

Remarks for the NC African American Heritage Commission Meeting

From Dr. Valerie Ann Johnson, Commission Chair

26 January 2021

“It’s a new dawn. It’s a new day. It’s a new life....and I’m feeling good.” Taken from Nina Simone’s uplifting song, “Feeling Good.” Nina Simone’s childhood home in Tryon, North Carolina is one of our State’s heritage treasures being preserved through the collective efforts of several entities including the NC African American Heritage Commission, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the State of North Carolina. The culture, history, and heritage of Black people in and from North Carolina matters greatly. The purpose of the Commission is to preserve, promote, and protect North Carolina’s African American history, arts, and culture for all people. This work is an antidote to the oppressive behavior of those who support white supremacy and antidemocratic values.

Welcome everyone to the January 2021 meeting of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission. I am pleased to see our Commissioners as we begin another year and happy that our Vice-Chair, Dr. Tamara Holmes-Brothers has been reappointed for another term.

We welcome to our meeting Secretary D. Reid Wilson, Deputy Secretary Staci Meyer and Assistant Secretary Tracey Burns from the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. We appreciate their supportive and thoughtful remarks.

The purpose of today’s meeting is to hear about the plans our dedicated AAHC Staff have for the Commission and to get you, our Commissioners, charged up. We have an amazing and busy year planned so please listen attentively to all the presentations.

As your Chair I am charged with helping our Commissioners fulfill their responsibilities to the Commission, to execute the purpose of the Commission and serve as an Ambassador of the Commission. To that end I have been engaged in a variety of activities such as representing AAHC at State functions, responding to speaker requests, serving on local and state committees as an AAHC representative, and making media appearances. Two recent examples of my AAHC activities as your Chair are: 1) Completing with my co-editor, Dr. Lynn Harris our manuscript: *Discovering Hidden Histories Of Slave-Trade And Pirate Ships Through Material Culture And Maritime History* and 2) Bringing welcome remarks on behalf of the Commission at the 20<sup>th</sup> annual and first time ever virtual African American Cultural Celebration, co-sponsored in part by the AAHC. The AACC will be held on January 27<sup>th</sup>, this upcoming Saturday.

In closing, I am dedicating this January 2021 meeting of the NC African American Heritage Commission to Dr. Gail Hayes – who is recently deceased. Dr. Hayes represented the AAHC with grace, intelligence, and fervor using her many talents to help the Commission grow. She gave generously of her time and energy and remained a staunch supporter of the AAHC until her death earlier this month. Please join me in a moment of silence.