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July 5, 2016

**Support H.R. 4539, the 400 Years of African-American History Commission Act**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to support H.R. 4539, the 400 Years of African-American History Commission Act, introduced by Representative Bobby Scott. Creating a commission to commemorate the contributions by African Americans to this nation is an important first step in promoting reconciliation for the harm done to so many over the past 400 years. We welcome this opportunity to look at the ways we can confront our history and ensure that the contributions of African Americans to society are never forgotten.

The notion of a government publicly acknowledging racial injustice is not a new concept. Earlier this year, following a visit to the United States, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, established by the UN Human Rights Council, recommended that the United States facilitate public dialogue about our history of racial injustice by erecting memorials and historical markers.<sup>1</sup> The idea of reconciliation has slowly gained public support in the United States. In 1941, nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans were interned (forcibly relocated and confined) by the U.S. military following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. government formally apologized by enacting the Civil Liberties Act in 1988, which granted reparations to surviving internees and their families.<sup>2</sup> In 2008, 93 years after the lynching of Leo Frank, the only known lynching of an American Jew, Georgia dedicated a historical marker at the site of his lynching.<sup>3</sup> Just last year, the city of Brighton, Alabama dedicated a historical marker near City Hall that documents a 1908 lynching of William Miller, an African-American man who was seeking better wages for black workers and was murdered by a white mob.<sup>4</sup>

We encourage you to support this bill, as it will represent a significant step toward recognizing the incredible achievements of African Americans, as well as acknowledging the injustices that African Americans have faced over the years. Clearly, commemoration will not in and of itself bring about racial equality or healing. Nevertheless, racial justice cannot be accomplished without creating an opportunity for honest conversation about the history of racial discrimination in America. We look forward to further discussion with this important issue. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact June Zeitlin, Director of Human Rights Policy at [zeitlin@civilrights.org](mailto:zeitlin@civilrights.org) or (202) 263-2852, or Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice

<sup>1</sup> "Statement to the media by the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to USA". January 2016

<sup>2</sup> H.R.442 - 100th Congress (1987-1988): Civil Liberties Act of 1988

<sup>3</sup> City of Marietta, Georgia. "Leo Frank Lynching Site Recognized with Historical Marker"

<sup>4</sup> Equal Justice Initiative. <http://www.eji.org/node/1179>

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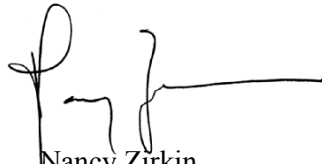


President, at [zirkin@civilrights.org](mailto:zirkin@civilrights.org) or (202) 263-2880. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President