

**STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO
HISTORIC LAND LOSSES IN BERMUDA**

By Cordell Riley and Lynne Winfield

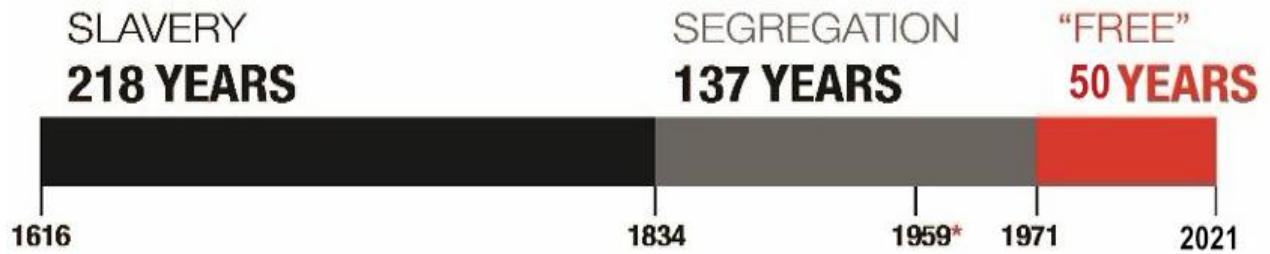
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“Faced with a collective forgetting, we must fight to remember.”

reni eddo-lodge



BERMUDA



***Theatre Boycott.**

Desegregation of schools was not mandated by law until 1971.

With this Statement to the Commission of Inquiry into Land Loss, Cordell Riley and Lynne Winfield of CURB wish to set the context from both a historical and contemporary history perspective. Understanding what was happening in Bermuda and in other countries around the same time, helps bring clarity and greater understanding to the oppression and loss of land for Bermudians.

From the arrival of the first enslaved people in Bermuda in 1616, for 218 years enslavement was endured across 11 generations till 1834. Post-Emancipation another 137 years of segregation codified in law and culture, was endured across another 7 generations until 1971 when the last law was passed desegregating the primary schools.

Pre-Emancipation these oppressive laws, policies and social rules allowed for the punishment, murder, death, and banishment of enslaved Black Bermudians. In particular, Black Bermudians both enslaved and free were prevented from inheriting and/or owning land from birth to death.

Post-Emancipation further laws and policies were put in place for the next 137 years, disenfranchising Blacks and poor whites from voting, running for parliament, accessing work opportunities and preventing wealth creation, whilst continuing to openly sanction and approve racial segregation and discrimination across multiple areas, e.g. hotels, restaurants, employment, hospitals, maternity wards, theatres, land/home ownership, funeral homes, social clubs and churches.

During this period economic violence was the preferred methodology for keeping Black people in check, compliant and subservient. Threats of the loss of one's home (albeit owned or rented), blocked from finding work, loss of employment for individuals and family members, loans and mortgages pulled, all worked to ensure Black Bermudians did not rock the boat or rise above their station.

This history has left the Black community to deal with inter-generational trauma spanning generations; and the white, colonial, and punitive systems of the past can still be found embedded in our society manifesting in the criminal justice system, education and across myriad other social and cultural behaviours.

The centuries of oppression resulted in a Culture of Fear and Silence, where speaking about race resulted in quick retribution, punishment and marginalization. A culture which is only just beginning to be lifted as people seek the truth and acknowledgement about the past.

Today, that history of oppression has serious legacy issues for Bermuda with social, political, health and economic ramifications, continuing inequality and inequity, identity conflict, internalized oppression, and the tragedy of individual, collective and societal intergenerational trauma.

Despite this oppression, Black Bermudians fought countless battles to overcome their oppression to achieve and excel, and despite all the barriers put in their way still managed to rise.

Buried in this oppressive history, is a long and troubled history of 'land denial' and 'land grabbing' in colonial Bermuda. Key features of that history can contribute to contemporary analysis because there are lessons and insights to be derived from the past and the historical literature on the fate of the land and those who settled it.

In the Bermuda context, historical research clearly shows that laws and legislation were manipulated to achieve the personal and economical aims of the oligarchy throughout the 20th century, and even today

the threat of economic intimidation still rears its head, with people not being hired because of their political beliefs and discrimination based on stereotypes and biases.

The purposeful alienation of land from enslaved and free Black Bermudians up until 1834 is a major contributor to ongoing poverty in the community today. The geographical patterns of land division established, the colonial rules/laws of acquisition, ensured access to land was denied, whether to grow food, create a homestead, or ensure security.

Stories of land loss in Bermuda are common, and it seems as if every black family has a story to tell or knows of someone's experience. Sadly, in many cases one is told deeds have been stolen or 'lost' by those entrusted with their care, oftentimes lawyers, banks, and businessmen. Many Black Bermudians were uneducated around legal matters and, being misled, were an easy target.

Cases of coercion/pressure are also told, where families were put in a position that they knew they had to sell or suffer the economic consequences of a wrathful oligarchy. Oftentimes, the money paid was below market value.

There are stories of unfair acquisition of land for the building of hotels with Cambridge Beaches and the Southampton Princess being spoken of but all needing further research.

Sadly, there is still a culture of fear and silence about speaking of land loss, racism and discrimination and there are some who are unwilling to come forward, or if they do are unwilling to go into the necessary details about their family history, worried that retribution will happen. Even today, people are fearful of losing their jobs if they speak up about unfair treatment or discrimination. As such economic violence during segregation has given way to economic intimidation today.

Many of these stories passed down have little or no proof to back them up other than the African tradition of oral history being passed down in families. But what is important is that these stories are told and recorded, so the systemic nature of land loss, from one end of the island to the other, is recorded and the extent of the loss documented for future generations.

We present to the Commission today the book *Black History in Bermuda: Timeline spanning 5 centuries*, which has just been published and is provided to the Commission as evidence of past injustice. This Timeline contains a bibliography of both books and electronic links to the citations contained therein. We have also provided this Timeline in PDF form and in the form of an online link <https://bit.ly/2FRq8fl>, which is fully accessible by all.

Today's PowerPoint presentation to the Commission will provide an overview of the Timeline and contains evidence of the oppression and legislative denial of access to land/property and the ability to earn money. It is hoped that in understanding the broader context of white supremacy in Bermuda, the loss of land in both historic and contemporary history is more clearly understood.