



**REPORT OF THE
1696 HISTORICAL COMMISSION**
AUGUST 1, 2015



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State
Nellie M. Gorbea, Secretary of State

July 31, 2015

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
Governor of the State of Rhode Island
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Raimondo:

On behalf of the 1696 Historical Commission, I am pleased to submit a report of the commission's work to date. This commission is tasked with developing a comprehensive African-American history curriculum for Rhode Island public schools from Kindergarten through grade 12 and present a report no later than August 1, 2015.

The 15-member commission had not yet met when I assumed the role of Secretary of State and, therefore, Chairperson of this body. Since then we have met a total of three times. The enclosed report, required no later than August 1, 2015, is intended to provide you with an update of the commission's progress.

Next steps include the engagement of a curriculum expert to assist the commission in integrating its ideas and concepts into an effective and practical African American History curriculum to be used in Rhode Island public schools.

The commission is scheduled to meet next on Thursday, September 10 at 4 p.m.

Enclosed is the report.

Sincerely,

Nellie M. Gorbea
Rhode Island Secretary of State

CC: 1696 Historical Commission members

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....1.
Membership.....2.
Resolution.....3.
Curriculum Guide.....4.
Meeting Agendas and Minutes.....5.
Addendum – RI African American History Timeline.....6.

1696 Historical Commission Executive Summary

Background:

In 1696, seventy-six years after the sailing of the *Mayflower*, the first documented slave ship, the *Seaflower*, arrived in Newport, Rhode Island. Over the next century, the Rhode Island economy would benefit greatly from the slave trade and through direct and indirect participation in the so-called Triangular Trade. In recognition of this chapter in our state's history, the Rhode Island state legislature established the 15-member 1696 Historical Commission with the stated purpose of developing a comprehensive African-American history curriculum for Rhode Island public schools from Kindergarten through grade 12.

The commission was created through House Resolution 7490, Substitute A sponsored by Representative Joseph Almeida (D-Providence) and Senate Resolution 2418, Substitute A sponsored by Senator Harold Metts (D-Providence).

The commission includes the Secretary of State or designee as chairperson, the Education Commissioner or designee, as vice-chairperson, the executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, and 12 members of the public appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, President of the Senate and the Governor.

Although the commission was enacted into law July 1, 2014 and had an initial reporting date of January, 2015, the commission had not met in 2014. The commission was extended in 2015 through Senate Resolution 0079 sponsored by Senator Metts. Upon being made aware of the commission by Senate and House policy staff, newly elected Secretary of State Gorbea, in her role as chairwoman, called the commission together to begin its work.

The commission is responsible for developing a comprehensive African-American history curriculum for Rhode Island public schools from kindergarten through grade 12. This curriculum will include a history of people of African heritage, including the history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America and Rhode Island, the enslavement experience in America and Rhode Island, abolition, and the contributions of Africans to America and to Rhode Island.

In addition, the commission will offer recommendations on facilitating the inclusion of the curriculum into the educational system of the state, with the goal of funding and implementing such curriculum for the start of the September, 2016, K-12 public school year. The commission will also request that local boards of education incorporate the information developed by the commission into their educational curricula.

Commission Meetings:

June 15, 2015 Commission Meeting

At the commission's initial meeting members introduced themselves, discussed their goals for the commission and were provided an overview of the commission as well as its purpose. Commission members also discussed the work plan going forward and what could be accomplished.

There is consensus from the commission members that it is important that African American history be taught comprehensively and not simply one month during the year. Also, in order for the curriculum to be seen as a benefit to the education of students it is critical that teachers are included in the process. Along the same lines it is important that the curriculum be relevant to both students and teachers so that there is an interest in the subject matter.

Also, incorporating technology into the learning and teaching curriculum should be a focal point of the commission's work. Technology can assist in bringing the curriculum to the students in exciting and innovative ways to improve the learning experience.

Rhode Island is fortunate to have an abundance of primary and secondary source information on African American history however we do not make it available as much as we should. Our state has the potential to be a national model in the teaching of African heritage and history.

The Commission discussed using the following foundational pieces for the curriculum:

1. Making clear connections to existing RI Standards;
2. Building educator knowledge through pre-service or in-service training; and
3. Integrating social media and technology.

A sub-committee was formed to shape the work of the commission. The sub-committee is comprised of the following: Geralyn Ducady, Mary Gwann, Theresa Moore, Julia Jordan-Zachery, Rochelle Lee, Mary Ann Snider, Keith Stokes and Valerie Tutson.

July 15, 2015 Subcommittee Meeting

The subcommittee met to further discuss the commission's work plan in order to report back to the full group. The subcommittee made revisions to the African American History Curriculum Guide drafted by Keith Stokes. The revised curriculum guide will be presented to the full commission for its approval.

July 27, 2015 Commission Meeting

After discussing the Curriculum Guide outline that was revised by the subcommittee, the commission voted to approve the outline. The guide will serve as a template to direct the commission's work going forward around the design of a curriculum.

The commission also discussed the possibility of retaining a curriculum guide to assist in designing the curriculum and advancing the commission's work. In addition, there was discussion of the potential for engaging a curriculum consultant to assist in developing the curriculum. The commission will contact the Choices Program at Brown University as well as the Rhode Island Foundation to determine interest in possibly assisting with a curriculum consultant.

There was discussion of the commission holding a public meeting to hear from persons across the state and that this also might be an opportunity to learn about what is already taking place around African American history.

The commission also discussed the importance of ensuring that the work that they do is acted upon and incorporated in the education curriculum. The Department of Education hosts an Innovation Summit that might be a good opportunity to get feedback from teachers. Also, it was mentioned how important it is to prepare teachers, administrators and students for this curriculum. The commission must get the word out to the schools.

There was discussion around the lack of program and teachings in the schools during Black History Month. There is an opportunity to get more visibility and education around black and African American history in the schools.

Next Steps:

The next commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 10 at 4 p.m. In addition, the commission will look to schedule a public meeting to hear from persons across the state on the issue of African American history. The public meeting also will provide an opportunity to learn what other activities are taking place on this issue throughout the state.

Discussions will continue in order to determine the potential to engage a curriculum consultant to assist the commission in crafting an African American History curriculum that will be of interest to both teachers and students.

The goal of the 1696 Historical Commission is to ensure that African American history is taught throughout the year in Rhode Island public schools. Ensuring that teachers and administrators are included in the process is critical in order to have this be seen as a benefit to the teaching of our state's students.

1696 Historical Commission

Membership:

Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea or designee, Chairperson

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education or designee, Vice chairperson

Edward Sanderson, Executive Director, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission or designee

Geralyn Marie Ducady, Curator for Programs and Education, Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology – Appointed by the Governor

Elyssa Tardif, Ph.D, Director, Newell D. Goff Center for Education and Public Programs, Rhode Island Historical Society – Appointed by the Governor

Valerie Tutson, Storyteller, Rhode Island Black Storytellers – Appointed by the Governor

Barrymore Bogues, Ph.D, Asa Messer Professor of Humanities and Critical Theory, Professor of Africana Studies, Brown University – Appointed by the Governor

Marcia Ranglin-Vassell – Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Rochelle Lee – Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Dr. Julia Jordan-Zachery, Director of Black Studies, Providence College – Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Mary Gwann – Appointed by Speaker of the House

Paul Gaines – Appointed by the Senate President

Keith Stokes – Appointed by the Senate President

Joyce Stevos, Rhode Island Black Heritage Society – Appointed by the Senate President

Theresa Moore, T-Time Productions – Appointed by the Senate President

2014 -- H 7490 SUBSTITUTE A

LC004327/SUB A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

JOINT RESOLUTION

CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE 1696 HISTORICAL COMMISSION" OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

Introduced By: Representatives Almeida, Williams, Diaz, Shekarchi, and Abney

Date Introduced: February 13, 2014

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

1 WHEREAS, Rhode Island holds a unique place in history with the establishment of its
2 Royal Charter in July 1663, that marked the first time that a sovereign leader signed a charter
3 guaranteeing that individuals within a society were free to practice the religion of their choice
4 without any interference from the government; and

5 WHEREAS, This progressive act during the early settlement of the Colony of Rhode
6 Island would attract from across the world all manner of religious, ethnic and racial groups to
7 Rhode Island shores bringing with them their expertise in maritime trade and commerce; and

8 WHEREAS, By the 18th century Rhode Island was one of Colonial America's leading
9 maritime centers; and

10 WHEREAS, As Rhode Island became the first American Colony to declare its
11 independence from Great Britain on May 4, 1776, it was also at the same time in history one of
12 the largest African trade and importation centers; and

13 WHEREAS, The earliest history and people of Rhode Island has included persons of
14 African heritage who, even though they arrived as chattel property, would soon rise up to
15 establish many of America's earliest African American civic, religious, cultural and educational
16 enterprises; and

17 WHEREAS, The history of the African slave trade, the early arrival of persons of African
18 heritage to the state, and the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to
19 the development of this state and country is the proper concern of all people, particularly students

1 enrolled in the schools of the State of Rhode Island; now, therefore be it

2 RESOLVED, That a special legislative commission, to be known as "The 1696 Historical
3 Commission," so named in honor of the first documented group of enslaved Africans to arrive in
4 Rhode Island at Newport in 1696 on the brig Seaflower, be and the same is hereby created
5 consisting of fifteen (15) members: one of whom shall be the Secretary of State, or designee; one
6 of whom shall be the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or designee; one of
7 whom shall be the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage
8 Commission, or designee; and twelve (12) of whom shall be public members, four (4) of whom
9 shall be appointed by the President of the Senate, four (4) of whom shall be appointed by the
10 Speaker of the House, and four (4) of whom shall be appointed by the Governor.

11 The public members shall be residents of this state, chosen with due regard to broad
12 geographic representation and ethnic diversity, who have an interest in the history of Rhode
13 Island, the African slave trade and slavery in Rhode Island and America and the contributions of
14 African-Americans to our society. Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in the same
15 manner as the original appointment.

16 The purpose of said commission shall be to develop a comprehensive African American
17 history curriculum for all K-12 public schools in Rhode Island. Said curriculum should include,
18 but not be limited to, the history of persons of African heritage, including the history of African
19 peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to
20 America and Rhode Island, the enslavement experience in America and Rhode Island, abolition,
21 and the contributions of Africans to America and Rhode Island.

22 The commission shall develop, in consultation with the Department of Education,
23 curriculum guidelines for the teaching of information on the African slave trade, slavery in
24 America and Rhode Island, the vestiges of slavery in this country and state, and the contributions
25 of African-Americans to our country and state.

26 The commission shall make recommendations on facilitating the inclusion of the history
27 of persons of African heritage, including the history of African peoples before the political
28 conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America and Rhode Island, the
29 enslavement experience in Rhode Island and America, abolition, and the contributions of African
30 Americans to Rhode Island and America and any related special programs in the educational
31 system of the state, with the goal of funding and implementing such curriculum for the start of the
32 September, 2016 K-12 public school year.

33 Every local board of education is requested to incorporate the information developed by
34 the commission in an appropriate place in the curriculum of elementary and secondary school

1 students in the state; and

2 On facilitating the inclusion of the history of persons of African heritage, including the
3 history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the
4 passage to America and Rhode Island, the enslavement experience in Rhode Island and America,
5 abolition, and the contributions of African-Americans to Rhode Island and America and any
6 related special programs in the educational system of the state, with the goal of funding and
7 implementing such curriculum for the start of the September, 2016 K-12 public school year.

8 The Secretary of State, or designee, shall serve as the chair and the Commissioner of
9 Education, or designee, shall serve as the vice-chair of the commission. The presence of a
10 majority of the authorized membership of the commission shall be required for the conduct of
11 official business.

12 The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

13 The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission and Rhode Island
14 Department of Education shall provide staff support for the Commission.

15 All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information,
16 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or
17 desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution.

18 The commission is authorized to prepare all reports by January 1, 2015 for the Governor
19 and the Legislature regarding its findings and recommendations on facilitating the inclusion of
20 the history of persons of African heritage, including the history of African peoples before the
21 political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America and Rhode
22 Island, the enslavement experience in Rhode Island and America, abolition, and the contributions
23 of African-Americans to Rhode Island and America and any related special programs in the
24 educational system of the State, with the goal of funding and implementing such curriculum for
25 the start of the September, 2016 K-12 public school year.

26 The Joint Committee on Legislative Services is hereby authorized and directed to provide
27 suitable quarters for said commission; and be it further

28 RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the
29 General Assembly and the Governor no later than January 6, 2015, and said commission shall
30 expire on February 15, 2015.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

J O I N T R E S O L U T I O N

CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE 1696
HISTORICAL COMMISSION" OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

1 This resolution would create a fifteen (15) member special legislative study commission
2 whose purpose it would be to develop curriculum guidelines for the teaching of information on
3 the African slave trade, slavery in America and Rhode Island, the vestiges of slavery in this
4 country and state, and the contributions of African-Americans to our country and state, and who
5 would report back to the General Assembly and the Governor no later than January 6, 2015, and
6 whose life would expire on February 15, 2015.

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2014 -- S 2418 SUBSTITUTE A

LC004756/SUB A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

JOINT RESOLUTION

CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE 1696
HISTORICAL COMMISSION" OF RHODE ISLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

Introduced By: Senators Metts, Pichardo, Jabour, Crowley, and Goldin

Date Introduced: February 27, 2014

Referred To: Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs

1 WHEREAS, Rhode Island holds a unique place in history with the establishment of its
2 Royal Charter in July 1663, that marked the first time that a sovereign leader signed a charter
3 guaranteeing that individuals within a society were free to practice the religion of their choice
4 without any interference from the government; and

5 WHEREAS, This progressive act during the early settlement of the Colony of Rhode
6 Island would attract from across the world all manner of religious, ethnic and racial groups to
7 Rhode Island shores bringing with them their expertise in maritime trade and commerce; and

8 WHEREAS, By the 18th century Rhode Island was one of Colonial America's leading
9 maritime centers; and

10 WHEREAS, As Rhode Island became the first American Colony to declare its
11 independence from Great Britain on May 4, 1776, it was also at the same time in history one of
12 the largest African trade and importation centers; and

13 WHEREAS, The earliest history and people of Rhode Island has included persons of
14 African heritage who, even though they arrived as chattel property, would soon rise up to
15 establish many of America's earliest African American civic, religious, cultural and educational
16 enterprises; and

17 WHEREAS, The history of the African slave trade, the early arrival of persons of African
18 heritage to the state, and the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to
19 the development of this state and country is the proper concern of all people, particularly students