DOVER HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
Minutes from January 18, 2010
City Hall Council Chambers

PRESENT: Dr. Samuel B. Hoff, Chair, Mr. Gregory Bunkley, Vice Chair, Mr. Mark Monroe, Mr. Roy Sudley, Jr., Ms Dawn Allen-Pyne, Dr. Phyllis Edamatsu, Ms. Ellen Wasfi.

I: Chair Hoff called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. The commissioners introduced themselves, and the contractual assistant was introduced. Chair Hoff gave a brief overview of the history of this project, from its first presentation to the Dover City Council in April 2007 to this evening's meeting, which is the final open forum for public input and comments.

Mr. Kenneth Dryden: Passed out his written response to DHRC's proposed resolution on an apology for slavery. He stated that he agrees with the DHRC that an apology is necessary, but he feels that more than an apology is required and it alone should not serve as a full and complete settlement to those who are indirectly impacted by the wrongs of slavery today.

Mr. Fred Torbert: Said that the statements that were made objecting to the apology for slavery offended him. He urged the DHRC to push forward in their efforts, and said there is no excuse for the State of Delaware not to have apologized sooner. He offered to assist DHRC in any way possible.

Mr. Syl Woodford: Feels that we are custodians of this democracy. He supports the DHRC's resolution to apologize. He cited laws that were made in the past that created slavery and how even today the discrimination continues. He cited a situation in which his father, a school principal, was not allowed to teach white students in a classroom here in Delaware!

Mr. James Brooks: Thanked DHRC for the work they are doing, and thought that it was odd that it seems to be quietly put aside and not reported by the local papers. He feels that this sends a message of continued intolerance. It is honorable work that the DHRC is doing, and he offered his help and support.

Mr. Brian Rajotte: Came to the meeting out of curiosity. He does historic re-enactment. He feels that we should strive for more equality for everyone, and we need to work with our children to teach them that bigotry is wrong. He also spoke about a case of reverse discrimination against his wife that happened earlier today. He feels education about slavery is a way to help end racial bigotry.

Commissioner Monroe: Took on this project because people do not understand the how slavery affects us through history up to the present day. He found out that Delaware was one of the last states to abolish slavery! He sees the need to apologize for slavery, and sees the need to educate people about these issues.

Commissioner Wasfi: Went over the old resolution and criticized it for not going far enough. The legacy of slavery carries through today. She feels that DHRC needs to discuss the wording of the new resolution to be sure all of the current problems of bigotry and discrimination are included in the resolution.

Dr. Phyllis Edamatsu: Said we can't just stop there. The Japanese still have problems from having their property seized, being displaced and interred into camps during WWII. She feels racism, intolerance, and distrust must be addressed.

Commissioner Sudler: Was sorry that some of his African American brothers had disrespected Brian's wife and property. He asked if Brian thought slavery was taught in public schools in our area.

Mrs. Rajotte: Said that the Civil War was taught for only a week in history classes. American History is not taught in school systems. She said that the schools tend to teach only the "fun stuff" about history, and avoid teaching about the dark side of human nature.

Ms. Rebecca Cooke: Made a comment from the audience that she was taught about slavery only in college in Black History class. That high school doesn't teach about slavery.

Mr. John Walson: Said we have to approach the issue differently, we have to have a paradigm shift, and stop compartmentalizing people. We have to let go of the hatred on both sides through forgiveness as well as apologizing for racism and stereotypical injustice.

Commissioner Sudler: Posed a question to Mr. Brooks as to why he felt no apology was needed today. **Mr. Brooks:** Replied that he thought we should let bygones be bygones, that life's faster, and people are looking for what's new & exciting. He wants to leave the fragments of people's lives behind because we are not on an equal playing field, and as long as people are put in their place and treated unfairly, the apology is not sincere. He also said he thinks that whites are probably tired of paying the price for the deeds of their ancestors. He said Christian forgiveness is necessary. If you don't stand on principles, what do you have?

II: The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.