

RESOLUTION NO. _____

RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY REPARATIONS FOR BLACK PEOPLE IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY

WHEREAS, between 1619 and 1865, an estimated 4,000,000 people were unjustly enslaved in the colonies and the United States;

WHEREAS, in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, there were an estimated 1,913 people enslaved in Buncombe County. At that time, 12,654 people lived in Buncombe County¹;

WHEREAS, slavery represented an irreconcilable contradiction in our nation's founding: a young democracy committed to the ideals of liberty and justice and yet actively perpetuating the degradation of Black people. This contradiction - what some have called our nation's original sin - has yet to be fully addressed and systemic racism continues to this day;

WHEREAS, the early American economy, including in North Carolina, was built with the labor of enslaved people who were denied the ability to generate wealth from their labor and who were instead subjected to brutal and inhumane abuses including violence, the forced separation of families, being denied access to education and voting, and death;

WHEREAS, even after slavery was abolished by the 13th Amendment, Black Americans in the South continued to be persecuted under the regime of Jim Crow laws and segregation;

WHEREAS, between 1877 and 1950, more than 4,084 Black people were lynched in the South, including three people who were lynched in Buncombe County²;

WHEREAS, many Black Americans could not effectively exercise the right to vote in the United States until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 due to racist state and local voter suppression laws;

WHEREAS, public schools in Buncombe County were not integrated until the 1966-67 school year, as a result of a district court ruling more than a decade after the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education³;

WHEREAS, even after the era of legal segregation ended, Black Americans continue to experience the harms of institutional and systemic racism;

¹ 1860 Slave Schedule; 1860 Census

² Equal Justice Institute: <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report>

³ <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2016/01/07/today-asheville-history-buncombe-school-integration-plan/78400878/>

WHEREAS, urban renewal in Buncombe County destroyed many homes and businesses owned by Black families and greatly harmed many traditional minority neighborhoods, displacing many people to live in public housing;

WHEREAS, despite decades of policy-level efforts and community and faith-based efforts to create racial justice, deep disparities persist for Black people in Buncombe County, including but not limited to the areas of infant mortality, home ownership, ownership of businesses, earnings, health, education, justice system involvement, incarceration, and life expectancy;

WHEREAS, in Buncombe County, only 41% of Black people own the home they live in compared with 65% for White people⁴;

WHEREAS, although Black people comprise 6.3% of the population of Buncombe County, less than 2% of businesses are owned by Black people⁵;

WHEREAS, Buncombe County has a leadership role in supporting economic development, public education and health care in our community and must assure this vital work is carried out so all people have an equal opportunity to thrive and that no part of our community is left behind;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress passed resolutions via House Bill 194 in 2008 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 in 2008, apologizing for slavery and Jim Crow, however our country has not yet made reparations for these harms, which have now passed through generations of Black Americans⁶;

WHEREAS, the United States has made reparations to other communities who have experienced human rights violations and systemic racism⁷, including Japanese Americans who were interned and their descendants; to Pueblo Native Americans in 1924; Navajo-Hopi Native Americans in 1950; Alaskan Native Americans in 1971; Seminole and Chippewa Native Americans in 1985; and Ottawa Native Americans all via acts of Congress supported by presidents Coolidge, Truman, Nixon, and Reagan, respectively. Reparations have also been made to descendants of survivors of racial terrorism and massacres targeting Black people in Rosewood, Florida, and Greenwood, Oklahoma, through acts of their state legislatures in 1994 and 2001;

WHEREAS, on July 14, 2020 the City of Asheville passed a resolution to create a local commission to make recommendations about how community reparations can be made and has invited other local governments to participate;

⁴ U.S. Census, 2018 American Community Survey

⁵ <https://www.stateofblackasheville.org/economics/>

⁶ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hres194/text>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/reparations-slavery.html>

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNTY COMMISSION OF BUNCOMBE COUNTY

The County Commission of Buncombe County:

- (1) apologizes to the Black community - including descendants of people who were enslaved in Buncombe County - and seeks to make amends for Buncombe County's participation in and sanctioning of the enslavement of Black people;
- (2) apologizes to the Black community and seeks to make amends for Buncombe County's enforcement of segregation and racist, discriminatory policies and practices during that era;
- (3) apologizes to the Black community and seeks to make amends for Buncombe County's participation in an urban renewal program that harmed multiple, successful black communities;
- (4) will appoint representatives to and fully participate in the new Community Reparations Commission that the City of Asheville is creating;
- (5) calls on other organizations and institutions in our community that have advanced and benefitted from racial inequity to join in these steps;
- (6) calls on the U.S. Congress to pass H.R. 40, which would establish the federal Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans, which would examine the legacy of slavery and discrimination in the United States and make recommendations to Congress to address their lingering impacts⁸;
- (7) calls on the state government of North Carolina to complete a parallel process;
- (8) directs county staff, including the newly-formed Equity and Inclusion Workgroup, to continue prioritizing racial equity in the implementation of the Buncombe County Strategic plan, including but not limited to the following urgent priority areas for Black residents of Buncombe County:
 - Expanding access to quality early childhood education and taking other steps to reduce the opportunity and achievement gap in the local public school systems;
 - Increasing Black home ownership, business ownership and other strategies to support upward mobility and build generational wealth within the Black community;
 - Reducing health disparities, including infant mortality;

⁸ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40>

- Reducing racial disparities in the justice system.

(9) directs county staff to update content on www.buncombecounty.org about the history of Buncombe County to include references to enslaved people who lived in our community; and

(10) directs county staff to provide, at minimum, bi-annual updates to the County Commission on the impact of strategies being pursued through the Strategic Plan on reducing racial disparities in Buncombe County; and on the progress of the Community Reparations Commission.

Read, approved and adopted this 4th day of August, 2020.

COUNTY CLERK

COMMISSION CHAIR

Approved as to form:

COUNTY ATTORNEY