

H.478: An act relating to establishing a task force to study and consider a State apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery

Representative Brian Cina

March 20, 2019

H.478- Slavery Reparations Task Force

- Convenes an 11-member task force, appointed by Governor and the Legislature. At minimum, four appointees shall represent major civil society and reparations organizations that have historically championed the cause of reparatory justice, including the NAACP, Justice For All, and Black Lives Matter. Members shall be drawn from diverse backgrounds to represent the interests of communities of color throughout the State, have experience working to implement racial justice reform, and, to the extent possible, represent geographically diverse areas of the State
- Studies and considers a State apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery
- Makes recommendations to the General Assembly on appropriate remedies

Slavery in Vermont

Vermont Constitution abolishes slavery, with exceptions, on July 8, 1777.

"Among this slave-holding and lawless elite were Vermont Supreme Court Judge Stephen Jacob and Levi Allen, described by Whitfield as "Ethan's troublesome brother." And nearly 60 years after the supposed abolition of slavery in Vermont, Ethan Allen's daughter, Lucy Caroline Hitchcock, returned to Burlington from Alabama in possession of two slaves — a mother and child. Hitchcock continued to enslave this pair for six years in the Queen City."

<https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/uvm-slavery-study-challenges-vermonts-abolitionist-rep/Content?oid=2296191>

Harvey Amani Whitfield, *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont, 1777-1810*: Vermont Historical Society, 2014.

"The language of the act was sufficiently vague that slaveholding may have persisted without sanction in a few cases for several years."

Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and 'Race' in New England 1780-1860*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998, p.64.

From Slavery to Systemic Racism

Some examples of the legacy of slavery:

- Sharecropping
- Convict leasing
- Jim Crow laws
- Redlining
- Unequal education
- Disproportionate treatment in the criminal justice system

Systemic Racism in Vermont

Act 54 (2017) Task Force Report by the Attorney General and the Human Rights Commission:

- Acknowledged "racial disparities within the state systems of education, labor and employment, access to housing and healthcare and economic development."
- Stated "While slavery has been outlawed in this country for over 150 years, the vestiges of it and of Jim Crow remain today in the form of systemic racism"
- Concluded "Everyone who has grown up in this country is a beneficiary of a White Supremacy culture..." We are on a path to reversing this but it will require difficult decisions."

Dismantling Systemic Racism in Vermont

- Acknowledged racial disparities across all systems of state government in [Act 54 \(2017\)](#).
- Committed to "dismantling systemic racism" in [Act 9 \(2018\)](#). The Racial Equity Director will be seated any day now.
- Introduced [H.R.25 \(2018\)](#), which urged the 2019 Senate to Amend the Constitution to ensure that slavery is completely prohibited.
- [PR.2](#), a proposal to amend the constitution to ensure that slavery is completely prohibited to "serve as a foundation for addressing systemic racism in our State's laws and institutions" is now in Senate Government Operations.
- NEXT STEP: Bring in witnesses and hear testimony. Take a closer look at the Vermont history. Pass [H.478](#) and establish a Slavery Reparations Task Force to research reparations and consider a formal state apology for slavery.