

Reparations Task Force Summary
Report by Phet Keomanyvanh and Rebecca Zietlow
Burlington VT
August 10th, 2022

On August 2020 a Resolution to develop a Task Force to study a proposal for reparations and to consider a City apology for the institution of slavery was established. The sponsors of this resolution are Councilor Freeman, Hightower, Stromberg, Tracy, Hanson, and Pine.

The Reparations Task Force charge was to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans living in Burlington and the institution of slavery. In addition, the Reparations Task Force was to study and develop reparation proposal of discrimination against freed slaves and their descendants. The result of the Reparations Task Force is to recommend ways to educate the Burlington public of the findings; and recommend remedies if an apology is to be made and how the laws and policies continue to disproportionately and negatively affect African Americans as a group.

Full Resolution:

<https://go.boarddocs.com/vt/burlingtonvt/Board.nsf/Public#>

November 11, 2020 the Task force had their first meeting:

<https://go.boarddocs.com/vt/burlingtonvt/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=BV7RMX6E88C0>

Original members of the Task Force were:

- Pablo Bose, Professor of Geography at the University of Vermont
- Hal Colston, State Representative, Director of Partnership for Change
- Tyeastia Green, City of Burlington Director of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
- Christine Hughes, New Seasons Vermont and Racial Justice Alliance
- Rebecca Zietlow, Professor of Law and Values at the University of Toledo College of Law

Current members of the Task Force are:

- Pablo Bose, Professor of Geography at the University of Vermont
- Christine Hughes, New Seasons Vermont and Racial Justice Alliance
- Rebecca Zietlow, Professor of Law and Values at the University of Toledo College of Law
- Phet Keomanyvanh, City of Burlington Acting Director of REIB

Reparations Task Force Main objectives:

Document the histories of enslaved persons within Burlington
Examine the broader connection of Burlington to the institution of slavery
Explore the historical and contemporary legacies of slavery in Burlington
Research and present some of the main models for reparations for slavery

Task Force Budget

Original Budget = \$50,000.00

Total Expense Cost = \$25,067.00

Remaining Budget = \$24,933.00

The Reparations Task Force hired three scholars to research reparations. Below is Rebecca Zietlow's Reparations Task Force Summary of Research provided by experts as of August 2022.

1) Rashad Williams

- a. Description and brief history of racial covenants in the United States.
- b. Description of cases involving racial covenants outside of Vermont (including the U. S. Supreme Court opinion *Shelley v. Kramer*)
- c. Links to two newspaper articles about racial covenants in the Burlington area
- d. Plan and detailed instructions for researching covenants in Burlington using electronic data bases and other tools.

2) Laura Hill

- a. Report #1: This report contains a brief discussion of reparations and includes examples of reparations attempts in U.S. History (including during the Reconstruction Era). It includes a comprehensive bibliography of scholarship about reparations.
- b. Report #2: This report describes the colonization movement in the mid 19th century – a movement to encourage free Black people to move to Africa. This was supported by many prominent political figures in the early US and was active in Vermont. The Vermont Colonization Society existed between 1819-1868, with the stated goal of removing all Black people, free and enslaved, to Liberia; and ending the slave trade. Many prominent Vermonters belonged to this society. The report includes quotations from members of the society including religious leaders using racist stereotypes to advocate for “repatriation” of people of African descent.
- c. Report #3: This report discusses the cultural legacies of slavery in Vermont, which reinforced a racial caste system in which formerly enslaved people were treated as a lower class. Cultural legacies of slavery in Vermont included the widespread use of disparaging language by Vermonters who opposed Reconstruction measures to help newly freed formerly enslaved people; the use of disparaging racial terms to name landmarks and roads; the widespread popularity of minstrel shows in Vermont through the 1960s; and disapproval of racially mixed marriages.

- d. Report #4: This report discusses incarceration as a legacy of slavery, including the post-Reconstruction system of convict leasing in the south and the disproportionate incarceration of people of color in Vermont. In 2017, the incarceration rate of Black people in Vermont was 7.6 times the rate of white people. The report describes attempts by the Vermont state legislature, Chittenden County, and the city of Burlington to remedy the situation. Those efforts are ongoing but, according to Prof. Hills, so far have not impacted the racial disparity in Vermont's criminal justice system.
 - e. Report #5: This report discusses segregation in northern states, including Vermont. Unlike in southern states, northern state laws did not require segregation, but many northern communities became segregated due to racially restrictive covenants. More research is necessary to determine the scope of racially restrictive covenants in Burlington, but it is certain that those covenants existed. Housing discrimination continues today. Moreover, people of color have disproportionately low incomes compared to white people and are therefore disproportionately affected by the high rents in cities like Burlington. The report also discusses racial disparities in other public institutions in Vermont, including education and public transportation.
 - f. Report #6: This report discusses global calls for reparations and reconciliation. It discusses the history of global – the exploitation of people of color and their natural resources by white colonists.
 - g. Report #8 (please note Report #7 was not in the shared documents): Some of the former colonies have attempted to recover reparations for that exploitation, and for the atrocities committed by the colonists. Most notable is the South African Truth and Reconciliation process which followed the fall of the apartheid system. The report describes that process in detail.
- 3) Elise Guyette:
- a. *Vermont's Pre-Statehood Record on Slavery and Beyond to Freedom*: This 30 page article discusses the myth that white men founded Vermont as an anti-slavery state, which omits the history of indigenous people, enslaved people, and other people of color who lived in the state and contributed to its founding. In fact, there were many enslaved people in New England, especially in the state of Connecticut, in the 18th century. There is evidence of Black people who were enslaved in early Vermont, and of Vermonters engaging in the slave trade. Guyette describes the stories of some of those people in detail. Free Black people were also treated poorly and subjected to racial prejudice. Guyette describes how racial prejudice and the mistreatment of Black people in Vermont continued into the 19th century, including servitudes imposed on Black children. She also includes occupational data in the late 19th century, showing that most Black people in Vermont worked as farmhands or domestic servants during that time. Guyette concludes with examples of people in the Burlington area benefitting from slavery, including the Webb family, who owned Shelburne Farms and built the Shelburne Museum.
 - b. Occupational data: the report contains detailed occupational data about people living in Vermont from 1790-1940.

- c. *Vignettes of Black Burlingtonians*: This report includes short descriptions of the lives of some Black people who lived in Burlington from the 1790s-1840s.
- d. *Occupational and Housing Data Analysis in Historical Context*: This report provides some historical context for the data that Guyette provided in other parts of the report.

Current thoughts and questions:

The Reparations Task Force would like to focus on models of reparation and keep a Vermont focus. Historical context is important but need to get more raw data specific to Burlington. For example, Burlington benefiting in the economy from slavery.

The Reparations Task Force was put together as a committee 2 years ago and there was a pause due to COVID-19 pandemic. Need to revisit direction from City Council on how the Council wants the Reparations Task Force to share the scholar findings. Will it be a presentation at City Council, published, and what type of public engagement will be around this? The Reparations Task Force has lost momentum in involvement and there needs to be re-energized effort to get more members on the Reparations Task Force and to have more local people and students involved too.

Next Steps:

Pablo proposed to work with Urban Geography and Methods class at UVM using paid interns to look at the land record files that have been scanned.

The Reparations Task Force will vote on it at their next meeting on August 23, 2022 at 5:30. See here for agenda and location.

<https://go.boarddocs.com/vt/burlingtonvt/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=BV7RMX6E88C0>