

Draft Declaration of Intent

From 1945 to 1975, racism cast a shadow over the experiences of all Mississippians.

This time period encompasses the transition between the height of Jim Crow and a post-segregation society. It was characterized by increased and organized resistance to white supremacy, as well as the development of more subtle methods of institutional racism. Many practices consciously and unconsciously oppressed a large segment of the population. These practices resulted in crimes against the body, crimes against property, the collusion of public and private institutions in preventing access and opportunity to all people, and conspiracies of silence.

We still feel the effects of that dark time.

As a part of a dominant culture of racism, Mississippi's economic, environmental, legal, political, educational and social systems have shackled our potential and promise. Racial disparities in the areas of housing, health care, education, criminal justice, and employment not only continue to have disproportionate effect on the state's African-American population, but also limit the shared quality of life for all citizens.

The courageous struggles of many have yielded progress, but a full and accurate measure of our state's history and its lasting impact has been obscured.

Too often stories are told of this time focusing on individuals and not institutions. While it is true that vigilantes terrorized the night, it is also true that public officials and community leaders shaped the daily experience of oppression. Moreover, the white establishment enabled the violence that occurred. The failure to understand this connection has allowed the premature declaration of closure following instances of individual justice that have happened.

A just and inclusive future can only be ensured by a comprehensive inquiry of this unjust and segregated past.

There are still living eyewitnesses from this era who can help Mississippi face and tell its own stories in an honest, unflinching fashion. This opportunity allows the collection of detailed stories and records about this era. This is a unique moment, wherein we have attained a measure of distance and insight into this period while still having living participants and observers of this time.

The establishment of a Mississippi Truth and Reconciliation Project will allow us to develop appropriate remedies and to create a culture of equity, harmony, and prosperity.

Acknowledging and working to understand our deliberate, insidious and systematic racism can set us free to understand our past and to create opportunities to heal our wounds. It is hoped that citizens will use these findings to help raise Mississippi up to its potential and serve as a model for other states and communities struggling with their racial legacies. A Mississippi Truth and Reconciliation Commission will allow the state to constructively engage the confusion, division, and bitter feelings related to this time period. A truthful engagement will lead to greater reconciliation and multiracial support for restorative justice among individuals, sectors, and institutions within the state of Mississippi.

We, the undersigned, commit ourselves to work diligently and honestly with the people and institutions of Mississippi to carry out this project with integrity, promoting truth, understanding and reconciliation.