

Testimony March 29, 2022

Given By Evelyn A. McDowell, Ph.D.

Good morning. Thank you to Kamilah Moore, Chairperson of the State of California's *first-in-the-nation* **Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, with a Special Consideration for African Americans Who are Descendants of Persons Enslaved in the United States and fellow committee members.**

I am honored to be called to speak before this groundbreaking, history-making committee. I applaud your efforts.

Next Slide 2 (See attached)

My name is Dr. Evelyn A. McDowell and I am the President and Chair of the Board of the National Society of Sons and Daughters of the United States Middle Passage, a lineage society, representing close to 100 individuals who have successfully traced themselves to over 100 people enslaved under the barbarous system of the US chattel slavery, where millions of individuals over many generations were killed, terrorized, starved, tortured, raped, kidnapped, humiliated, robbed of their freedom, wealth, and political representation, and robbed of the ability to be educated and married, and robbed of their children and families. We celebrate our ancestors' triumphs over these atrocities and their contributions to our country and the world. Our organization was founded in 2013. Its mission is:

To Connect Members, Commemorate Ancestors, and Educate the world about the resilience of our ancestors.

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To join the organization, one must be over 18, prove lineal descent from an individual of African descent enslaved in the US, including its colonial period, before the end of slavery.

The organization does not have an official stance on reparations. However, I, speaking for myself, as a descendant of over 30 enslaved people, offer my full support because it is the only way to close the many trillions of dollar wealth gap between descendants of enslaved people and people classified as White in America. And, it is the only way to bring a measure of justice for the atrocities committed and to bring healing and honor to our nation.

I have helped many individuals find their enslaved ancestors and I have spoken at conferences and organizations across the nation and written about this subject.

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My purpose here is to tell the committee that is absolutely possible to trace one's lineage to an individual who was enslaved in these United States. For the vast majority of African-Americans, it is can be relatively easy. And, I want to leave you with some ideas about more efficient ways to identify enslaved ancestors.

I will walk you through the process using my own family.

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There are two words that sum up the ease of connecting to enslaved ancestors and those two words are “negative evidence”. It is defined by an inference one can draw from the absence of what should exist under given circumstances.

I will be using negative evidence throughout my presentation.

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Step 1: Find your parents with their parents on the most recent census. Before starting, determine your parent's and grandparents' names, places and dates of birth and death, and then start with the most recently published census to find your parents living with their parents. The 1940 census is available however the 1950 census will be published in April of 2022. Then, you want to keep going back, census by census, until you find your parents living with their parents. For me, I located my Father, Ervin Aniton, a future Montford Point Marine in WWII, living with his parents Boston Lincoln and Irene Aniton in Blount Country, Oneonta, AL on the 1940 census. I confirmed the details on the census to make sure I have the right people.

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For Step 2, Find your grandparents living with their parents (your great grandparents). Some people will need to ask parents and others who these ancestors were. One way to verify this information is to locate the death certificate of your grandparents to get the names of your great-grandparents. As you can see, I'll be looking for Boston Lincoln Aniton with his mother and father, William and Easter Aniton.

Next Slide 8

I continue going back to each census, one at a time until I reach the 1910 census, where I see my grandfather living with his parents. You can see here my great grandmother and great grandfather with their son, Boston Lincoln Aniton, who is listed there at age 21. Please note, on this 1910 census you will see the race and age listed. This information is also very important as well as the birthplace of the ancestor and the birthplaces of their mothers and fathers. On the 1910 census, my great-grandfather's age is 48 and my great-grandmother is 57. For my her, Easter, if you do the math, you will see she was born during the time of slavery in a deep slave state.

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On the next slide, we see a key piece of negative evidence. This is an Alabama law passed in 1832 virtually eliminating its free people of color by threatening torture and re-enslavement if they don't leave. So anyone living in Alabama after February 1, 1833, but before December 1865 was most likely enslaved because free people of color were forced to leave. If her parents were free at the time of her birth, she would not have been born in Alabama. Another form of negative evidence supporting enslavement is the absence of the qualifying ancestor on the 1860 and 1850 censuses since enslaved people would not be listed.

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Using the genealogical proof standard¹, I can stop here because I have critically tested relevant evidence through a process of analysis and correlation to show that my ancestor, Easter Staton Aniton, was more than likely enslaved. Her race is identified as “Black”--Generally, individuals identified as “Black”. Indian, or Mulatto were enslaved. She was born in Alabama in 1852 between 1833 and 1865. She and her mother were born in Alabama establishing long roots in a slave state as defined by >10,000 enslaved African-Americans like Alabama, Georgia, Texas, Arkansas, Virginia, Missouri, Florida, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Utah, and Oklahoma. I did not find Easter Staton nor her parents enumerated as free on the 1850 or 1860 censuses. So, I have successfully proven in just a few steps that my ancestor was enslaved, using negative and other evidence.

For me, it was relatively easy, but for some, it may take a bit more work, depending on how many individuals were born in their direct line between now and the end of slavery.

Now, to become a member of our organization you have to do a little more work because we are interested in the details of her enslavement. We want to understand how she experienced slavery. We want to make sure her story is told. I recently spoke to an uncle who actually saw her when he was a young boy. My uncle is nearly 100 years old. His young life was changed after hearing about how badly she was treated during slavery. In my subsequent research, I found Easter's mother, Lucinda Minerva Bynum, at age 8, listed on will valued at \$350. I do believe that this level of exactness is necessary to establish a claim for reparation since almost all people who were identified as Black or Mulato, living in 1865 were enslaved or descendants of the enslaved.

So in conclusion, finding evidence of enslavement is fairly easy to do especially using negative evidence. It is powerful and simple. It is a great tool when positive evidence, like bills of sales, inventory lists, and deeds can be difficult to obtain. Additionally, to aid in the power of negative evidence, I am proposing the creation of a database of free “Black” immigrants and their descendants arriving before the end of slavery.

Most researchers will agree that there is no significant evidence of unforced migration of people who would be identified as “Black” before 1865. For instance, according to the 1850 and 1860 censuses, fewer than 10,000 people immigrated to the United States², most of them from the West Indies. I propose the development of a database containing individuals and their descendants who immigrated to the United States as “Free”. It would help to generate a key source of negative evidence. We may also add free individuals who were living in the Spanish colonies and unclaimed territories (naturalized) before the land became a part of the United States. If an ancestor was born before the end of slavery, living in the United States, and not on the Free People of Color Immigration and Naturalization List, the ancestor would be considered enslaved or coming from a lineage of slavery.

In addition, to honor the millions and millions of individuals who had so much taken from them, our government could help create a vast database of enslaved individuals, using negative and other evidence, to identify their descendants, and help descendants connect to them. In my humble opinion, it is the least we can do to honor the humanity of the very people who created so much wealth for our

¹ Board of Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Ancestry.com, 2019, pp. 2-3.

² Compiled from United States Census, 1860 Census, Table LXXXI and 1860 Census Recapitulations Nativities of Free Populations p. 620.

country. This kind of, what I call “reverse genealogy” is being done all over the country and especially descendants of individuals enslaved on college campuses like Georgetown University and the University of Virginia.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity and I look forward to your questions!