



**Reparations Task Force Meeting
Thursday, March 7, 2024, at 6 p.m.**

Location: Fulton County Government Center Assembly Hall, 141 Pryor St SW, Atlanta, GA
30303

Zoom:

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/!QbbrmETndvr28rP8Zm-UctEeqdwODbimBl9urYUCfjTiiz-DPkmH8vSuufmLDah.cVlqn7e1E-KhkugS>

POST AGENDA MINUTES – RATIFIED

This document has been ratified or approved by the Fulton County Reparations Task Force and is not binding on the County or any officer.

****A QUORUM WAS PRESENT****

Roll Call: Rodney Littles, Donte’ Thompson, Ann Hill Bond, Greg Fann, Amanda Meng, Karcheik Sims-Alvarado, Elon Butts Osby, Marcus Coleman, Mike Russell, Michael Simanga (online), Carole Sykes (online)

Staff Present: Fran Calhoun and Jordana Arias

Adoption of March 7, 2024, Meeting Agenda

Motion by Rodney Littles. Seconded by Mike Russell. Motion passes.

Approval of February 8, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Motion by Donte’ Thompson. Seconded by Marcus Coleman. Motion passes.

Old Business

- Research update
 - Christopher Smothers provides the following updates on the enslaved persons research: Since our last meeting, we have done a lot of work. Mostly the work that we have done involves extracting the names of all the enslaved people in Fulton County. So in that time period, not only have we gone through the

painstaking work to extract all the names of those who were enslaved in Fulton County in between 1853 and 1865. We've also looked at the tax digest records and the tax digest records happen every year since the county was founded. And the tax digest records include critical information that helped us fully realize the African-American experience in Fulton County, whether you were a free person of color or you were enslaved. So we had already identified the names of every slave owner via the 1850 and 60 slave schedules. However, the tax digests allow us to identify the slave owners in between those 10 year periods. And if someone were to move to Fulton County and own enslaved people and then they moved away, like before or after the 1860 slave schedules, we're able to see, okay, this person came to Fulton County from 1854 to 1858 and left. That's why they were not on the 1860 slave schedules, or they came in 1861 and they were slave owners until emancipation in 1865. We can see that data reflected. We can also see that not every slave owner owned a ton of land. So we can also see, you know, the free white people if they own land or not, the slave owners that they own land or not. But we also can calculate the percentage of their estate based off of what percentage of their whole estate is made up from the value of enslaved people. And then we're looking at the net aggregate income of taxation on enslaved people for Fulton County. So each year the tax commissioner goes through or tax assessor goes through and makes sure that those policies coming directly from the state are followed for local jurisdiction here in Fulton County. In addition to all of that, we have begun to use the information that we extracted from the 18, not just the slave schedules, but all of the probate records that I pulled the names of enslaved people out of in identifying those individuals on the 1870 United States federal census. So what this allows us to do is really trace the descendants and the legacy and the posterity of those who were enslaved in Fulton County. So now we're moving in our, you know, in our own way to not only quantify and identify but also locate and identify living descendants. So that's a little bit about what we've done in the past since the last meeting.

- Chair Karcheik Sims-Alvarado: And for the record, I want to say that I recommended that you do not provide a PowerPoint because I know that you all are updating information every single day, every single column, and you all are making discoveries along the way. And there's so much information that you have compiled together over a short period. So I want to applaud you all for your efforts. I think it's important what you're doing regarding looking at the tax digest and seeing how much, and I'm not sure we want to reveal that just yet, the percentage of the value of the enslaved compared to the value of the property. And I want to know what those numbers are and I know y'all are still calculating it. So I just wanted to shed light on what I am seeing as you all are working.
- Mike Russell: You know my favorite thing is have you been able to reach any of the descendants?

- Christopher Smothers: So, I have not taken an active role in contacting descendants yet, because I want to make sure that before we move there, that we gather the full impact of that presentation. If we are careful about how we contact people, I think we can better present, because processing the emotional component of this is something that you really want to be complete in the way that you prepare it. So, right now we have the names of the ancestors and who they were owned by, but I also would like to give them, okay, here's how we got to you. You know, here's the, the, the descendant chart of, okay, here's your ancestor who was enslaved from Fulton County. Here you are. And this is the experience that they've had, whether they migrated outside of Fulton County or they stayed here the whole time. I just want to be able to give them a complete story because, you know, doing Black genealogy is combating the lack of information.

- Mike Russell: I fully understand that and the only thing I'll say is I'd like to go to my commissioner and ask her, I think this means this reunion or this process beyond just the Reparation's Task Force. I think we need to do that. Whether it's, I'd like to see it on video, on film, but I'd like to see if they can't fund us or support us, us being the residents of Fulton County, because we lose all this history, right? If we had a way to document that and with their permission to get their feelings about the reunion and how they feel about that on both sides, and so that we have this history that we don't lose again. But I, if no one has any objection to that, I will talk to my county rep and see if she can help us move that forward.

- Chair Karcheik Sims-Alvarado: If I may, one of the things I think that researchers do is that they're mining information in the middle of the night. And so it's difficult to document that as is happening, and it would be wonderful to be able to shed a light on that. One of the things that the researchers are doing is actually explaining the process of finding these documents, the methods that they're using in order to answer the questions. Christopher, if you don't mind, can you share a little bit of the research methodology and how you are finding the names of individuals between the years of 1850 and 1860? And I want to share with everyone that this has never been done before by historians. In fact, I don't think that I've seen any study on slavery of the years in between 1850 and 1860. Share with us, if you will, how you are going about that process.

- Christopher Smothers: Few historians focus during Reconstruction. Most historians jump to after the Hayes administration, you know, till the election. But in between 1850 and 1860, outside of the slave schedules, the names of people will be listed in probate records, property deeds, successions, wills, and certain tax digest information. Sometimes the tax commissioner will write the names

of that person who the county used to build the infrastructure and like the hiring out of their labor. Sometimes they'll write the name of the enslaved person and say, okay, this person worked for the county for a year for their labor, to build. And so that's, you know, one of the ways, but the majority of the names of enslaved people come from, you know, after their former owner dies. So when the former owner dies, they write a will of their estate, someone is appointed over their estate, as the administrator. And then one thing I really like about the probate as far as being able to trace it, the migration is the probate actually lists when the owner dies who they're sold to. It lists their evaluation when the owner dies of what they were worth, who they were sold to, and what they were sold for. So you get all of those moving components. And not all of the sales took place in Fulton County after an owner died. Some of them happened in Forsyth or Cobb County. So depending on who the administrator was and where they lived, you'll be able to identify exactly who that person was transferred to and find the deed that corresponds with that sale as well, each probate. So between 1850 and 1860, there are records that specify the documents related to their sale after owner's death. In addition to that, you have other records like insurance policies that are written for enslaved people and awarded to slave owners should something happen to an enslaved person.

- Elon Butts Osby: Madam Chair, I'd like to ask a question of clarification. When you [Mike Russell] were speaking about us finding funding to possibly record the transaction or whatever, I thought when meant when you are able to locate a descendant.
- Mike Russell: I would like to see if we could do it quick enough, because you know how slow it is. If we could actually record the process of finding those documents. So the future generations have seen them, and maybe that would inspire them to go do their own research. And then as the progress is made towards the end, I would imagine with their permission, you would be able to interview both the families, the descendants of the slave owners and the enslaved people and get that on them. And then maybe show their family actual property that had belonged to the descendants of these enslaved people and where it is today, what's happened up to the present time. I think that would be very informative if we could do that. So I will start on this, if nobody has a objection, tomorrow.
 - Christopher Smothers: That would be wonderful. Even today I was sharing with Dr. Karcheik, in the WPA Slave Narratives, which was an initiative that was started during the New Deal, there were several people in Fulton County who testified to their experience.

And I actually went through to date the tax digest for a certain individual who owned eight or nine people in Buckhead. And one of the people that he owned gave his testimony in the 1930s. And he basically articulated what his father had told him how they were sold from Virginia to a spectator. And that spectator brought them to Decatur. And in Decatur they were sold to their final owner in Buckhead. So even in that, you know, reality, I would love to find his descendants and show them, here your ancestors' words from the 1930s and, you know, be able to bridge that oral history and that cultural legacy and cultural memory of their family.

- Ann Hill Bond: I have a question, are we looking at the descendants of slave owners as well?
 - Christopher Smothers: Yeah
- Vice Chair Marcus Coleman: First, let me start off by saying hello. I see a lot of good friends and stuff in the audience for housekeeping and political purposes, and plus, there's a conrad. I'd like to acknowledge the former, the mayor of the city of South Fulton, Mayor Khalid Kamau. And, and plenty of others. I think I have a slight objection, Mr. Russell, considering the historical nature of this project and sensitivity and information. And your famous now [Christopher Smothers], you stood up in the chambers and said you could locate every single descendant. Considering Mr. Russell, it is public information that the commissioner that appointed you is publicly against reparations. I would think that would be counterproductive to, let me make sure, she was publicly against reparation. I'm not sure, maybe she's changed. But I don't see, it doesn't sit comfortable with me to have a commissioner bring like some type of recording of this very crucial research that we will then use to roll out in the forms of political suggestions that have to be voted upon. Unless her political position has changed, but I mean she is publicly against reparation, so I don't see how someone is publicly against reparation secure public funds for this. That just seems, I have to put that out in the task force, you know, we have to be careful. We have to be careful because all of this work, at the end of the day, I'm always going to be looking out for the success of this task force. I did have something for you, Mr. Smothers. Since you've been doing this work, I know you gave a very passionate address last time you were here. Has there been anything that has raised your eyebrows? Has there been any research or any evidence, red flags, something that is unseen before?
 - Christopher Smothers: I'm trying to be careful with my words.
 - Vice Chair Marcus Coleman: Which is why we shouldn't be recording the research, if we're being careful.

- Christopher Smothers: I'll say this. There are opportunities within our government to work together to accomplish this effort. And the sentiment I experience when trying to work with certain individuals in our government is that they are not being intentional about building relationships, even after I've contacted, not just me, but the Chair of this task force as well. There's records that do exist in some form and capacity. But there's been no open dialogue about allowing us to walk through certain archival spaces in full county, local county archives that would help us really expand the study from the transactional economic perspective. So it's disconcerting to know that people who are in elected positions would stifle the progress of this research. So there's many things I could say that are red flags from the government level. But in the research itself, there are things that should be available that are not available. And that limits our capacity to really identify the full breadth of, because not every slave owner died during 1850, 1860, or died, or some slave owners lived in past emancipation. So in order to identify the names of people who were bought and sold in the county of Fulton, require that we get access to deed records that implicate the transactions of auction houses, brokers, spectators, and other individuals involved in the plantation economy. So that would be in the Clerk of Superior Court.
- Chair Karcheik Sims-Alvarado: We need to understand, even those who are elected officials, must understand that public records must be made accessible to the public. Okay. And these are not your records. You cannot have them behind your desk. You cannot Christopher Columbus it. And you must understand these are not your personal possessions. They belong to the county. There's vital information in it, which is called vital records. Okay. And those records have been on the shelves for as long as I've been in the county. And when Mr. Smothers and I went to certain buildings looking for records, they were missing. And they have been sitting in the same place for as long as I've been doing research in this county, and then they just miraculously disappeared as we began doing this research. So I just want to go on the record to say that they need to be taken from behind the shelf and placed back onto the shelf where they are made accessible to the public.
- Amanda Meng: I just wanted to say the intent and motivation of making this research process more public, I really appreciate. My concern is that it starts to sound like a recommendation from the task force, and I don't think we're at the point of recommendations. And I know the process is happening now, so you would want to act on recording it, but there could be other ways that we make the recordings and some of the key statements from the very powerful task force meetings that we've have much more

accessible than how we currently are that could just help the public see this process. It's something that we do and not request from the board of commissioners. So I am just concerned about making something that sounds like a recommendation at this point because I don't think we're there yet.

- Vice Chair Marcus Coleman: Just briefly, and I appreciate what Ms. Calhoun said at the end of the meeting, but I still have to be honest and speak my truth. So, considering the magnitude of the work that we're doing, everyone in here is doing. It's disheartening that we can't be viewed on Fulton County government TV. It's disheartening that it's kind of treated like an afterthought considering how serious and important this is. I can understand things happening. You have to roll with it, but I think it's blatantly obvious that whomever in the county is not taking this work serious enough until that day comes when the suggestions come out and this work is extremely important. We shouldn't have IT issues, and considering this county has got its own network, we should be broadcasting on that.

- Rodney Littles: I've been around politics for quite a few years, up north and down south. I had the same feeling when I heard we were going to have a black out tonight. I'm not going to take it lightly, so I'm going to make some phone calls. On another note, I want to thank the research and staff for what you're doing. You're close to where we want to be. I'm very proud of the leadership of the task force and staff that's been assembled to do this work. I have a question, son. On any tax records that you haven't been able to get?
 - Christopher Smothers: Okay. Certain records pertaining to tax records specifically that we're having difficulties getting may not exist anymore. So there's 1860, 1861, 1863. Those are not at the state archives, so I'm not sure if secretary of state may still have them or they just don't exist in addition to that. I want to say 1858 does not exist or cannot be found.
 - Rodney Littles: So based on the values that you came up with and the taxes that we have found, can we ensure that we're getting an estimate?
 - Christopher Smothers: Yes.
 - Chair Karcheik Sims-Alvarado: And let me say that because we haven't been able to have access to these records here in the county, I mean in the county government, that the researchers have to go all the way to Morrow, Georgia, in order to access these records. And so this takes away time and they've been very, they

found a very ingenious way to get the records in spite of them not being able to have access to the records. And I can speak to this. There are certain records that are just not on the shelf. Like the records for the deeds records of the enslaved and the sheriff sales. Am I right?

- Christopher Smothers: That's correct. So every county has a sheriff's sale book, anytime tax, I mean land goes tax delinquent, any county sells it in public auction, this is a common practice we still have today. So in the same way, property that slave owners defaulted on, i.e. enslaved people could be sold at public auction again. So there should be a whole book for a series of years that the county had at one point. And we know for the books that are missing, that are completely missing off the shelf, they have it, they have the book for the years before it and the years after it. It's just the one specifically related to the auction houses, those are not on the shelves. And when I tried to investigate this, there were a lot of complication. So that seemed very, I can't say what I want to say, but it seemed very disenfranchised. Those books, the originals, are actually in local Fulton County archives. They're not at the courthouse, they're offsite. In the warehouse that I've been to.
- Fran Calhoun: Fulton County Board of Commissioners has established this task force, giving you a charge, giving you funds to hire researchers. And quite honestly, I am certain that I can say that those commissioners would like for this task force to operate and its researchers with the highest amount of support from Fulton County, as well as whatever access is available to the public, even if it's an open records type of request. And so if we are encountering problems, then please do report that to us. That's why we're here. We are here to support you. And this is quite honestly the first time that I, my supervisor or anybody else, are so interested in this purpose. I'm not aware of whether or not the commissioners or anyone is for this. I'm not really sure where all of the barriers are, but we certainly would love to help to remove those barriers. And I would like to also just make it a point of verification, it's okay, that we are not locked down. As I stated, we do have a zoom, which is why that computer is there. We have both the archive of the meeting, as well as for the speakers to be seen and broadcast to the online listening public. We do apologize that I am told that one of our IT persons got sick and we can't have the full setup going. But we endeavor to do our best, no matter what our barriers are. And so we are doing this workaround. Sometimes we have to go manual. You know, IT is great when it is, and when it isn't, you have to do a work around. And so we're

doing a semi, you know, IT level workaround. All right, but please do let us know how we can be of assistance.

- Rodney Littles: I got a text message saying the guests cannot get on, it's not working. The error message says unable to join this webinar, webinar has expired.
 - Fran Calhoun: No, the link should be working and it's the same link that we use for every meeting.
 - Rodney Littles: Error code 3030.
 - Fran Calhoun: Okay, got it. All right. We'll work on that. Thank you so much for letting me know.
- Rodney Littles provides a financial update
 - AUCC moved its payroll management system from Paycor to ADP WorkMarket effective 02/01/2024
 - AUCC processed Fulton County Reparations Taskforce February 2024 Payroll, \$14,285.72 through ADP WorkMarket
 - AUCC sent the second invoice (attached- for \$70,000) for payment on 02/06/2024; it has not been paid

New Business

- Invited Talk from the Descendants of Rosewood Foundation (see recording link at the top of the document)
- Discuss creation of an advisory board
 - Vice Chair Coleman: After speaking to Commissioner Arington and others, it was suggested that there be an advisory board created by us because of the high volume of those who now want to serve on the board. And the idea is two members per district. And they would basically serve as, like it says, as an advisory committee, but it would be selected by those of us who were sitting on the task force. And from my understanding, it would serve as every month there would be some type of report that would be read off from this advisory board. So I just, you know, I want to make sure it was on the agenda, understanding that we have researchers in place. Again, this is all birthed from the high volume of calls that they're receiving about those who want to help. I honestly think it could be very beneficial, the more eyes that we have and brains that we have on this the better. It adds another component. Not keeping us here any longer, Brother Fann, but it has us here. I mean, it has another component where we could hear a report. So again, I want to throw it out there and glad it was on the agenda. But again,

this is birthed from the high volume of those who profess that they have helpful information for us. So I just want to put that out. And see how you felt about that.

- Elon Osby: I do not understand, what is their purpose?
- Vice Chair Coleman: It's basically. Again, it will be two per district. What do we have 11 members here now? It would be two per district. And they would be a totally separate from us, Ms. Osby. And they would be giving basically recommendations every month on how they see it. You know, just be another board of the community. And again, it is birthed from there being a number of people saying that they have valuable information that could be helpful to us. That would be for us to determine. You know, how valuable that information, you know, is but. Again, I'm the messenger. I'm big on community support. I guess I yield, I want to throw it out here to the task force.
 - Various questions from members of the task force
 - Vice Chair Coleman: Let me take these items and get back to the sources that wanted me to present it.
- Update on Status of HB 955 and discussion of official position
 - Rodney Littles: HB 955 is called the Georgia Equity and Fairness Commission Act. And it was proposed three years ago, two sessions. The bill would basically set up a state commission to look at the impact of chattel slavery on the descendants in Georgia, bottom line. It was reported to the House State Planning and Community Affairs Committee. It was read twice and died in committee, no public hearing. The Legislative Black Caucus picked it up as an issue. And there was nothing that they could leverage it with where their votes were needed because they're in the minority. The key sponsors on the bill that were the names that were signed and visible, it's only six signatures tops. The prime sponsor was State Representative Roger Bruce. Well, full disclosure, I was the staff person that did the research and helped to draft the bill. Reverend Representative Billy Mitchell, Representative Debra Bazesmore, Representative Carl Gilliard, who was chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus. Representative Al Williams, and Representative Derrick Jackson.

Public Comments (end of minutes)

Adjourn

Public Comment

Jermaine Ross Allen

Thank you. My name is Jermaine Ross Allen. Serve as the inaugural director of the Center for the Repair of Historic Harms with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. And I just want to begin by saying thank you to Dr. Alvarado Sims. Sims-Alvarado, forgive me. And also for Mr. Christopher Smothers for letting me know about this meeting and for inviting me to it. Just briefly, I don't have a whole lot to say, but I wanted to say that I'm very excited and very encouraged to hear of the existence of this commission. And because of the work of this commission, I'm sure I don't have to tell any of you that I represented a nomination that has been both the best and the absolute worst. On the question of slavery and the process is necessary to recover from being emancipated without compensation and exposed to Jim Crow and everything else without appropriate fourteenth amendment protections. And I've been hardened listening to the presentations in the proceedings today and I've been reminded as well of ancestral duties by the way that Mr. Doctor has presented today and has shown me what it means to be faithful to the work that's given to you. And all of this is simply to say that I will continue to pay close attention to the work and the success and hopefully not but even the obstructions experienced by this body because the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has finally gotten on the right path. The understanding that it has very specific institutional responsibilities for which it must make repairs. And the Presbyterian Church also understands that it has set damages in motion historically that must also be addressed on a federal level. Having said that, I also want to say that if there is information about Presbyterians who owned slaves that you come across, the center for the repair of historic harms is very interested in that information here in Georgia and also in Florida. And we are interested in helping our constituents in our members understand that apologies are necessary and reparations are mandatory. And where we can be helpful as a denomination with the work that you are doing, whether that's in the form of encouragement, publicity, and other forms of support that can be discussed. We would appreciate to be in touch. Keeping abreast of the work that you are doing and if there are other ways to be in touch and to work together, we look forward to hearing about that. Even ideas that are in a nascent form of being thought about and imagined. And thank you once again for the faithful work and the witness that you are providing on the national and even on an international level. Thank you again.

Jumoke Ifetayo

Greetings. Fulton county Task Force, I really wasn't going to speak today, but I was really moved by the brother from Florida, who is in Atlanta now, in Rosewood. Because really all of these harms impact all of us. I saw how you all were so intent and moved by what he was saying. But Tulsa impacts all of us. You know, Wilmington, all of these atrocities affect all of us. And so just glad that you all are doing this work and continue to do this work. Glad to be a part and support Beacon Hill in their effort to get some seed money to move their reparations work forward in Decatur. Th City Council was very supportive of what they were doing. Thinking I was just like I said moved just by the connections here though you know I did some work down in Florida with Lizzy Robinson who was one of the descendant families. We did a special ceremony to honor the 100th anniversary of the massacre there. It was a very powerful, moving ceremony that we did at the site. You know, I was thinking about Presbyterian church there. Brother Mark Lomax, who I used to go to his church, told me he was the one that introduced the bill to get the Presbyterian denomination to support reparations. Because all of this work is connected. I'm just glad that I've been a part of it. And again, I just wanted to close out by saying, you know, I've mentioned this before, but say it again, there's a group of activist organizations that I'm working with that want to know how we can more inform the research while it's going on. So I'm asking again, it's a group of groups of organizations that I'm officially working with that want to know how we can contribute to the process while we're doing research before it gets reported out. So. You got me? Alright. Thank you.

Kylie Irving

Hi everybody. My name is, my name is Kylie Irving. I'm a 9th grader at Maynard Jackson. I want to thank everybody, especially the people who have already came up here and shared their story and their vulnerability. Especially for the people who have already come up here and told their story because I know it's hard. Especially when you talk about vulnerability and massacre in the Black community, so I want to applaud you and I'm very thankful for you. And when thinking about mental health, I would, I would wonder when it comes to reparations because a lot of people don't want reparations through money. They want reparations through acts. Like for example, he talked about putting, some of the descendants through college. So I, I was proposing the idea maybe we could think about, providing therapy or some mental health resources, not to just, that is not just just to residents of Fulton County, but specifically the youth

of Fulton County, because I know that they can be overlooked. I talked about this to APS too, because there's not a lot of resources or shown resources to APS schools and Fulton County students. So I would wonder how we're going to address the reparations and mental health when it comes to youth and how we're planning to bring youth into this program because a lot of people, a lot of youth think reparations is so far, like that's just an idea, but you're coming here and working on it every Monday of the month. Sorry, the first Thursday of every month. And, I would just wonder, the past speaker, he talked about bringing an organization there like youth organizations who are in leadership and would like to speak about this. I would wonder how are we planning to bring in the youth and how are we planning to impact youth.