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Omaha's Documented Lynching: Where do we go from here?

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Black Lives, Black Poverty and Black Votes Matter

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One of Omaha's riots occurred September 28–29, 1919. The riot was by white people: it was not a race riot as they were frequently termed and it resulted in the brutal lynching of Will Brown, a black worker (he was also shot, burned and dragged through north Omaha); the death of two white rioters; the attempted hanging of Mayor Edward Parsons Smith; as well as white and black citizens; and a public rampage by thousands of white rioters who set fire to the Douglas County Courthouse in downtown Omaha. It followed more than 20 race riots that occurred in major industrial cities of the United States during has been called "Red Summer of 1919." For the record Omaha whites also lynched George Smith AKA Joe Coe, in October 1891.

Fast forward to December, 2018. Next year, September, 2019 will mark 100 years since the Will Brown tragedy. For months there has been a small ad hoc work group meeting to determine our response to the lynching of Smith and Brown and for that matter the police shooting of Vivian Strong and more. The Brown anniversary may provide an opportunity for education, dialogue, healing, and transformative progress in many areas as to race relations and the addressing of solutions and progress to the challenges of today. The work group conducted a public meeting in August in order to open up the discussions with the community. Recently the group formally formed an organization: **Omaha Community Council for Racial Justice & Reconciliation (COUNCIL). Vickey Young (NAACP) serves as its President.** Please be clear, this is NOT a closed group, on the contrary it is just beginning and open to all individuals and organizations. Meetings will be posted on social media, the Omaha Star and email. This is to be a community wide effort. It was important to organize because of EJI. EJI (Equal Justice Initiative), oversees and operates a Memorial and Museum in Montgomery, Alabama that features over 4400 documented Lynchings throughout the USA. The Council will be formally interacting with EJI going forward.

Where do we go from here?

The COUNCIL is following a strategy to create three "Rails" to commemorate the Will Brown 100-year anniversary:

Rail 1: To provide an anchor and framework to the community, including a master calendar centered around the yearlong events culminating with September 28th anniversary. Individual and organizations are urged to consider creating events and ideas. This "Rail" will provide vast opportunity for community involvement and creativity. Open to all.

Rail 2: To provide a formal link to EJI. That link will oversee the planned and protocol of EJI to provide Omaha with a Marker, commemorating the lynching(s) and a larger coffin looking “canister” (pictured: “Canisters” from all over the country each documenting lynching by county. Photos taken during the 2018 BVM’s Black History Tour). The decisions to when, where and how to place a “canister” in Omaha will be part of the task for this “Rail”.



Rail 3: To develop the event day and rollout of a September 28th, 100-year anniversary ceremony.

Next Meeting:

Where: Creighton at Highlander, 2112 N. 30th Street (first level past Hardy Coffee Co.) | <http://highlanderomaha.com/>

When: Monday, January 14, 5:30 p.m.

What: Discussion will include an update on the Council's current progress in communication with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) about markers and monuments, an update on the Council's broader communication efforts, and group discussion of events to plan around in 2019.

Please submit any relevant events (i.e. those that address racial violence or in/justice) from your organization here for consideration: <https://goo.gl/forms/qwwcmLJmjySSWmhi2>

For information about past meetings, see the meeting minutes at: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ERf0Q8J8o82jocwkQ48019-rFuTOEh8y>

We hope to see you in January. Happy Holidays!

RSVP: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1919-commemoration-community-partners-meeting-tickets-53955092133>