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**THE
CHISHOLM
LEGACY
PROJECT**

**Resolution on the Juneteenth Commemorative Federal Designation
of and Investment in Freedmen’s Settlements in the United States**

WHEREAS, On June 18, 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration proclaimed the Juneteenth Day of Observance a federal holiday and defined it as a day to: 1) commemorate the past, 2) celebrate the emancipation of the formerly enslaved, and 3) remind us of our capacity to “heal, hope and emerge in new ways”. The Administration also signaled it as a call to action to “uplift our founding ideals and collective prosperity”.

WHEREAS, Over 1,200 Freedmen’s Settlements and Black Towns were established throughout the South and across the nation before and after emancipation by free and formerly enslaved African Americans to create safer, self-sustaining, and thriving communities away from racial violence and economic discrimination;

WHEREAS, The Freedmen’s Settlements and Towns are the embodiment of ‘ground-up emancipation’ and the untold story of community resilience, collective economics, and community building of churches, schools, and enterprises rooted in the African ethic of Ubuntu (I am because you/we are);

WHEREAS, Many of these Freedmen’s Settlements and Towns were destroyed by southern domestic terrorists, or otherwise became impoverished by centuries of public and private divestment. This includes uncompensated enslaved labor, failed Reconstruction, and the unmet Freedmen’s Bureau’s post-emancipation promises to transition people who were formerly enslaved into the American economy, Jim Crow Laws, economic and housing discrimination through redlining, public housing and transportation policies, and environmental racism.

WHEREAS, In acknowledgment of extreme economic and racial disparities, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched the Environmental and Climate Justice Program in 2022 to provide financial and technical assistance to implement environmental and climate justice activities to benefit “underserved and overburdened” communities across the nation,^[2] which have continued “disproportionate environmental health burdens, population vulnerability, and limits to effective participation in decisions with environmental consequences”^[3];

WHEREAS, The White House further recognized the need for greater investment in disadvantaged communities through the Justice40 Initiative in 2022, where the Federal Government set a goal to direct 40% of overall benefits of Federal investments to communities that lack clean water, sewer infrastructure, clean energy, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, and remediation and mitigation of legacy pollution^[4];

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WHEREAS, Approximately 45% of the residents of the unincorporated community of Sand Branch, Texas, established as a Freedmen’s Settlement in 1878, live below the poverty line. In addition, the community is surrounded by environmentally polluting facilities such as cement plants and is also a dumping ground for tires and other trash. The community has no local school, no proximity to medical facilities, and has not had access to clean running water for over 30 years due to contamination of the local well system, and there is no access to municipal water or sewer system. Although hydro panels have recently been installed to provide drinking water, residents continue to rely on limited donations of bottled water to meet the majority of their water needs;

WHEREAS, The unincorporated community of Africatown, Alabama, established in the 1860s as a Freedmen’s Settlement by West Africans brought to the United States illegally aboard the ship Clotilda, consists of 1,215 people, of which 34% live below the poverty line, and are surrounded by industry zoned land and potential expansions of chemical plants, resulting in continued improper waste management, causing pollution, toxic exposure, contamination, and cancer in residents^(a);

WHEREAS, The unincorporated community of Mossville, Louisiana, established in 1790, has been encircled by over a dozen petrochemical plants, refineries, and other industrial facilities that pollute the air and water, causing elevated rates of cancer and other diseases among residents as multinational corporations continue to expand in the area, displacing many Mossville families and threatening the community’s long-term survival^(a);

WHEREAS, The community of Edmondson, Arkansas, incorporated in 1911, emerged as a thriving hub of Black-owned businesses, churches, and cotton farming, with African Americans constituting its civic leadership from the outset, and despite the injustice faced in the 1930s by systematic white racism to steal hundreds of town lots from the original Black owners and the county sheriff making false declarations of the delinquent property tax status of Black families, the Edmondson community persisted and persevered, rebuilding churches, homes, and a sense of cohesion after floods, fires, and storms^(a);

WHEREAS, The community of Allensworth, California, established in 1908 and the first town in California to be founded, funded, and governed by African Americans, was once a promising burgeoning town off a main railroad line, but faced racist disinvestment through the relocation of their train stop, seizure of water resources and subsequent drought and pollution of the aquifer, leaving the town under-resourced and sparsely populated. Since then, the residents have organized to revitalize the town through agriculture and historic preservation, and are laying the groundwork for a full community revitalization using 40 million dollars of state funding allocated to the town in 2022^(a);

WHEREAS, Oberlin Village, North Carolina, established in 1866, was once a prosperous free Black community with successful small businesses, schools, and university churches. It faced discrimination and displacement through the mid-20th century and is now undergoing vigorous efforts by the community-led Friends of Oberlin Village to restore historic buildings, preserve oral histories, and ensure that the community can continue to thrive in the future^(a);

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WHEREAS, Independence Heights, Texas, was first established in 1908 and became the first Black city in Texas in 1915. The community built a municipal infrastructure and an ecosystem of 40 Black-owned small businesses, and now faces threats from natural disasters and gentrification that are displacing residents, including those who own property passed down through generations, leading the community to organize vehicles such as the Independence Heights Redevelopment Council to ensure community leadership in development projects and preserve its cultural and historic identity¹⁴⁰;

WHEREAS, Communities such as Edmonson, Allensworth, Oberlin Village, and Independence Heights should not be exceptional cases of communities overcoming their circumstances, but rather models for the possibility of reparation, restoration, protection, and thriving of Freedmen’s Settlement communities;

WHEREAS, It is difficult to fully quantify and understand the history and current status of all the Freedman Settlements in the United States due to lack of research and investment in analyzing, preserving, and supporting these historic settlements, towns, and communities, with a large part of this history held by the descendants of the founders and residents.

WHEREAS, These Freedmen’s Settlements can serve as pillars of inspiration and modeling of land regeneration, eco-based economies organized around communal and collective land, and economic policies for divested communities;

WHEREAS, A handful of former Freedmen’s Settlements have received state or local designation for their historic status, offering them an opportunity for preservation and public acknowledgment, such as the Freedmen’s Town Historic District in Houston, Texas;

WHEREAS, There is an ongoing call, gaining much traction today, to preserve and document the history of Freedmen’s Settlements, leading to projects such as the Texas Freedom Colonies Project, the Mapping Blackness Project, as well as the Freedmen’s Bureau Search Portal created by the National Museum of African American History and Culture, among others;

WHEREAS, With a greater focus and leveraging of the power of various federal agencies’ support, protection, and investment, transformation becomes possible for all these historic communities across the United States;

WHEREAS, The rich history of Freedmen’s Settlements and the Freedmen’s Bureau provides a foundation and precedent for the Federal Designation of Freedmen’s Settlements;

WHEREAS, The current moment presents an opportunity for the federal government to not only fulfill the unmet promises and possibilities of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the larger Reconstruction movement, but also to help right the historic and present wrongs that have placed the Freedmen’s Settlements and Black frontline communities in such chronically vulnerable positions; and;

WHEREAS, A Federal Designation of Freedmen’s Settlements, as described below, is imperative to support the continued and sustained thriving of Black frontline communities situated in Freedmen’s Settlements across the United States.

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It is, therefore,

RESOLVED, That on Juneteenth 2024, the known Freedmen’s Settlements should be federally designated as historic communities free from eminent domain, imposed development, and gentrification;

RESOLVED, That significant efforts be made, with the funding, technical assistance, and/or staffing of federal agencies, to fully identify all former Freedmen’s Settlements across the U.S., utilizing existing records and oral history keeping created by multiple communities and organizations;

RESOLVED, That the Federal government dedicate ongoing funding for historic and cultural preservation, infrastructure creation and maintenance, and economic investment to Freedmen’s Settlements, both designated and undesignated;

RESOLVED, That the Federal Designation of Freedmen’s Settlement enshrines historic community preservation, including protecting communities from development, gentrification, and environmental hazards through strategic investment, external development regulation, community-led and driven economic development, small business creation, workforce development, and education;

RESOLVED, That designated Freedmen’s Settlements receive physical commemoration of their histories in the form of plaques/signage, preserved and restored historic buildings, lands, and sites, and/or museums or other historical institutions;

RESOLVED, That the Federal Designation serves to provide designated communities with preferential status in seeking funds from federal agencies and dedicates access to resources for community-driven and owned economic development, small business creation, and workforce and infrastructure development to help lift these communities out of poverty;

RESOLVED, That ongoing support shall be provided to the residents and descendants of the founders of Freedmen’s Settlements who hold long-standing knowledge of the history of their communities to preserve the historical foundation of this nation, and tribute be paid to the founders through physical plaques/signage in each of these historic communities;

RESOLVED, That a research team shall be formed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the communities on the cities and states in which they reside and the impact of the State’s actions upon the communities to better understand the power dynamics of the historical injustices that have taken place in the Freedmen’s Settlements;

RESOLVED, That coordination amongst the federal government, state governments, agencies, and nonprofit organizations is warranted to support Freedmen’s Settlement communities and municipalities, including, but not limited to, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, food assistance programs, historic land preservation, and clean water foundations;

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RESOLVED, That all Freedmen’s Settlements in the United States have fair standards of living, including sewage, roads, emergency services, climate-resilient infrastructure, and an overall focus on the health, wellbeing, sustainability, and resilience of these communities;

RESOLVED, That a new entity in the legacy of the Freedmen’s Bureau be created to serve as a hub for technical assistance and advocacy support to Freedmen’s Settlements to help close the gap of the racial disinvestment in historically Black communities;

RESOLVED, That the above-mentioned changes will lead to greater equity and investment in historically disadvantaged communities that have faced centuries of racism, discrimination, environmental and climate injustices, and violence, as conceived in the nineteenth century and continually built upon today; and,

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, That by adopting these commitments proposed by The Chisholm Legacy Project, Inc and endorsed by the undersigned, the Federal government honors the legacies of freedom, ingenuity, resilience, and community care created by the communities in the Freedmen’s Settlements and bring recognition and honor to the efforts of these formerly enslaved people on Juneteenth 2024.

^[1] Eliot, T. D. & Miscellaneous Pamphlet Collection. (1866) *Freedmen's Bureau. Speech of Hon. Thomas D. Eliot, of Massachusetts, in the House of representatives*. [Washington: Printed at the Congressional globe office] [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/18000897/>.

^[2] *Environmental Justice Grants, Funding and Technical Assistance*, EPA, <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/environmental-justice-grants-funding-and-technical-assistance> (last updated Jan. 29, 2024).

^[3] *Environmental Justice Showcase Communities by Region*, EPA, <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/environmental-justice-showcase-communities-region> (last updated June 21, 2023).

^[4] *Justice40: A Whole-Of-Government Initiative*, The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>.

^[5] *Africatown, AL*, The Chisholm Legacy Project: The Freedmen Settlements, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d34e56390f8a4dbba74e94badfbb979c/page/Africatown%2C-AL/>; See also: <https://nextcity.org/features/africatown-rail-industrial-pollution-port-cities>.

^[6] *Mossville, LA*, The Chisholm Legacy Project: The Freedmen Settlements, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d34e56390f8a4dbba74e94badfbb979c/page/Mossville%2CLA/>.

^[7] *Edmondson, AR*, The Chisholm Legacy Project: The Freedmen Settlements, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d34e56390f8a4dbba74e94badfbb979c/page/Edmondson%2C-AR/>.

^[8] Brennon Dixon, *Allensworth, A One Time Black Utopia, Could Rise Again from the Central Valley Dust*, Los Angeles Times (Feb. 20, 2023), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-02-20/california-first-black-town-allensworth-looks-to-historic-past-to-build-a-better-future>.

^[9] Friends of Oberlin Village, <https://friendsofoberlinvillage.org/>.

^[10] Independence Heights, <https://independenceheights.org/>; see *Super Neighborhoods*, City of Houston, TX, <https://www.houstontx.gov/superneighborhoods/13.html>; see also Independence Heights Redevelopment Council, <https://ihrchouston.org/>.