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# HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

City and County of San Francisco

## ***SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION***

### ***Draft Meeting Minutes***

**August 10, 2023 5:00 PM**

#### **ROSTER OF COMMISSIONERS**

Karen Clopton, Chairperson  
Ann Champion Shaw, Vice-Chairperson  
Rodrigo Duran, Commissioner  
Hasib Emran, Commissioner  
Jayson Johnson, Commissioner  
Mark Kelleher, Commissioner  
Jason Pellegrini, Commissioner  
Leah Pimentel, Commissioner  
Irene Yee Riley, Commissioner  
Michael Sweet, Commissioner

Sheryl Evans Davis, EdD  
Executive Director

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For more information, contact the Commission Secretary at 415-252-2500  
Agenda and other information are available on the HRC website: [www.sfgov.org/sfhumanrights](http://www.sfgov.org/sfhumanrights)

**Meeting was called to order at 5:10 pm.**

Ramaytush Ohlone Land Acknowledgement – **Commissioner Duran.**

**1. 4:23 CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Present:** Karen Clopton, Ann Champion Shaw, Rodrigo Duran, Hasib Emran, Leah Pimentel, Mark Kelleher, Jayson Johnson, Michael Sweet

**Absent:** Jason Pellegrini, Irene Yee-Riley

Meeting called to order with 7 Commissioners present; Commissioner Johnson arrived shortly after roll call.

Chair Clopton welcomed the attending visitors from the “Ambassadors in Sneakers” program that included many youth visiting from Germany. She noted that today’s agenda would be focused on the subject of Reparations, and how important this discussion is in our country as well as others.

**2. 8:57 GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT (Discussion Item)**

Members of the public may address the Commission on matters that are within the Commission’s jurisdiction and are not on today’s agenda.

**Ace Washington (Ace on the Case):** Noted his support for the work of the Reparations Advisor Committee and advocated for the approval of its recommendations. He asked for information regarding the RFP written regarding the future of the space Yoshi’s once filled; he asked for transparency as the RFP moves forward. He noted the whole community must come together on this and that the community must have a voice as this work proceeds.

**3. 12:19 ADOPTION OF THE JULY 13, 2023 MEETING MINUTES (Discussion and Possible Action Item)**

Review and anticipated adoption of minutes from the Commission’s July 13, 2023 meeting.

**Public Comment**

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment on this item.

## **COMMISSIONER COMMENT/ACTION**

Motion to adopt July 13, 2023 Meeting minutes as submitted: 1st Commissioner Emran, 2nd Vice Chair Shaw. Motion carried by unanimous consent

### **4. 14:06 REPARATIONS AND CALIFORNIA** (*Discussion Item*)

The history of achieved reparations in California and nationally, and iterations of slavery in California, focusing on enslaved African Americans who were transported across the plains or through the jungles of Panama for the Gold Rush.

**Presentation: Jean Pfaelzer, Professor, University of Delaware**

#### **Public Comment**

Professor Pfaelzer delivered an in-depth historical overview of slavery, incarceration, indentured servitude, and the laws enacted by the state and its leadership to allow these human rights violations. Her thesis of California as a Slave State was well laid out and documented. She noted that slavery and abuse of indigenous peoples were part of the early Spanish culture, the Russian trader's culture, as well as the now American culture that had spread west. Abuse of peoples extended to Asian immigrants, indigenous peoples, and the enslaved (and "freed") African Americans.

The Professor pointed out that "San Francisco is the 10<sup>th</sup> top site for human trafficking in the US. and Oakland is the 6<sup>th</sup>." This sad statistic demonstrates that alongside institutional racism, human slavery continues in this City and State.

**Chair Clopton** reflected on the presentation. She noted that, despite the myth of California and San Francisco were free of slavery, the truth was Chattel Slavery existed here. She went on to note Black People of San Francisco came together to help those living in bondage, briefly citing the work of Mary Elen Pleasant. Her comments ended by noting the current trend in the US to bury, deny, and silence the teachers of our racist and morally depraved history; the truth of our past, and our present, must be told.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Ace Washington (Ace on the Case):** Thanked the Professor and commented on the history the Professor told of how the first Governor of the State wanted "the Blacks" gone. Mr. Wahington was grateful for the telling of the truth of our history and stated that keeping our true history is important to the work of reparations. And he added his support for their recommendations of the African American Reparations Advisory Committee. He is a great grandfather, nearing 70, and he state he wants "his 5."

**Member Gloria Berry** (African American Reparations Advisory Committee, Elected Member of the San Francisco Democratic Party ): Thanked the Professor for her report and noted her “annoyance” at the rhetoric of San Francisco did not have slavery. She noted that Bethel AME Church was a part of the Underground Railroad. Slaves came to the church for safety and for information on how to navigate through this racist city. Member Berry stated that the movement toward Reparations needs “partners” rather than “allies. That people must embrace Reparations or else accept they support the outcomes of the disparities felt by the African American communities (drug addiction, environmental poisoning, lack of education, and more).

### **COMMISSIONER COMMENT**

**Commissioner Shaw:** Noted the Professor’s comment that she had not learned of this history while studying at UC Berkeley. She asked what compelled the Professor to write and do this kind of research.

Professor Pfaelzer answered that following her (first) book, “Driven Out - The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans”, she was impacted by the fact she had not learned of any of this history while studying at UC. Secondly, she was affected by seeing the image of the young Asian girl in the caged brothel in San Francisco (circa 1890) and she had to ask, “what happened to the Thirteenth Amendment.” She went on to tell the story of a recent abduction of a young girl from the streets and how this story and the teachings of a friend led her to understand that “survival” is a form of resistance.

Both Professor Pfaelzer and Vice Chair Shaw commented on the important history of Bethel AME Church citing the case of Archie Lee, and the exodus of many African Americans to British Columbia.

**Commissioner Emran:** Cited the history of law in the US and noted Dred Scott, Wing Hing vs Eureka, and Cyrus Gwen Perkins case as examples of the law failing to protect people and supporting discrimination. He asked the Professor to speak to how government institutions like the justice system, which is supposed to be representative of all people, can continuously, perpetuate discrimination and hold people of color back from reaching their full potential. Professor Pfaelzer noted that this is a very big subject and beyond the scope of available time. She noted that Archie Lee, who had been “arrested” (returned to slavery) four times even though he was a free man, could not testify to his being free because Black men could not make testimony in court. His freedom was won due to the actions of local citizens and the use of Habeas Corpus enacted by an African American Administrator. It is important to note, no one

knew this person had the authority to demand Archie to be produced, and this story highlights the value of the law and the importance of our understanding of it and how it can be leveraged to hurt people, and how it can be used to aid people in need.

**Commissioner Duran** addressed the scope of the Professors comments touching down on the Asian, Native American (Indigenous peoples) and Black experiences. He asked if there are any current Native American reparations movements in progress at this time in California. Professor Pfaelzer noted there is a parallel Commission at state level looking at Native American reparations. The Commission is ongoing, and she offered to send information to the Commission.

**5. 1:26:28 DISCUSSION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN REPARATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT** (*Discussion Item*)

Members of the Commission will discuss the Final Reparations Report.

**Presentation: Karen Clopton, Chair**, San Francisco Human Rights Commission

**Public Comment**

**Chair Clopton** noted the final report of the African American Reparations Advisory Committee (AARAC) will be discussed at the Board of Supervisors meeting on September 19. In preparation for that meeting, the Human Rights Commission will be holding community engagement sessions and the next Commission meeting, September 14, will be one of those publicly noticed sessions. Details on the other community sessions will be shared with the Commissioners. She opened the floor for Commissioners to provide their comments on the submitted AARAC Final Report.

**Commissioner Emran:** Commented on the historic nature of this Report, and it needs to be analyzed with open minds and hearts. He stated it is vital for the Human Rights Commission to hear from the public to receive the broadest and most widespread and inclusion of public opinion to build consensus going forward. He thanked the staff of the HRC for their work supporting the AARAC and in developing the report. He believes that the goal of this report is to bring American society to a new reckoning with how the nations, and this City's, past affects the current conditions of African Americans and to make America a better place by helping those that are truly disadvantaged. He stated that we owe to the millions of descendants of these slaves for they are the Ayers to a society of inequities and indignities reparations are ultimately about respect and reconciliation, and the hope that one day all Americans can walk together towards a much more just future.

**Commissioner Duran:** Offered his congratulations to the AARAC for their work, and that he was moved by the context and history of this City where he was born and raised. Seeing the report further exemplifies the need for this work happening now. He recommended that, moving forward, the City have engagement (participation) from all City Departments since the issues addressed affect so many aspects of life (economic, housing, health, and more). He asked, how do we ensure everyone is accountable.

**Commissioner Johnson:** Stated he too was moved by the Report. He cited that this had been a huge community effort, informed by lots of voices, lots of input, lots of passion, lots of history, and, most importantly, lots of facts. He wanted to know how we could learn from other communities that have had successful reparations granted to them. He stated appreciation regarding the multi-faceted approach to the proposal; that it wasn't just about "handing out money", rather that it was about creating an infrastructure to create financial support, advance the black community, and provide wraparound support to ensure that there are other dimensions of advancement, building wealth, and education in the community.

**Vice Chair Shaw:** Added to comments made by Commissioner Johnson stating the need to maintain wealth (in the community) once it is built. She noted the time and energy put into the report. She noted the whole world is watching, and that his work will affect not just this generation, but future generations.

**Chair Clopton** shared this work is about love; about leadership of valuing everyone. And recognizing the history (ongoing) of dehumanization and devaluing of Black people. She noted, how we embrace reparations, and teach others about reparations, is how we show the values and love we hold true in our communities. She added this work is about obligation. It's not about who deserves what; we need to have clearly stated and repeated that chattel slavery in America was reprehensible. It was dehumanizing, and there is a debt owed.

She closed by stating her gratitude for the Advisory Committee, and that she is very proud to be part of this process. The Commission's next step will be to convene on September 14 to receive the final report and to offer this meeting as a public engagement session. She asked the commissioners to continue their review and make notes of specific items they wish to ask questions on. She noted that an Executive Overview of the Report will be available soon and will be shared with the Commissioners through the Secretary.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Member Gloria Berry** (African American Reparations Advisory Committee, Elected Member of the San Francisco Democratic Party ): Thanked the Commission for their comments on the amount of work that went in the report. She noted there was a lot of trauma, revisited, as the ARRAC went through the process of deciding what would go into the Report. She asked the Commission to act on the hiring of the Director of the Office of Reparations. The new Department budget has been created (\$2 mil). She hopes the new Director will be bold and have the passion to see, and enact, a future that has the full scope of recommendations acted on and more.

### **6. 1:48:39 COMMISSIONER ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY** (*Discussion Item*)

Commissioners update the public on activities they have participated in and any upcoming events.

#### **Public Comment**

**Vice Chair Shaw** Last Saturday, August 5<sup>th</sup>, Bethel AME held a coffee and conversation around “Searching for Hope; The Laws Present and Future Impact on Minorities and Women”. It featured justice Terry L. Jackson, who was the first African American appellate court justice here in San Francisco as well as Lagina Shelton, a UC law San Francisco student.

**Commissioner Duran** Applauded HRC staff at Sunday Streets on July 30. The team and HRC sponsored a full block and had a big team out there throughout the day. On 15 September, in partnership with the General Counsel of Mexico, there will be a celebration Mexican Independence day. The Mayor will be there, and all can join.

**Commissioner Emran** On July 22, attended an event with the Cathay Post, American Legion Post 384, for their 93<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary at the Far East Restaurant. This is the oldest Chinese American Veteran organization in the Country. He took time to highlight and shed light on disabled and homeless Veterans sleeping on the City’s streets. He stated as a government body, the Commission, and City, has have every tool to make sure the City’s Veterans are housed with dignity and respect.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Member Gloria Berry** (African American Reparations Advisory Committee, Elected Member of the San Francisco Democratic Party ): Thanked Commissioner Emran for his comments and noted that she was a homeless Veteran for a time. She stated there was, 3 years ago at

the time she was homeless, just one dedicated bed for a female Veteran in San Francisco. She continued by sharing there is an upcoming meeting of the AARAC on Monday August 14 at 5:30. The Board of Supervisors will meet to hear the report on September 19. The AARAC will meet monthly until this Committee sunsets in December and work will likely focus on outreach. She added her support for the children returning to school and the importance of their right to an education.

7. **1:55:44 ADJOURNMENT** Meeting adjourned at 7:08 pm.

Motion to Adjourn: 1st Commissioner Sweet, 2nd Vice Chair Shaw

Transcription of the meeting minutes are available upon request to the Commission Secretary, [john.mcknight@sfgov.org](mailto:john.mcknight@sfgov.org).

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