

MOTION

10. Calling on the Federal and Provincial Governments to Make Emancipation Day an Official Holiday

At the Council meeting on October 6, 2020, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on October 7, 2020, to hear from speakers.

Submitted by: Councillor Swanson

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver recognized August 1 as Emancipation Day this year;
2. Emancipation Day recognizes the day that slavery was officially ended in the British Empire in 1834 before Canada was a separate country from Britain;
3. On August 1, 1834, only enslaved children below the age of six were freed. Enslaved people older than six years of age were “assistants” and required to work 40 hours per week without pay, as part of compensation payment to their prior owners. Full release from slave labour happened at 12 PM on July 31, 1838, just about four years later;
4. Making Emancipation Day a federal holiday would help confront the legacy of slavery and white supremacy. As recent months have shown, this is something our country and society sorely needs;
5. Canadian history is taught in schools from a Eurocentric viewpoint that overlooks or minimizes the human rights infringements against Black and Indigenous people, while students learn about white European explorers rather than the Black and Indigenous people they enslaved and colonized;
6. A major piece of recognizing Emancipation Day is discussing the numerous areas of Canada's past that regularly don't make it into the "typical" history-class educational program;
7. Even after emancipation, Black people were and are targeted with discrimination, prejudice, and murder;
8. Emancipation Day is also about reflecting on our present, taking the time to examine the current circumstances and remembering why Black lives matter and what concrete steps we can take to end systemic racism;
9. Emancipation Day is about learning Canada's collective history - not rewriting that history but telling a more complete history that includes the history of slavery and systemic discrimination;
10. Emancipation Day questions why slavery happened in the first place, and it is also about fighting to end systemic racism for this and future generations;

11. Recognizing Emancipation day helps teach the next generation about the shameful parts of the past that must not be repeated;
12. Slavery and segregation created circumstances of marginalization, a cycle of unequal access, lost opportunities and systemic poverty. Even after slavery was abolished in Canada, Black people continue to be devalued with subpar health care, education and lack of employment opportunities. Communities were legally segregated, creating significant barriers to economic success; and
13. As the City's Emancipation Day proclamation acknowledged, local Black communities have worked and continue to work to bring awareness to these present and historical realities, and there is a contemporary campaign to declare a National Emancipation Day in Canada.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT City Council direct the Mayor to write to the Province of British Columbia to call for Emancipation Day on August 1st to be recognized as a holiday.
- B. THAT City Council direct the Mayor to write to the Government of Canada to call for Emancipation Day on August 1st to be recognized as a holiday.

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