

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 2207

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, RECREATION & TOURISM

Hearing Date: April 19, 2021 10:00 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Bob Ward, Chair

Travis County Historical Commission

AUSTIN, TX

The Travis County Historical Commission is pleased to support this bill to create a Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission. Speaking from a local viewpoint, Travis County is currently in the process of establishing a county African American Cultural Heritage Commission to work in conjunction with the current Travis County Historical Commission. We welcome this addition as it increases the awareness and resources available to explore, interpret and preserve the valuable contributions to county history by the African American community. For far too many years, African American history has suffered neglect and under-reporting, and it is past time to correct this inequity. We look forward to working in support of the African American Cultural Heritage Commission in our county and hope that this legislation provides opportunities for other communities to share in this partnership.

Beverly Ashley

self

Edinburg, TX

I wish to offer my support for the House Bill 2207 that will provide protection and preservation of African American historical and cultural resources in Texas. There are so many area of Texas where African American have made their great contributions to their perspective communities and it has gone unknown. Through the passing of this bill, it will provide the opportunity for us to identify, document and preserve such a rich history. So, I join in with many others to provide my backing of the HB 2207.

Camille Briggs

Self

Beaumont, TX

As an African American living in Texas, I think it's important to protect and preserve our heritage. African American History is everyone's history and we Texans need to honor it. Establishing an African American Heritage Commission will allow us all to focus on our history and pass it on to the next generation.

Raymond Howard, Dr.

Village in the Valley, Inc.

McAllen, TX

This particular piece of Texas State legislation is a giant leap in the right direction to acknowledge and endorse the existence and resilience of African American heritage and cultural impact and renaissance in Texas. This Bill 2207 is an imperative to restore and promulgate a more accurate and complete account of important life legacies, places and events about African Americans. It's time we adequately address the African American gaps in Texas history.

Sabrina Walker Hernandez

Village in the Valley

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Edinburg, TX

I ask that this Bill be supported in recognition of the need to document the impact of African Americans in the state of Texas.

Onuwa Terry, Dr.

Village in the Valley

MISSION, TX

I would like to support the African American Heritage bill. It is a much needed bill to ensure that African American history is preserved in Texas. The history is part of the Texas framework and the rest of the United States. I live in Mission Texas and we discovered there was a southern underground railroad. That is very important not just for Texans to discover but the country and rest of the world. I have practices in this area for over 20 years and the culture along the border is very rich. Part of the richness includes African Americans from slavery to buffalo soldiers guarding citizens. I am co-founder of Village in the Valley which was started 2 years ago. Our mission statement "Elevating and uniting the black community while collaborating with other cultures in the Rio Grande Valley" is what guides us in educating the people in the region about who we are and how we have contributed to the region even with the small population. Please visit our website www.villageinthevalley.org for further information. Thank you for your time.

Barbara Williams

Matagorda County Historical Commission

Houston, TX

My family, the Williams, have roots deeply planted in Pledger, Texas, part of Matagorda County. The Pledger family brought enslaved people from S. Carolina and Georgia and built many many plantations there using my family to do so. In spite of it all, my great great grandfather was able to acquire acres of land, some of which we still own.

I am fervently researching my family's history and contributions to Pledger and surrounding Caney Creek areas. The establishment of the African American Historical Heritage Commission is necessary, and vital for the preservation, protection and promotion of the great culture, contributions and history of African Americans to Matagorda County and others.

We cannot allow this rich history to not receive its due attention. The establishment of the African American Heritage Commission is a must. Please please pass this bill. Thank you!

Roxanne Evans

Self/PR professional/historic preservation advocate

Austin, TX

Greetings. I am in full support of this very significant legislation because it would help preserve the diminishing history and historical significance of African Americans in Texas. It is important for Texans of all ethnicities to understand the full depth and breadth of our shared history. Not only is there educational value in knowing, understanding and appreciating history, cultural heritage tourism is a booming billion dollar industry, one that a state like Texas should welcome. For the educational, cultural and economic benefit of Texas and Texans, I encourage lawmakers to support HB 2207. Thank you.

Naomi Carrier, Dr.

TCAALH.org

Houston, TX

The time has come for African Texans to interpret their own stories representing their history and culture via the creation of the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission. Make history, vote for this bill NOW??

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Rosalyn Francis, President
Settegast Heights Redevelopment Corporation Northeast Community
Houston, TX

Settegast, a neighborhood adjacent to downtown Houston in the 77028 zip code has a rich and vibrant history. The community makeup is largely from a minority group. The population 4,939. The once then 100% African American population Settegast, has succumbed to 66% African Americans, 32% Hispanic, and 2% white makes Settegast their home.

In the 1950s, the Houston Chronicle published the first showing of the Settegast Heights Annex. Down-payment of homes were \$10 down and \$10 monthly as were Settegast Gardens lots listed as Colored Property. Now African Americans owns less than 1/2 of the housing stock in the once vibrant historic community.

Also, In the early 50's, Settegast was a self contained community with many black businesses included beauty salons, mom and pop restaurants, and grocery stores. The Black churches were the foundation of the community where families depended on the churches for spiritual and moral support. The predominantly 2 black schools, A. G. Hillard Elementary and B.C. Elmore Middle School were the main sources of education in the early 70's. Today, the community grade schools are converted into one school that serves only Pre-K to 5th graders. Today, community children are bused to surrounding communities to attend middle and high school.

Like many underserved, independent flourishing African Americans communities in Houston, Settegast was impacted by the loss of businesses, schools, infrastructure, cultural identity. The fight to continue preserving and protecting the black community housing stock, senior citizen homesteads, heir properties, and regain economic status is an ongoing effort to preserve the neighborhood historically, and the neighborhood rich vibrant history.

Amy Scott, Scott
HB 2207
Missouri City, TX

Texas Africa American Cultural Heritage Commission. I am writing in support of HB 2207 to create the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission. I am a historian with over 16 years of experience, specializing in the preservation of African American history across the state of Texas. During my years of research, I noticed that African American history was grossly under represented or preserved, in regards to our vast contributions and undeniable sacrifices to the very birth and present success of America today. African Americans hold a tremendous wealth of history in America, that has been suppressed, as if it was of no value. Although African Americans have fought in every single war throughout the history of America, their sacrifices have been ignored and rarely ever acknowledged. Today, we have an opportunity to change this problem. Let's move forward with HB 2207 and preserve history in it's entirety. Thanks so much for your time. Sincerely, Amy Scott

Diane Merchant, Ms
Self, Educator
Texas City, TX

This Commission is an essential part of Texas' history that must not be overlooked.

KENNETH RODGERS, TEXAS CITIZEN
Self - Retired
HOUSTON, TX

With the loss of historic places related to African American history, Texas can leverage an tremendous opportunity to capture a large part of the hottest trending market for Black heritage tourism, conventions, and family reunions. I ask the State favorable consider forming the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission to focus on capturing more of this multi-billion

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dollar industry.

Pamela Norman

Barrett Economic & Community Development Organization

CROSBY, TX

On behalf of the Historic Barrett community, a freedmen settlement established in 1875, Barrett Economic & Development Organization (BECDO) is pleased to voice support for establishing the Texas African American Heritage Commission. As one of the Houston area's most historic communities, we know the value of preservation and the great loss to history if immediate measures are not implemented to protect the remaining assets that represent African American history and culture.

The establishment of a Texas African American Heritage Commission would add value to our region by highlighting the important contributions of people of African descent across the state and offer opportunities for people both young and old to learn about these under-told stories of history. It will also give a much needed focus on promoting the protection of African American historic/cultural assets and create economic benefits associated with the increasing African American History tourism industry.

Sincerely,
Pamela B. Norman - CEO, BECDO

Pamela Jae Boveland, Dr

Self

Houston, TX

It is critical in order set back all attempts to erase our historical contribution to Texas.

Tracie Cantu

Self

Austin, TX

Texas is a wonderfully diverse state and I think it right to honor our diversity. African American Texans have played a great role in the history of our state and their full history from bondage to freedom, the ongoing struggles for equality, and the rich cultural history of African Americans in our state.

Sallie Willis Williams

African American Heritage & Culture Grimes County

Katy, TX

The Texas African American Heritage Commission would serve as a conduit for African American families, individuals and organizations to share the rich Texas History of African Americans throughout the state of Texas and the World highlighting significant contributions both great and small.

Debra Smith-Stevens

Jack Yates National Alumni Association

Houston, TX

To endure that the African American history in the State of Texas is preserved for future generations, the Texas African American Heritage Commission should be created.

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Cecelia Ottenweller
Self - Community Organizer
Houston, TX

I urge the Texas House Committee for Culture, Recreation and Tourism to support HB2207 creating the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission.

Until recently, the history Texas tells of itself has been from a White perspective. I am a White woman, and the former chair of the Houston History Alliance, and have personally experienced how easy it is to fall into the trap of the single "White" story of the birth of Texas. Historically, state and regional organizations have been dominated by a White perspective, both within the leadership and its philanthropists. Our stories have been lopsided; we have unconsciously had blinders on and missed the opportunity to fully celebrate all of the stories within the state.

There must be equity. It is not enough for the state's current leadership structure to pledge to be more inclusive in its focus and investment; White hegemonic leadership must give way and make room for a central entity linking African American historical sites across the state and with other such resources around the nation.

This is an effort that will, in both the short and long term, pay off in rich dividends for Texas. Financially, Black heritage tourism nationally is an untapped potential worth tens of billions of dollars and Texas is missing out on over \$7 billion of that return. Thousands of jobs would be created.

This plan makes sense: the new commission's efforts would coalesce the scatter-shot regional efforts into a cohesive whole within the Texas Historic Commission, and would serve to broaden and enhance the THC's mission. It has wide bi-partisan support and it merits not just creation but FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Best,
Cecelia Ottenweller

Loretta Hubbard-Green
Pan African Orthodox Christian Church
Houston, TX

We support the establishment of this commission supporting African American Heritage

Brenda Younger
Self
Houston, TX

It is imperative this bill be passed in order to preserve Texas history

Roman McAllen
Self
Houston, TX

I support this bill. The establishment of a State African American Heritage Commission is necessary to help assure the most comprehensive telling of the history of Texas. The injustices of the past have saturated our processes, government and educational system in Texas with cultural bias since its founding. The Commission would be a tool for action and motivation.

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The establishment will offer an opportunity for educators, students and Texans of all walks of life, to be more motivated to dig deeper to document the Texas history that matters to them. It will give authority and meaning to the uneasy feeling that many have, including myself as a Mexican American, that their story has not been recorded and that it therefore matters less.

I write this letter in support of HB 2207 as a private resident of Texas, while I presently serve on the board of Preservation Texas and as the Historic Preservation Officer of the City of Houston.

James McKnight

Self

Houston, TX

To preserve the history of African American historical legacy.

Michelle Robinson, Retired

Self

Houston, TX

We are long overdue in our creation of the Texas African American Heritage Commission. Texas is rooted in African American contributions to our state. Our citizens & visitors must be made aware of it as a key tourist designation to enlighten our visitors and to maintain our history. Texas should not miss out on this opportunity. Please support all of our history. Do not exclude the African Americans.

Samuel Collins III

Self

Hitchcock, TX

I am writing in support of establishing the Texas African American Heritage Commission (TAAHC). I often use the analogy of a green salad when discussing our shared history in Texas and America. The stories that you often hear about founding fathers and early settlers are like the lettuce and tomatoes of the salad. The salad could and should include onions, bell peppers, pickles, croutons, hot peppers and other ingredients. These ingredients add more flavor to the salad. When you slice the onion sometimes it can make you cry. The crouton unlike the lettuce is not soft, but hard and important to the salad. Maya Angelou has a great quote, "History, despite it's wrenching pain cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." I hope the elected officials will have the courage to establish the TAAHC to insure present and future generations will learn a more complete story of our Texas history. African American history in Texas is not just about pain and suffering. The TAAHC will also have the responsibility to celebrate the many accomplishments and successes of African Americans in the state of Texas. Individuals like Matthew Gaines, George T. Ruby, John Rufus Gibson, Jack Johnson and Jessie McGuire-Dent are just a few of the African Americans that lived lives that can inspire all Texans not just African Americans. We just completed the largest public art project highlighting Juneteenth in Galveston. The new Juneteenth Legacy Project Absolute Equality mural will increase heritage tourism to Galveston Island and to the state of Texas. African American history is Texas history and support to tell the story should be as big as Texas. I currently serve and work with preservation organizations on a local, state and national level. As the country and world works to expand the narrative of our shared history Texas has an opportunity to led the way. The establishment of the TAAHC will make the teaching of this African American history a priority in the state of Texas. The establishment of the TAAHC is not to ignore other Texas history, but to fill the gap that exist with regards to highlighting the contributions of African Americans to the success of Texas. Please support the establishment of the TAAHC.

Lucille McGaskey

Self. Community Advocate

Texas City, TX

This HB 2207 will aid in documenting and preserving the history of many African Americans for present and future generations.

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Frank Jackson

My self as a Citizen of the United States and Texas

Prairie View, TX

I have submitted a written statement in support of HB 2207 to Rep. Reynolds Office.

keith somerville

Self

HOUSTON, TX

I am in full support of this bill

Lillie Boson

The Friends of Hopewell Inc.

Humble, TX, TX

We are sending this letter in support of creating an African American Cultural Heritage Commission. As one of the sites of African American importance in San Jacinto County, we here in Coldsprings support HB 2207.

Michael Hurd, Director

Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture, Prairie View A&M University

The Woodlands, TX

African Americans have contributed to every facet of the building of the state of Texas and have had a presence here since 1528. However, the stories of Black Texans have been marginalized and sanitized and much of our history – the places, stories, images, sounds, documents, etc. – is being erased by aging memories and mortality, or carelessly discarded, destroyed, and overlooked.

There is an imperative need for the efforts of the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission which will work in concert with the Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture at Prairie View A&M University – which will serve as the institutional repository for the group's findings and become a beacon for scholarly and community research to the good of all Texans. Their work will present a more accurate telling (and safekeeping!) of the state's African American history and assist in identifying and preserving relevant spaces that have immense historical value, many of which are disappearing because of gentrification.

The TIPHC was created in 1999 by the Texas Legislature (HB 889), and the heritage commission will greatly help the center fulfill its mission to "...collect, preserve, study, and make available research information, records, documents, artifacts and other items relating to African American history in Texas."

As director of the TIPHC, I wholeheartedly support and welcome the commission's creation.

Mona H Ross

Self

Houston, TX

Why we need a Commission:

- African Americans have a rich, robust history in Texas that has not been fully explored, told or preserved.
- The history is disappearing and without proper specific attention the history will die.
- We must not solely rely on others to preserve & protect our history.

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- Black heritage tourism currently is among the hottest markets in the tourism industry nationwide.
- The story would add value to the culturally—rich story of Texas and generate heritage tourism in local communities.

Danny Asberry El, President

Solel international

Houston, TX

This bill is definitely detrimental to the fabric of the history of the American People. To pass on this bill would be a Huge disrespect and disregard for those of other persuasions. America needs this. This will help the healing process in our paradigm.

Terrie Salter, Council Member District 3

City of Orange

Orange, TX

I am proud to support of HB2207, establishing the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission which has been formed to make African American locations a priority.

It is vital that our African American children know their true heritage. Heritage isn't just a story passed on by our grandparents. Our heritage stretches back decades revealing a lot of challenges that has brought heartaches, death and progress. Data reveals only two percent of 95,000 entries on the National Register of Historic Places are deemed worthy of preservation by the federal government that focus on the experiences of the African American people.

Some people may see this, as a failure to preserve the African American history and an example of racial injustice.

We cannot deny the evidence that historic preservation in the U.S. has been tainted by racial inequality since its beginnings.

There is need for the federal government to correct this imbalance.

In 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Historic Preservation Act, establishing the National Register of Historic Places and providing federal funding for the National Trust. In it were many biases written into it that determined how sites were selected, revealing a lack of support for African American historic sites and a failure to protect them.

There is no doubt that we also need more African Americans in the institutions that decide what history is preserved. Many times blacks are forced to preserve historic sites on our own by raising funds.

We must continue to fight until our story is told truthfully. On the State level, tens of millions in taxpayers dollars has gone to Confederate statues, parks, and more that supports Confederate iconography.

The people know that these nearly 2000 Confederate monuments across the United States were installed at the time to glorify enslavement and oppose the civil rights movement yet few public spaces display the completed true story. If we are to tell the story then we must tell it all.

Where are the monuments that acknowledge slavery in it's true form or the racial horrific lynching or anything showing the opposition to racial equality during the civil rights era? We need balance when it comes to telling the stories.

African Americans must have our history preserved. We owe it to ourselves, the government owe it to us as a part of our Liberty.

Our kids deserve to be educate. The American people deserve to know our history to fully understand our important role in the shaping of this Nation.

Thank you Texas African American Heritage Commission for the hard work and support to preserve our history. We need this bill to be established like we need air to breathe.

Sincerely, Terrie Turner Salter City of Orange, Texas Council Member District 3

Sha'Terra Johnson, LMSW

Fort Bend Black Heritage Society

Rosenberg, TX

Dear Texas State House,

The members of the Fort Bend Black Heritage Society support House Bill 2207 in creating a Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission.

Who is the Fort Bend Black Heritage Society? ESTABLISHED: August 1984 in Rosenberg, Texas

MOTTO: A committee of people, committed to the people!

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Why We Need A Commission?

MISSION: To promote and highlight African American heritage and uphold unity among all heritages in Fort Bend County through programs, social events, community service, and fundraisers.

The history of African Americans in Texas is an under-told story. African Americans have played an important role in the establishment of the entire state. With economic development of towns, cities, and counties within Texas the history is disappearing and being overlooked. We need to preserve any existing documents, artifacts, and places of African American past and use it for education and growth of the present and future. While we know the history of African Americans in Texas is rich it is important that Black Texans have the space and opportunity to preserve and protect our legacy. People are yearning to learn more about Black heritage, and we must, collectively, tell the narrative for the generations to come through educational tourism throughout the state, Texas Black Heritage museum exhibits and lectures and Storytelling of our ancestors in their local communities.

Again, we are sending this letter in support of the establishment of the Texas African American Cultural Heritage Commission. We feel this is an important step in the right direction and want to lend our support to the effort. We are willing to help in any way possible.

Please feel free to contact us directly for further information questions, comments and/or concerns.

Signed,

Fort Bend Black Heritage Society Members

Monday, April 19, 2021

Written By, Sha'Terra Johnson, LMSW, FBBHS VP, fbheritagesociety@gmail.com

Valerie Street

Texas Progressive Action Network

Austin, TX

I write on behalf of Texas Progressive Action Network to support HB 2207 and to urge committee members to support this bill also so that it can progress further into the legislative process.

It remains of crucial importance that Texas amplify the legacy of African American history, achievements, and contributions in this state and that we cultivate and grow the narrative for this as well as future generations.

Thank you for considering HB 2207 today and we hope to see it's passage.