



March 28, 2017

## Support H.R. 1242, the 400 Years of African-American History Commission Act

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to support H.R. 1242, the 400 Years of African-American History Commission Act, introduced by Representative Bobby Scott. Creating a commission to commemorate the contributions by African Americans to this nation is an important first step in promoting reconciliation for the harm done to so many over the past 400 years. We welcome this opportunity to look at the ways we can confront our history and ensure that the contributions of African Americans to society are never forgotten.

The notion of a government publicly acknowledging racial injustice is not a new concept. In early 2016, following a visit to the United States, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, established by the UN Human Rights Council, recommended that the United States facilitate public dialogue about our history of racial injustice by erecting memorials and historical markers.<sup>1</sup> The idea of reconciliation has slowly gained public support in the United States. In 1941, nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans were interned (forcibly relocated and confined) by the U.S. military following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. government formally apologized by enacting the Civil Liberties Act in 1988, which granted reparations to surviving internees and their families.<sup>2</sup> In 2008, 93 years after the lynching of Leo Frank, the only known lynching of an American Jew, Georgia dedicated a historical marker at the site of his lynching.<sup>3</sup> Just last year, the city of Brighton, Alabama dedicated a historical marker near City Hall that documents a 1908 lynching of William Miller, an African-American man who was seeking better wages for black workers and was murdered by a white mob.<sup>4</sup>

We encourage you to support this bill, as it will represent a significant step toward recognizing the incredible achievements of African Americans, as well as acknowledging the injustices that African Americans have faced over the years. Clearly, commemoration will not in and of itself bring about racial equality or healing. Nevertheless, racial justice cannot be accomplished without creating an opportunity for honest conversation about the history of racial discrimination in America. We look forward to further discussion on this important

### Officers

#### Chair

Judith L. Lichtman  
National Partnership for  
Women & Families

#### Vice Chairs

Jacqueline Pata  
National Congress of American Indians  
Thomas A. Saenz  
Mexican American Legal  
Defense and Educational Fund  
Hillary Shelton  
NAACP

#### Secretary

Jo Ann Jenkins

#### AARP

#### Treasurer

Lee A. Saunders  
American Federation of State,  
County & Municipal Employees

### Board of Directors

Helena Berger  
American Association of  
People with Disabilities  
Cornell William Brooks  
NAACP  
Kristen Clarke  
Lawyers' Committee for  
Civil Rights Under Law  
Lily Eskelsen Garcia  
National Education Association  
Marcia D. Greenberger  
National Women's Law Center  
Chad Griffin  
Human Rights Campaign  
Wylecia Wiggs Harris  
League of Women Voters of the  
United States  
Mary Kay Henry  
Service Employees International Union  
Mark Hopkins  
AAUW  
Sherrilyn Ifill  
NAACP Legal Defense and  
Educational Fund, Inc.  
Michael B. Keegan  
People for the American Way  
Samer E. Khalaf  
American-Arab  
Anti-Discrimination Committee  
Marc Morial  
National Urban League  
Mee Moua  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice |  
AAJC  
Janet Murguía  
National Council of La Raza  
Debra Ness  
National Partnership for  
Women & Families  
Terry O'Neill  
National Organization for Women  
Rabbi Jonah Pesner  
Religious Action Center  
Of Reform Judaism  
Anthony Romero  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Shanna Smith  
National Fair Housing Alliance  
Richard L. Trumka  
AFL-CIO  
Randi Weingarten  
American Federation of Teachers  
Dennis Williams  
International Union, UAW  
William Yoshino  
Japanese American Citizens League

### Policy and Enforcement

#### Committee Chair

Michael Lieberman  
Anti-Defamation League

#### President & CEO

Wade J. Henderson  
Executive Vice President & COO  
Karen McGill Lawson

<sup>1</sup> "Statement to the media by the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to USA". January 2016

<sup>2</sup> H.R.442 - 100th Congress (1987-1988): Civil Liberties Act of 1988

<sup>3</sup> City of Marietta, Georgia. "Leo Frank Lynching Site Recognized with Historical Marker"

<sup>4</sup> Equal Justice Initiative. <http://www.eji.org/node/1179>

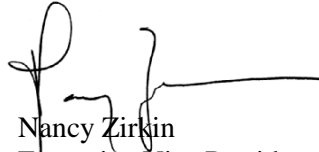


issue. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sakira Cook, Counsel, at [cook@civilrights.org](mailto:cook@civilrights.org) or 202-263-2894. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President