



## Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series

### Past Policies and Practices

[June 3, 2021](#)

#### Comments and Questions from audience members at the event

##### *Transcriptions*

“I was wondering if you can go into the Swann vs Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education case.”

“During the Johnson great society, it’s become more well-known that redlining and just Johnson’s great society had an outcome...that I’ll let others react to. A statistic that’s on the City of Asheville Office of Equity and Inclusion’s website, it’s difficult to pinpoint, but it’s on a table that states that 71 percent of Asheville’s African Americans currently live in public housing. And to me, that’s a metric that says structural racism. I didn’t expect you to fit that into your presentation but I’m wondering, we’re talking about past policies, but as this proceeds into what to do with the future, you can speak to this number but it sort of says segregation continues to me.”

“Thank you so much for your presentation. Can you talk a little bit more about what accounted for the decline in black Buncombe County residents? And can you talk a little bit about whether that challenge or issue would point to a potential solution or point to what reparations could possibly look like?”

“I stand here as the first black valedictorian of Asheville High School, which I guess is historic but the aftermath is something that was not destroyed. There are some of us who are native Ashevilleians, despite our ability, who continue to be left out. I really don’t understand. The data initiative, as Ms. Mitchell talked about, is one in which I chaired, the NAACP’s initiative here in Asheville, to get written consent done. It was based on data and so forth and other initiatives as well. But there is a problem, as you look around this auditorium, many of the people who need to be here, who have been dramatically impacted and, since I’m a native, I’m one of them, they’re not in this room. They really need to be. I don’t know if you know the answer to this question: how do we stop being excluded? Sometimes you speak truth to power and that is the power to exclude you and it doesn’t matter how bright you are. It doesn’t matter how erudite you are either? How do we get involved after we’ve been so long excluded, so long omitted and

the results are the people who are most vulnerable are impacted and hurt? If you look at our demographics and our data, Asheville ranks near the bottom in every way for African Americans. The illusion that you talked about “progressivity” is just that, an illusion. We have the widest achievement gap in the state and the fifth worst in the country. Black motorists are stopped at a higher rate than any other black motorists in North Carolina. Our mortality and morbidity rates are the highest. And black business formation is the worst in the state. I would ask you, how do so many of us, and I’m just one of those who represent the people who are left out, how do we use what skill sets we have in an environment that has been so hostile to us and yet has produced absolutely nothing for people who need it the most? Thank you for coming and thank you for your work.”

“My name is Roy Harris and I’ve been living in Asheville since 1983 and, Attorney Ferguson, your street is changing. It’s probably half and half now, white and black, very few kids at this time. In fact, when I hear a kid giggling in the neighborhood, I stay right around the corner, I jump for joy. Believe it or not, birds even left our neighborhood. When birds leave your neighborhood, your neighborhood is in trouble. I just finished my 71st year on this earth. And last month, I decided to celebrate my birthday by using this theme: to boldly go where no brother has gone before. My first trip, I went to something called “Herb Fest,” which is plants and herbs and all of those kinds of things. There was one brother out there. And I’m thinking, how did we get so far away from producing food? When I look back at the 1920 and 1930 census, beside everyone of my relatives, there is the title of farmer. Not one of us is a farmer anymore. So as I boldly try to go where no brother has gone before, I found some of those places. In fact, I found one just a few moments ago. I stopped over at Mount Zion, parked my car, went in to check the building, started walking across the city, I saw one brother and he was a busker. I saw one black female who I won’t say is homeless or houseless, more house less than anything, and we had a conversation. Even Downtown Asheville, I don’t see myself anymore. So one of the questions I’m asking myself now at this age, am I going to stay in Asheville or do I leave? Am I going to be buried in Riverside Cemetery, Violet Hill, Sunset? Or do I leave now? But when this word reparations came up, I decided maybe I’ll stick around for awhile just to see how all of this plays out. So I just want to answer one question for me, the panelists, should I leave?”

“I too am a 1976 WSSU with the other lady, but I was raised in Asheville, I was raised in stumptown. I get emotional when I talk about it and a lot of my classmates, we talk about it together. As I listen to you Dr. Ferguson talking about Stephens Lee and desegregation, the riot that they called of 1969 at Asheville City High School, I was a sophomore. I was still a kid. It was not a riot. It was a peaceful demonstration because we felt like our rights were not, we were not looked at as equals. And that’s how it began. Is there anyway when I look at reparations, there were some classmates, some seniors, that were expelled because they said they incited the riot,

which they did not do. Would reparations be maybe they would be able to get their diplomas? Would they be able to get recognition for being part of our school system? My heart, still today, I would love to see a proclamation in September of healing for that day because it still impacts me. I don't know how it impacts other people. People don't like to talk about it. It was so horrifying. And to come back into the school system and have the National Guard there in the school. You could not talk. They treated us as if we were criminals. And we were just kids. I think that I probably need help for that because I can never get over it. It brings me to tears. We were dehumanized. We had to run. Nobody cared how we got home. We had to run from Asheville High. I feel for the people that did not incite the riot but they were expelled and never could come back. Is that a part of reparations? If we had a proclamation for healing. Because I do have some white friends who have said they saw the difference in the way we treated them after that riot, which they didn't even know what was going on. But I want to know if that's part of reparations? It would bring some healing for me because of the injustice of that day. We were just kids, even though we were teenagers, we were kids. I'm going to call you out Sandra, she was there. Some people don't like to talk about it. But I have to talk about it because it still hurts me. It still brings me to tears. Is that part of reparations, to have some healing?"

"Thank you all so much for being here and having this conversation. My name is Kyla Morton and I am the granddaughter of the late Reverend Nilous and Christine Avery. They moved here in the 50s to come and be the pastor of Hill Street Church....he was a part of the sit ins at Woolworth and I hate that Mr. Ferguson is not here because I would like to know if there's a connection there. My question is on behalf of my mother, what needs to happen for the function of Asheville to change? It's hard to live here. I just recently moved here from Greensboro. I got here and the cost of living is ridiculous. Jobs are hard to find. My friends are not moving here because of that, and these are young black professionals. So what needs to happen for things to change here?"

"Well my birthday is tomorrow. I'll be 81. I grew up in the deep South, I mean the deep South. I went to Atlanta University School of Social Work because my black grandfather adopted, wrote a letter to me and said this little white boy is different. So I was abused emotionally growing up, not physically, I had a silver spoon but women are organizing and organized. Blacks are organizing and organized. We don't have to know everything. Browns are organizing and organized. Young people are organizing and organized. All we got to do is bring everybody together and do what they did in Atlanta and vote and turn the old white men that raised me and told the authorities all this junk. That's the thing they fear the most and that was the riot in Washington. Those white men, they weren't quite as educated as some of us have had the advantage of being and they're afraid that we want to replace them with women, with blacks, with browns. We are all the people. I know because, you'll have to laugh at this one, I've got

revolutionary blood in my veins and it's not physical. It's not war. To hell with war. My direct descendant was the guy at 22 years old that went up into the old north church and hung the light out and kicked King George's butt out of America. But this is the most powerful time, including the 60s or any other time ,that we've got a chance, so get involved and vote and work for people like the lady who spoke up here."

"My name is Sidney Bach and I was blown up here by a bad girl named Katrina in New Orleans. Actually, I trump all of you old men. I'll be 83 in November. I find it difficult to stand here and address you because, I'm emotional about it, a good part of my history as a lawyer in New Orleans was focused on civil rights and I'm proud of that. But as a lawyer, I respect the law and our constitution. I'm afraid I stand before you as a harbinger of some difficult suggestions and opinions that many of you may find disagreeable or not welcome. But as you said, we should be engaged and that is what I'm trying to do. To make this a little quicker, I have prepared in writing so you can follow along." Mr. Bach gave each panelist prepared remarks. [Page 1/Page 2](#)

### Written Comment from comment cards and emails

"As the African-American owner, founder, and principal of a small start-up construction management company formed under North Carolina state statute G.S. 143-64.31 and located here in Asheville, NC, (the City), I sincerely applaud the courage and insight demonstrated by the Council's decision to devise and embrace an effective local Reparations Program aimed at making amends for historic injuries and wrongs committed on its former African-American residents and their descendants.

In the spirit of this recognition, it is proposed that the following comments be entered into the public record of the **Information Sharing and Truth Telling Speaker Series** being conducted on June 3, 10, and 17, 2021.

My written comments are as follows:

Suggestions to be considered for adoption:

1. Use the City's credit standing to underwrite, (VA-like guarantees of financial support), low-interest, 30-year mortgages for qualified African-American slave descendants who desire to purchase a home commensurate with their household income and/or ability to make prospective mortgage, (P&I, property taxes and homeowners insurance), payments.

2. The total dollar amount of mortgages to underwrite would be equal to the total dollar amount of the City's Reparations Budget for X number of years as determined by the City. The total reparations budget available for underwriting mortgages would be offset by the total dollars awarded, (on an annual basis), in cash grants to qualified recipients who do not choose the home mortgage option.
3. Include, as a feature of the City's Reparations Program, active engagement of NGO community support organizations through outreach activities with organizations such as, **Mountain Housing Opportunities, Homebuyer Financial Education and Counseling, North Carolina FHA Experts, Habitat for Humanity**, and others, such as local realtors and media outlets, to secure liberal down-payment assistance and PMI exemptions for prospective qualified African-American slave descendants.
4. Include, as a feature of the City's Reparations Program, active engagement of local Black churches, medical clinics, grocery outlets, and other local charitable organizations in its outreach efforts to inform the African-American slave descendant residents of the City's Reparations Programs.

The City's consideration of these suggestions is sincerely appreciated."

**Comment by: Tony Mackey**

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"Don't put the house lights down during any part of the evening. This is not a performance. We need to see each other, write notes, be seen. Between this evening and the next two reparation discussions: if experts from elsewhere are coming to speak on the stage, also put some "locals" on the stage. Focus on Asheville. Do what you can to get more black Ashevilleians here. Put some of them on stage; model "storytelling" and "creative problem solving."

**Comment by: Citizen**

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"Please **DO NOT** put the house lights down. This makes the audience passive and invisible. We need to see each other for this to work. Thank you!"

**Comment by: Citizen**

"Better communication to market what is happening. Not enough people knew about this."

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“Woefully inadequate community input from folks who have been impacted by lack of opportunity. Almost need new paradigm to intentionally create systemic change.”

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“The history was informative and unfortunately heartbreaking. Thank you for the information. It would be really wonderful to have more historical informative sessions on black history in Asheville here. Ie:3 part series on black music, art, etc. specific to Asheville and it’s history.”

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“I think talking about critical race theory and making pronouncements at city functions is critical. The beginning of city council meetings, for instance, could mention different injustices to give recognition to racial inequality of Asheville. We need to make plaques and markers throughout the city of Asheville (city hall for ex) acknowledging balck history and injustices. City sponsored storytelling of racism needs to happen. We need to address the racist history of Asheville Police. We need accountability for APD. APD can start w/ addressing the case Sgt. Hides who brutally beat unlawfully and attempted to arrest Jonny Rush. This bloody stain needs cleaning, APD needs to find a way to apologize and make amends. I have no idea how to do this as the crime was so heinas. But the APD should come up with as many ways as possible to heal their disgusting act. The city should be funding art and mosaic programs specifically for black artis. Graffiti art is one way. Use many from the ballooning TDA to make scholarships for black folks to do these programs. More community land trusts for black families.”

**Comment by: Citizen**

“More people need to be in this conversation, especially those you have been apart of damage (those who were wronged.”

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“My understanding of the purpose of reparations is not just about atoning for the past but also ending our current disparity in equity and equality.”

**Comment by: Jay Carey**

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“In 1936, a 19 year old white visitor to Asheville was found dead in her Battery Park Hotel room. A 22 year old “Hall Boy”, Martin Moore, after a “quick and secret” arrangement, a confession was reportedly beaten out of him. Convicted within four days and in December 1936 he was executed. True reparation must clear his name.”

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“WNC 4 Peace celebrates International Day of Peace. We would like to partner with you with a proclamation in September with the idea that in order to have peace we must have reparations and reconciliation. 828-505-9435.”

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“Why doesn’t reparations include direct payments?”

**Comment by: Citizen**

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“No panel.”

**Comment by: Citizen**