



Writing a New History

*When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression, and war. So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and **let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide.***

John R. Lewis (1940–2020)

U.S. Representative (Georgia—5th District)

Excerpt from Lewis' essay published July 30, 2020



Our Mission

The 400 Years of African-American History Commission Act, signed into law January 8, 2018, established a 15-member commission to coordinate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the English colonies. The Commission's purpose is to plan, develop, and carry out programs and activities throughout the United States that:

- Recognize and highlight the resilience and cultural contributions of Africans and African Americans over 400 years;
- Acknowledge the impact of slavery and laws that enforced racial discrimination on the United States;
- Encourage civic, patriotic, historical, educational, artistic, religious, and economic organizations to organize and take part in anniversary activities; and
- Assist states, localities, and nonprofit organizations to further the commemoration and coordinate public scholarly research

about the arrival of Africans and their contributions to the United States.

The Commission may also provide:

- Grants to communities and nonprofit organizations to develop programs;
- Grants to research and scholarly organizations to research, study, publish, or distribute information about the arrival of Africans in the United States; and
- Technical assistance to states, localities, and nonprofit organizations.

The Commission operates as an entity of the Executive Branch of the federal government. Among its primary federal and nonprofit partners are the **U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, and the National Alliance of Faith and Justice.**

Standing, left to right: Mrs. Kenya Cox, Dr. Myron Pope, Mr. Hannibal B. Johnson, Supt. Terry Brown, and Supt. Lewis Rogers. Seated, left to right: Mr. Ron Carson, Mr. Ted Ellis, Dr. Rex Ellis, Ms. Addie Richburg, Prophet Anyanwu Cox.



Milestones in Writing a New History

January 8, 2018: As enacted by Public Law 115-102, the 400 Years of African-American History Commission ("400 YAAHC" or "Commission") was signed into law by the President of the United States. Appointed to serve through June 30, 2021, the Commission, composed of 15 members and staffed by an executive director and administrative assistant, will plan, develop, and carry out programs and activities throughout the United States that commemorate 400 years of African American history.

June 12, 2019: Senator Mark Warner, Congressional host, and the 400 YAAHC convened **"Let's Talk About Our Dream: A 400-Year Journey of Trials, Triumphs, and Trailblazing."** Over 400 students, educators, officials, and special guests gathered in the auditorium at the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center. Among celebrity guests and speakers were: program host and philanthropist, Nick Cannon; federal legislative leaders Rep. Bobby Scott (VA) and Rep. Karen Bass (CA); Elizabeth Eckford of the Little Rock Nine; and Dr. Bernice King, daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King.

July 19, 2019: The 400 YAAHC launched the **"LET'S TALK: The International Day of Drumming and Healing"** to symbolize the ongoing process of healing and pay tribute to drumming as a sustained cultural tradition.

August 22–25, 2019: With the National Park Service and state and municipal partners, the 400 YAAHC participated in the development and execution of programs and activities in Hampton and Ft. Monroe, Virginia, which served as the official national commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Africans in the English colonies at Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1619.

September 25, 2019: The "Let's Talk About Our Dream" National Education Campaign that designated 400 secondary and higher education institutions as National Education Ambassadors of African American history began at Old Dominion University in Virginia. Prior to the interruption of classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ODU became the first of many schools committed to educating the public about the arrival of Africans in the United States and their subsequent contributions. These schools promote academic inclusion and special emphasis programming to ensure that we continue to write new history in commemorating 400-plus years of African American history.

October 7, 2019: The 400 YAAHC was invited by the Virginia Municipal League to provide a briefing to mayors and other municipal leaders during the annual luncheon of the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials convened in Roanoke, Virginia.



2020

Through a series of site-based and virtual public education meetings, film, publication, and education projects scheduled through 2021, the 400 YAAHC has and will continue to feature and benefit from the work of notable scholars and subject matter experts. To date, over 1,500 virtual attendees have joined the Commission in exploring a variety of topics, including health education/research, the arts/entertainment, economics, and criminal justice.

Through “Writing A New History,” the Commission continues to acknowledge the impact that slavery and laws that enforced racial discrimination had on the United States.

Through discretionary competition and special commemorative grants, the 400 YAAHC has awarded close to \$1.5 million to over 100 citadels of higher education, public institutions, historic sites, nonprofits, and cultural education program recipients in 25 states during FY20.

June 19 (Juneteenth) to August 25, 2020: Mayors from over 400 cities joined with the 400 YAAHC to stimulate unity by proclamation throughout the nation. Through this effort, the 400 YAAHC demonstrated its commitment to national synergies that support equal justice for all.

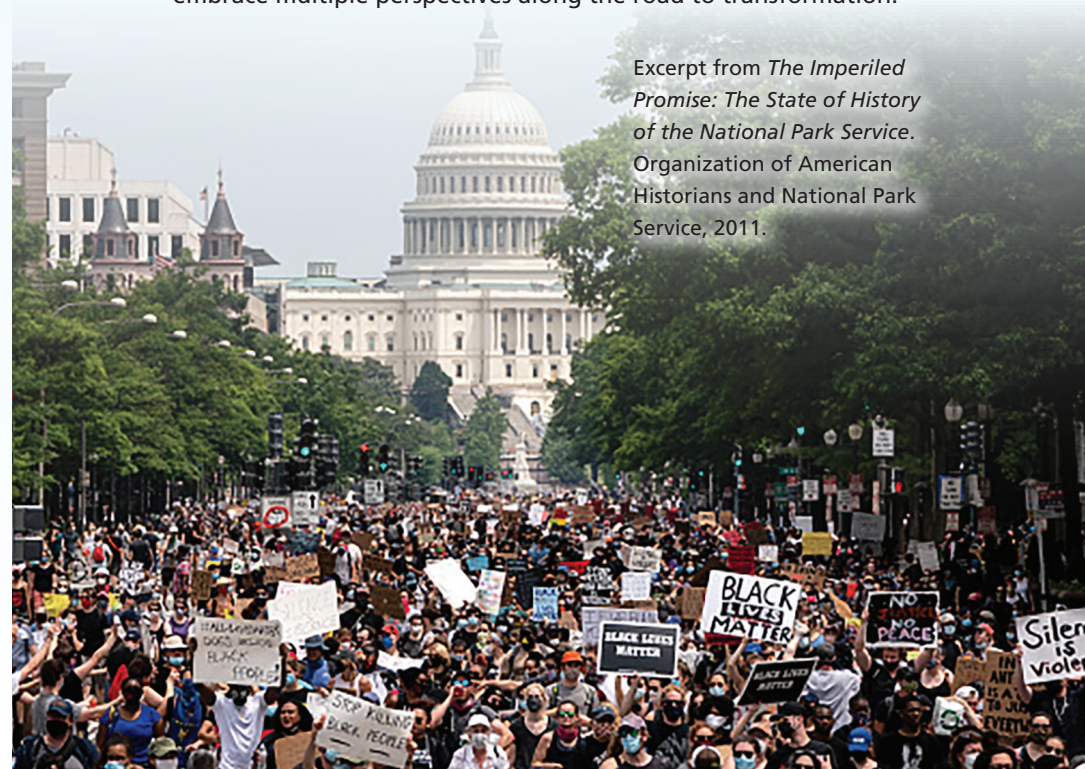
By June 2021: Four hundred men, women, and youth across the nation receive the 400 Distinguished Award, recognizing “firsts” in African American history, and hundreds of deeds known and less-known. Through this effort, the Commission will be able to fulfill one of its primary legislative priorities: recognizing and highlighting the resilience and contributions of 400 African Americans across diverse fields.

The Road Ahead

Interpretations of the past are forever open and subject to reconsideration; history is never “done.” We share the belief that history must not be perceived as a tightly bounded, single and unchanging “accurate” story, with one true significance. In writing new history, we believe history to be an ongoing discovery process in which narratives change over time as generations develop new questions and concerns and multiple perspectives are explored. We must embrace the historical and contemporary reality that the content and meanings of American civic heritage are not self-evident; they, too, are contested and evolving. We are challenged by changing perspectives in a complicated world.

In writing new history, we must come to terms with the legacies of injustice, listen respectfully to others, develop empathy, and embrace multiple perspectives along the road to transformation.

Excerpt from *The Imperiled Promise: The State of History of the National Park Service*. Organization of American Historians and National Park Service, 2011.



400 Years of African-American History Commission

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Dr. Rex M. Ellis
National Museum of African American History
and Culture (Retired)
Williamsburg, VA
Chairman

Mr. Ted T. Ellis
Artist and Cultural Historian
Friendswood, TX
Vice Chairman

Mr. Ron Carson
Carson Black Lung Centers
Pennington Gap, VA
2nd Vice Chair

Myron L. Pope, Ed.D
Vice President of Student Affairs
University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL
Treasurer

Ms. Addie L Richburg
Executive Director

Past Officers

Dr. Joseph L. Green, Jr.
The 2019 Movement
Harrisburg, PA

Mr. Glenn M. Freeman
National Council of Censors
Omaha, NE

National Park Service Representative

Superintendent Terry E. Brown
Ft. Monroe National Monument
Ft. Monroe, VA

COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Lonnie G. Bunch III
Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
Washington, DC

Ms. Kenya Cox
Kansas African American Affairs Commission
Topeka, KS

Prophet N. Anyanwu Cox, M.Ed
Reconciliation Min. w/o Walls
Wichita, KS

Mr. Hannibal B. Johnson, Esq.
Author, Attorney and Consultant
Tulsa, OK

Mr. Kenneth S. Johnson
Johnson Marketing, Inc.
Richmond, VA

Mr. George K. Martin
McGuireWoods LLC
Richmond, VA

Dr. H. Patrick Swygert
President Emeritus, Howard University
Philadelphia, PA

Mr. Bob Kendrick
Negro Leagues Baseball Museum
Kansas City, MO

Alternate

Superintendent Lewis H. Rogers Jr.
Petersburg National Battlefield
Petersburg, VA

400 Years of African-American
History Commission
PO Box 77075
Washington, DC 20013
202-661-3521
202-478-2575 FAX
www.400YAAHC.gov

CREDITS Front cover—Khalid Naji/AP; Commissioners
at table—400 YAAHC; group on steps of Capitol—
Michael Anthony Photography; Marchers in front
of Capitol—Getty Images; Below, Commissioners at
landing site—Christine Lucero/National Park Service

