

Georgetown African American Historic Landmark Project and Tour
Oral Statements Before
The United States House of Representative
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
October 14, 2021
Testimony of Andrena Crockett
Founder and CEO
H. R. 4009, *Georgetown Waterfront Enslaved Voyages Memorial Act*

Good morning, Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and other distinguished Subcommittee members. My name is Andrena Crockett. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you.

H.R. 4009, the Georgetown Waterfront Enslaved Voyages Memorial Act, authorizes the establishment of a commemorative work, in the District of Columbia recognizing the contributions of people of African descent who were brought to American shores against their will and who toiled without recognition or compensation. This commemorating work shall serve as a place of reflection and healing for all Americans. A plaque is not an option to commemorate the 388,747 Africans who survived the voyage to mainland North America nor the approximate 42 million descendants currently living in the United States.

As the sponsor of the Bill, I testify to its lasting impact on our nation as we progress toward a more perfect union and the lasting impact on the world, as other nations watch and learn from the United States.

Area I and II on the “Commemorative Areas Washington, D.C. and Environs,” map are where sites are being considered.

THE DEBATE

The Bill was submitted based on data compiled into The Slave Trade Database hosted by Rice University and after the designation of Georgetown Waterfront as a UNESCO Site of Memory. Confronting researchers are records during that period which include Georgetown, Piscataway, Port Tobacco, and smaller Maryland landings collectively known as “North Potomac.” During the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission meeting, a recommendation to amend the Bill to propose a national memorial was made.

Maps drawn in 1838 show the depth of the Potomac River, at the base of High Street (Wisconsin Avenue) was more than enough for a big ship to travel to Georgetown. Diagrams depict the ships construction capable of navigating these waters. The Long Bridge (14th Street Bridge) was not built until 1808.

This memorial is not so much about how the enslaved got here but their survival. The 1800 US Census records 1,449 enslaved and 277 free African Americans out of a total of 5,120 when Georgetown officially was part of Montgomery County, Maryland.

Slave records were often destroyed or hidden after the transport of the enslaved from Africa was outlawed in 1808. Intra-American slave trade continued, sometimes covertly.

DOMESTIC IMPLICATION

Unfortunately, many enslaved toiled for free under inhumane conditions. Their identities were stripped. Their last names removed. Their religions eliminated. And after the Civil War and Emancipation those freed had their dignity suppressed by Black codes and Jim Crow laws enacted to keep them in servitude.

The United States did issue a formal apology, H.R.194, on July 29, 2008. Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.) said, “Only a great country can recognize and admit its mistakes, and then travel forth to create indeed a more perfect union.”

In the “Apology for the Enslavement of African Americans,” (Senate Concurrent Resolution 26, 111th Congress 1st Session), Congress, on behalf of the United States, “acknowledged the fundamental injustice and inhumane treatment.” This apology was primarily symbolic but a step forward in atoning.

The District of Columbia has no physical or natural site to convert into a memorial or dedicate to commemorate families who were torn apart. There is no place to reflect and heal, to remember or forgive, and reconcile. When considering the Bill, I ask that you remember the broken families and misdeeds inflicted during slavery and the visceral racism of the Jim Crow era. A memorial in our nation’s capital is the least the United States—the greatest nation on the earth, with the greatest government conceived by man, with the great belief that “all men are created equal”—can do.

INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER MEMORIALS

Memorials and monuments recognizing the legacy of the enslaved exist in different forms around the world: Pelourinho, in Salvador de Bahia in Brazil; The Ark of Return at the United Nations headquarters in New York; La Citadelle Laferrière in Haiti; Ghana’s Elmina Castle and its slave forts; Windsor, Ontario, Underground Railroad Memorial; Le Morne Cultural Landscape in Mauritius; National Slavernijmonument (slavery monument) in Amsterdam; and the statues in Stone Town, Zanzibar.

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in Montgomery, Alabama.

CONCLUSION

Erecting a memorial sends a powerful message. One hundred and fifty-eight years after the Emancipation Proclamation it is befitting that a memorial be erected among the many monuments, memorials, and embassies, for Americans to pause for a moment to erase one drop of pain.

A simple “We acknowledge your existence” can have a profound impact on erasing years of neglect and conflicts.

Indicative of triumph over guilt and shame, “Flower-Seller in the Market at Washington, DC” illustrate a blending of the cultures - ladies with African head wrap and American style dresses. This location is known today as the Georgetown Market at 3276 M Street - the SE elevation.

Thank you for allowing me this time to speak before the Committee.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Andrena Crockett, Founder and CEO

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