White power. To Black people, it has also meant the same.

To defy the lie of White power and give the United States a chance to truly exude all that it has declared, the truth **must** be told. That includes the truth of this country's founding and preservation achieved through bloodshed, fear and repression. The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, are dedicated to elevating the stories of citizens whose experiences of oppression, trauma and resilience deserve the honor of being told, protected, and **learned**. For those who live with the memories and consequences of this multigenerational pain, healing cannot occur without knowing the extent of the pain and why it exists. The commissions' work is not focused on fostering shame, but rather empowering a devotion to unconditional acknowledgment, appreciation, respect, understanding and love for all people.

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About the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by House Bill 307 in the 2019 session of the Maryland General Assembly.

The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be reached at <https://msa.maryland.gov/lynching-truth-reconciliation/> or via email at mltrc@maryland.gov.

About the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture

Since its founding in 1969 by the nation's first African American female State Senator Verda Freeman Welcome and Morgan State University Professor of History and renowned African American Historian Dr. Benjamin Arthur Quarles, the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture is not only the nation's first ethnic commission but is also now a 21-seat statewide commission appointed by the Governor. The commission is committed to discovering, documenting, preserving, collecting, and promoting Maryland's African American heritage through operating Banneker-Douglass Museum - the State's official museum dedicated to preserving African American history and culture; operating Maryland's \$1 million African American Heritage Preservation Grant Program; and educating citizens about the impact of the African American experience in Maryland. To learn more, visit africanamerican.maryland.gov.