

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-02-005R

A RESOLUTION COMMITTING TO END STRUCTURAL RACISM AND ACHIEVE RACIAL EQUITY

WHEREAS, the City of Urbana endeavors to lead the pursuit of racial equality and justice; and

WHEREAS, equality does not come at the expense of another, but ensures that everyone gets what they need to be a full participant in their community; and

WHEREAS, white supremacy defies what it means to be American by denying the ideals prescribed in the Declaration of Independence and Civil Rights enshrined in the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, in order for our community to heal and achieve racial equity, it is necessary to recognize and confront the history of injustice; and

WHEREAS, in the City of Urbana, the history of white supremacy and racial oppression began with the first white settlements by the French, with slavery being legal and present in the territory through British and colonial rule until the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. From then on, territorial black laws and unlawful practice purposefully perpetuated slavery and racial oppression, and this practice continued despite the exclusion of slavery when the State was established in 1818. By an 1824 referendum for a constitutional amendment, 42% of the vote was still in favor of slavery; and

WHEREAS, despite nominal legal progress, Jim Crow laws and white supremacy continued to be prevalent in Champaign-Urbana. The Ku Klux Klan maintained a significant local presence, operating out of the Illinois Theater in Urbana and holding events with upwards of 3,000 members at a time when the County's population was less than 60,000; and

WHEREAS, issues of segregation and racial oppression became particularly acute in the decades following WWII, following the increase in the black population of Champaign-Urbana. Black citizens were systematically and illegally excluded from white neighborhoods through subdivision covenants, developer, realtor, landlord, seller, and lending practices and were *de facto* confined to the

‘north end’. Residents were further exploited by predatory rents in slum rentals and would-be homeowners faced inflationary supply constraints that actively diminished wealth creation. By 1961, the community was the most segregated community in the State. Furthermore, the north end neighborhood was underinvested in public infrastructure, with unpaved roads, unlit streets and other lacking infrastructure making life more difficult, unsafe, and expensive for residents; and

WHEREAS, the racial oppression of white supremacy was expansive, including more than just housing and was prevalent and punishing for employment opportunities. Regardless of qualifications, black workers were systematically discriminated against in hiring, where the only jobs made available were: lower paying, manual labor, more insecure, and segregated. In 1968, the unemployment rate in Champaign-Urbana was 2.6 percent for whites, and between 12 and 20 percent for blacks, depending on the season. Especially oppressive was the lack of employment opportunities for black professionals. Local black residents, having completed a college degree, were unable to find employment in Champaign-Urbana and were forced to leave the area to find appropriate employment. As late as 1968, there were no local black doctors, lawyers, firefighters, and only recently had *bona fide* black police officers been hired. The lack of black professionals meant that the black community faced systematic discrimination, with no alternative local option, from professions pertaining to wealth, health, public safety, and the law; and

WHEREAS, the history of white supremacy also extends to the racial discrimination of all non-white people. The land now known as Champaign County was originally home to the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations. Many were removed from the area in 1819 with the remaining native population forcefully removed in 1832 following the Black Hawk War. This history was then White-washed and the native population was caricatured in a racist demeanor for decades by the Chief Illiniweck mascot representing the University and our community; and

WHEREAS, white supremacy and racial discrimination continue to this day, both institutionalized and from impenitent individuals, where there is widespread community support for

an offensive former University mascot, and where local transportation companies discriminate against immigrants from Asian countries, and in Urbana, where the black community continues to face disparate outcomes in traffic stops; and

WHEREAS, repercussions of this history and current practice run deep. Community, social, educational, and economic outcomes for non-whites all suffer from the physical and psychological consequences of racism; and these outcomes sustain themselves long after the original sins and sinners perish; and

WHEREAS, the effects of racism are still profoundly felt today in Urbana. It affects the health and wealth of individuals and the entire community, having been declared by the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District to be a public health crisis¹. It will not be overcome without a concerted and sustained effort by all.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council, of the City of Urbana, Illinois, as follows:

Section 1. The City hereby rejects the institutionalized legacy of racism and white supremacy that is our history and afflicts our community today. While our community and government have continued to evolve away from the habitual practice and widespread acceptance of racism and white supremacy and is today a loving community seeking to fulfill the promise of a more perfect Union, we are all inhabitants of an inherited prison of institutionalized inequalities of free and fair existence. If the City is to actualize the commandments of Our Constitution, we must be conscious. The City of Urbana will strive to purge the perpetuation of discrimination that is institutionalized in our society through the power of its policies, procedures, and attitudes. The Mayor and City Council will henceforth speak truth to the power of white supremacy and shall publicly denounce it whenever its attitudes or effects become clear within our community.

^[1] See CUPHD [resolution](#). Much thanks to City of Evanston, Illinois [Resolution](#) for inspiring the format of this resolution and for the Champaign County Historical Archives staff at The Urbana Free Library, especially Tom Kuiper, for the historical research, including providing the dissertation [Injustice sheltered: race relations at the University of Illinois and Champaign-Urbana, 1945-1962](#). Their research allows this resolution to speak truth to history of white supremacy in Urbana and Champaign County.

Section 2. The City of Urbana recognizes that it will take additional effort to align our actions with our aspirations. The subversiveness of white privilege includes the double standard of responsibilities when there are unequal rights and inequitable opportunities. The City resolves to recognize and value diversity in its policies, personnel, and investment; the City will seek to ensure that there is harmony between equal and fair processes and equitable results. In the pursuit of equity, wherever it is feasible and just, the City shall use all methods and methodologies at our disposal through our Departments, City Council, Boards, and Commissions. The City shall resolve to constantly challenge ourselves and to be a leader in creating a government, community, society, and economy unshackled by the past, unleashing progress and prosperity to their full potential for all of our residents and business owners so that we may continue moving forward to form a more perfect Union here in the City of Urbana.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL this ____ day of _____, _____.

AYES:

NAYS:

ABSTENTIONS:

Phyllis D. Clark, City Clerk

APPROVED BY THE MAYOR this ____ day of _____, _____.

Diane Wolfe Marlin, Mayor