



PR 24-0238

RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL WAR MUSEUM INSTALLATION OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN SPIRIT OF FREEDOM EMANCIPATION STATUE APPROVAL RESOLUTION OF 2021

TO: The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
FROM: Brian McClure, Director, Council Office of Racial Equity
DATE: June 28, 2021

COMMITTEE

Committee of the Whole

BILL SUMMARY

Proposed Resolution 24-0238, the “African American Civil War Museum Installation of the Abraham Lincoln Spirit of Freedom Emancipation Statue Approval Resolution of 2021,” would approve the installation of an Abraham Lincoln Statue.

CONCLUSION

Although the overall impact on residents’ lives will be minimal, PR24-0238 would contribute to widening the racial inequity between the number of commemorative works dedicated to white men and those dedicated to Black persons and other persons of color in the District of Columbia.

BACKGROUND

- **PR24-0238 would allow the installation of a statue of President Abraham Lincoln on public space controlled by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) at the African American Civil War Museum.**
- **The mission of the African American Civil War Museum is to educate the public on the experiences of the United States Colored Troops and the Black community during the Civil War (1861-1865).**
- **The DC Commemorative Works Committee is charged with advising and recommending to the Mayor and the Council the status of each application for placement of commemorative works on public spaces in the District. This Committee gave a favorable ruling on the placement of the statue.**

If approved, PR24-0238 would allow the installation of a statue of President Abraham Lincoln on public space controlled by the District Department of Transportation (DDOT).¹ The space is adjacent to the African American Civil War Museum, located at the historic Archibald Grimke School.

The African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation (AACMFF) is a nonprofit corporation located in the District of Columbia. Their mission is to raise awareness of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) who fought for the Union in the American Civil War.² Since 1998, the AACMFF has operated the African

¹ See [§ 9-204.11.\(2\)\(A\)](#) “Public space” means any public street, alley, circle, bridge, building, park, other public place or property owned by or under the administrative control or jurisdiction of the District of Columbia.

² See the [African American Civil War Museum website](#)

American Civil War Museum currently located at 1925 Vermont Avenue, NW. The museum's mission is to serve the educational needs of the local, national, and international community with a high-quality and effective learning experience while interpreting the history of the USCT and the community life of Black Americans before, during, and after the American Civil War.³

One of the existing statues in the museum is *The Spirit of Freedom: African American Civil War Memorial sculpture and its Wall of Honor*. The sculpture was dedicated in 1999 to honor the Black soldiers who bravely fought. The ten-foot sculpture portrays uniformed soldiers and a sailor with a family depicted on the back. The sculpture is in the center of a granite-paved plaza, encircled on three sides by the Wall of Honor.⁴ The wall lists the names of 209,145 USCT drawn from the official records of the Bureau of United States Colored Troops at the National Archives, on 166 burnished stainless steel plaques arranged by regiment.⁵



The Spirit of Freedom: African American Civil War Memorial

Source: [National Park Service](#)

In 2018, the museum signed an agreement for a ninety-nine-year lease of the former Grimke School at 1923 Vermont Avenue, NW.⁶ A part of the \$8 million Grimke School⁷ expansion project will include the unveiling of another statue, a six-foot bronze statue depicting President Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order.⁸ The document declared that beginning on January 1, 1863, all enslaved people in states engaged in rebellion against the Union “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”⁹



The Abraham Lincoln Spirit of Freedom Emancipation Statue

Source: [The Washington Post](#)

According to Dr. Frank Smith, founding director of the museum, “the statue will place Lincoln in appropriate context as it positions him directly across the street facing the *Spirit of Freedom* monument honoring the USCT.”¹⁰ For visitors, a statue of Lincoln in proximity to the *Spirit of Freedom* can certainly help add nuance and complexity to understanding Lincoln’s legacy, the Civil War, and emancipation.

The Lincoln statue was delivered to the museum in June of 2020 and was placed in storage, where it will remain until it is installed in its permanent location on a ceremonial porch being constructed in front of the Grimke building.¹¹

The DC Commemorative Works Committee is tasked with advising and recommending to the Mayor and the Council the status of each application

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ [99 Year Lease Signed African American Civil War Memorial Museum Grimke School Redevelopment](#), African American Civil War Memorial Museum, 2018.

⁸ Dr. Frank Smith, [A new statue of Lincoln will adequately honor him alongside Black Americans](#), Washington Post, August 7, 2020

⁹ [Emancipation Proclamation](#), History Channel, January 25, 2021

¹⁰ Dr. Frank Smith, [A new statue of Lincoln will adequately honor him alongside Black Americans](#), Washington Post, August 7, 2020

¹¹ Ibid.

for placement of commemorative works on public spaces in the District.¹² During their April 30, 2021 meeting, the group considered the placement of the commemorative statue of Lincoln. The committee found that “President Lincoln is a person consistent with values defined in the draft report of Mayor Bowser’s District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) Working Group.”^{13 14}

RACIAL EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

There are at least four statues and commemorative works honoring President Lincoln’s legacy throughout the District, which has long been debated. The first statue of Abraham Lincoln was dedicated in 1868 on the third anniversary of his assassination.¹⁵ The statue is located in front the DC Court of Appeals (formerly, the DC City Hall). Additional pieces dedicated to Lincoln include one of our nation’s most iconic monuments, the Lincoln Memorial, which for many of the 6-7 million visitors¹⁶ it draws yearly serves as an enduring symbol of freedom.

There is also the lesser known Emancipation Memorial, which was erected in 1876 using funds collected by formerly enslaved men and women. Although Black Americans throughout the country provided money for the statue, it was designed without any feedback from them.¹⁷ The statue, however, has also been subject to interpretation. Depending on one’s vantage point, the person is either emerging from his chains or is kneeling before President Lincoln.¹⁸

Lincoln’s legacy has long been debated. The Council Office of Racial Equity cannot give this debate the space it’s due but encourages readers to review the resources cited below.^{19 20 21 22 23}

There is a severe lack of diversity amongst statues and commemorative works in the District of Columbia. In 2019, of at least 115 statues in DC, just six were of American women and only one was of a Black woman, that being Mary McLeod Bethune. Duke Ellington was the only Black native Washingtonian with a statue dedicated in his honor. Although this legislation was signed and enacted by the Mayor on January 11, 2021, PR24-0238 does not further the goals of Bill 23-0234 to diversify the representation of statues and memorials in the District. Instead, the very nature of erecting another statue of Lincoln underscores the need to close the existing gap called for by Bill 23-0234.

During the summer of 2020, the Mayor commissioned the District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES). This working group evaluated named DC Government-owned facilities²⁴ and made recommendations as to what, if any, actions needed to be taken if the person the

¹² See § 9–204.12. [Commemorative Works Committee](#).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ernest Furgurson, [Mr. Lincoln’s Washington](#), Washingtonian, February 1, 2009.

¹⁶ David Lange, [Number of recreational visitors to the Lincoln Memorial in the United States from 2008 to 2020](#), Statista, Mar 3, 2021.

¹⁷ Christian Zapata and Jacob Fenston, [Norton Reintroduces Bills To Remove Emancipation, Pike, And Jackson Statues](#), Dcist, February 18, 2021.

¹⁸ DeNeen L. Brown, [Frederick Douglass delivered a Lincoln reality check at Emancipation Memorial unveiling](#), The Washington Post, June 27, 2020.

¹⁹ WEB Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. The Free Press, 1935.

²⁰ David Blight, [Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory](#). Harvard University Press, 2002.

²¹ David Blight, [Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom](#). Simon & Schuster, 2020.

²² Eric Foner, [The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery](#). WW Norton & Company, 2011.

²³ Daniel Crofts, [Lincoln and the Politics of Slavery: The Other Thirteenth Amendment and the Struggle to Save the Union](#). University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

²⁴ [DC Government-owned Facilities Focus Areas](#) include: DC Government-owned streets, DC Government-owned buildings (libraries, schools, rec centers, etc.), DC Government-owned parks, statues in DC Government-owned parks, and other named public spaces.

facility was named for was found to be “inconsistent with DC values”²⁵ and in some way encouraged the oppression of Black Americans and other communities of color or contributed to our long history of systemic racism.

Although a final report has not been released, the draft report released by the working group recommended renaming, removing or contextualizing more than fifty different government-owned spaces in the city, after studying the history of racism and oppression behind the namesakes.²⁶ Figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Francis Scott Key, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington were initially named as problematic candidates for public works dedications, however, following criticism from conservatives and the Trump White House, recommendations related to federal sites were removed.²⁷

Additionally, research by the working group revealed that more than seventy percent of named assets²⁸ in the District carries the names of white men.²⁹ The group suggested that future assets should prioritize identifying diverse candidates to honor, particularly more women, people of color and LGBTQ Washingtonians.³⁰ PR-0238, does not honor a diverse candidate. Instead, it will be at least the fifth statue recognizing Lincoln in the District.

The Council Office of Racial Equity (CORE) is less concerned about Lincoln’s legacy and more concerned that PR24-0238 will not increase representation of native Washingtonians or communities of color. Commemorative works should be intentional about who is being honored, why they are being honored, and how that representation will inspire future generations. This point was recognized by the DCFACES Working Group and the Council when it passed the Diverse Washingtonians Commemorative Works Amendment Act of 2019 (Bill 23-0233),³¹ to increase the number of commemorative works in DC dedicated to women and native Washingtonians of color.³² The Committee Report for Bill 23-0233 noted that “testimony on creation of commemorative works for minorities and women was overwhelmingly positive” and that “proposing a commemoration for deserving individuals with a focus on classes of people who are underrepresented by the memorials...exists today.”³³ It also noted that:

Commemorative works that honor aspects of our history and individuals are important for later generations...In the District, where there are so many monuments and commemorative works to individuals of national importance—as there should be in the Nation’s capital—it is also imperative for our local history that we seek to honor native Washingtonians and others who made Washington their home, and for events important to local residents.³⁴

The Committee Report for Bill 24-0234, the “Commemoration Task Force Act of 2020,” further raises an important aspect of commemorative works. The report states that any such commemoration should

²⁵ See [Our Shared DC Values](#). The following eight values launched on May 10, 2019, initiating OP’s DC Values Campaign: accessibility, diversity, equity, livability, opportunity, prosperity, resilience, and safety.

²⁶ See the [DC FACES Working Group Report](#).

²⁷ Colleen Grablick, [Dozens Of D.C. Sites Could Get Renamed Or Removed Due To Ties With Slavery And Racism](#), DCist, September 1, 2020

²⁸ See [DCFACES Working Group Report](#). The working group recommendations are centered around three asset areas: (1) living, learning and leisure environments, (2) public spaces and (3) landmarks/commemorative works.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Bill 23-0233, [the Diverse Washingtonians Commemorative Works Amendment Act of 2019](#).

³² Ibid.

³³ See Bill 23-0233 [Committee Report](#).

³⁴ Ibid.

(among other things), “be inspirational,” that “contextualization of such commemorations can be more powerful in showing, indeed, that America itself has its own flaws,” and that commemorations, existing statues, and properties should, “be reviewed by experts—historians, academics, and those with expertise in advancing racial equity.”

PR24-0238 does not support Bills 23-0233 and 24-0234—efforts of the Council to provide residents and visitors with a deeper understanding of those whose stories have not been told, especially of local communities of color. While approving the installation of a statue of Lincoln would likely have a negligible impact, in this case, it takes away opportunities to honor and increase understanding of the role Black Americans and others played up to, during, and following the American Civil War.³⁵

In the future, the District could explore not only reviewing *existing* commemorative works through a racial equity lens, but also *future* commemorative works. This review would entail ensuring works are situated with appropriate context and evaluated against the goal of diverse representation.

ASSESSMENT LIMITATIONS

Alongside the analysis provided above, the Council Office of Racial Equity encourages readers to keep the following limitations in mind:

Assessing legislation’s potential racial equity impacts is a rigorous, analytical, and uncertain undertaking.

Assessing policy for racial equity is a rigorous and organized exercise but also one with constraints. It is impossible for anyone to predict the future, implementation does not always match the intent of the law, critical data may be unavailable, and today’s circumstances may change tomorrow. Our assessment is our most educated and critical hypothesis of the bill’s racial equity impacts.

This assessment intends to inform the public, Councilmembers, and Council staff about the legislation through a racial equity lens.

As a reminder, a REIA is not binding. Regardless of the Council Office of Racial Equity’s final assessment, the legislation can still pass.

This assessment aims to be accurate and useful, but omissions may exist.

Given the density of racial equity issues, it is unlikely that we will raise all relevant racial equity issues present in a bill. In addition, an omission from our assessment should not: 1) be interpreted as a provision having no racial equity impact or 2) invalidate another party’s racial equity concern.

³⁵ WEB Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. The Free Press, 1935.