

Declarations: Archivist's Task Force on Racism Town Hall Recap: May 11, 2021

Posted by [Michael Davis](#) May 14, 2021



All Hands



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Archivist's Task Force on Racism Town Hall

May 11, 2021

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Approximately 800 NARA employees from across the country attended the Town Hall for the [Archivist's Task Force on Racism](#) on May 11.

Recently, in [NARA Notice 2021-129](#), Archivist of the United States [David S. Ferriero](#) shared the [final report from the Task Force](#). This Town Hall covered the thought process, findings, recommendations, and addressed some of the questions, comments, and kudos NARA employees had regarding the report.

Acting Director for Public and Media Communications [Robin Waldman](#) moderated the meeting. In order of appearance, the Task Force presenters were:

- Archivist of the United States - Opening Remarks
- Task Force Chair and Office of [Office of Equal Employment Opportunity](#) Director [Erica Pearson](#) - Update on the Task Force on Racism
- [\(b\) \(6\)](#) and [\(b\) \(6\)](#) - Thought process and recommendations for the Main Task Force group
- [\(b\) \(6\)](#) and [\(b\) \(6\)](#) - Thought process and recommendations for the Museum Subgroup
- [\(b\) \(6\)](#) and [\(b\) \(6\)](#) - Thought process and recommendations for the Archival Description Subgroup

Deputy Archivist of the United States [Debra Steidel Wall](#) also joined the presenters, along with:

- Director of Workforce Strategy and Analysis (H) and Main Task Force Co-chair, [Ovnelle Millwood](#)
- Director of [John F. Kennedy Presidential Library](#) and Museum (LP-JFK) and Museum Subgroup Chair [Alan Price](#)
- Director, [Jimmy Carter Presidential Library](#) & Museum (LP-JC) and Museum Subgroup Co-chair [Meredith Evans](#)
- Chief [Office of Innovation](#) Officer (V) and Museum Subgroup Chair [Pamela Wright](#)
- Director of the Special Media Division (RRS) and Museum Subgroup Co-chair [Daniel Rooney](#)

“The final report was shared April 28 and I announced that we accepted all the recommendations presented in the report,” said Ferriero. “I’m proud to acknowledge this has been a staff-driven effort. It is obvious from the report that we share a common desire to make NARA a better and more equitable workplace and our responsibilities to the greater community, acknowledging harmful past practices of our own and building on the work of other institutions which led the way on efforts towards change.”

Pearson followed the Archivist by first thanking him and the Deputy Archivist for allowing her to lead the Task Force on Racism. She also thanked all of the Task Force chairs, its members, and the NARA employees who provided comments.

“To the Task Force members, thank you for every single effort and hard work that you included while working together,” said Pearson. “I’m so proud of your commitment and your research. Today, we will highlight areas throughout the execution of the Task Force, which are detailed in the report. We have six special presenters that will walk you through what we did behind the scenes and how we got to where we are today.”

The first set of presenters from the Main Task Force group were [\(b\) \(6\)](#) and [\(b\) \(6\)](#). They both spoke about the thought processes and recommendations their team took regarding issues relating to diversity and inclusion (D&I), employee experience, and race-based harassment.

The Main Task Force’s recommendations included:

- Rebranding the Diversity and Inclusion program by creating a Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) program
- Recruiting and retaining Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)

- Auditing and reevaluating NARA's hiring practices and policies for bias, unfairness, and legality

"Your voices were heard and we took into consideration the feedback from you all," said (b) (6). "We appreciate the effort to become one NARA. We worked as a team, met on a weekly basis, conducted research, explored the Management Directive 715, and consulted with NARA experts such as human resources, human capital, [and] research services to assist with the development of the recommendations."

The presenters from the Museum Subgroup were (b) (6) and (b) (6).

"I would like to start by telling you a story that we learned about through one of our staff focus groups," said (b) (6). "It happened during a tour of the Rotunda ... the leader referred to the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights as the Charters of Freedom, which many of us often do. It was at this point that one of the tour members a Black, credentialed staffer turned to him and said, 'Those are not my charters of freedom.' I tell this story because it demonstrates the importance of the work of the Task Force."

(b) (6) and (b) (6) summarized their team's thought processes when examining ways NARA can ensure a diversity of representation, viewpoints, access, and outreach in our exhibits, education, and public programs.

The Museum Subgroup's recommendations included:

- Listening and taking meaningful action in response to museum staff input
- Creating a culture and standard practice of active engagement with the public
- Reimagining the Rotunda

The presenters from the Archival Description Subgroup were (b) (6) and (b) (6), who both spoke about how their team examined matters relating to offensive terminology in legacy descriptions in the National Archives Catalog and how NARA presents information to the public.

"Our country is reckoning with oppression," said (b) (6). "Many of our records are testaments to these very events. When Black people, indigenous people, and people of color, or BIPOC, are seen as less than human at worst, and less than white people at best, then the government is not held accountable for describing them thoroughly, respectfully, and accurately. The descriptive language that we have inherited, and sometimes created, reflects a culture of oppression and willful ignorance."

The Archival Description Subgroup's recommendations included:

- Exploring and developing processes to correct under-described and over-described records in the Catalog
- Providing language translation in the Catalog and other Archives.gov sites
- Developing a dedicated working group to ensure all issues are continually addressed as a program rather than a one-time project

More information regarding the presenters briefings can be found in the attached slide presentation and all of the recommendations can be found in the [final report](#).

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Most of the questions and comments were addressed by the Archivist, Deputy Archivist, Task Force chairs and its members, during the question and answer session.

With the delivery of the report and the Town Hall, the Task Force has completed its chartered task. Further information about next steps the agency will take to address the findings of the report lies beyond the scope of the Task Force's work, but it will be forthcoming soon.

"This is a remarkable milestone but as I shared, this is just the beginning," said Ferriero. "The hard work is ahead, but I'm confident we will maintain the same approach, doing it together."

The slide presentation and written transcript are attached. The video recording is located [here](#).

NARA's next Town Hall will be hosted by the Office of Innovation on May 19, 2021. The Town Hall date is already on your calendar.

- [Task Force on Racism Town Hall-Writtentranscript.docx.pdf](#) 216.2 KB
- [May 11, 2021 Task Force Town Hall.pdf](#) 3.1 MB

105 Views

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