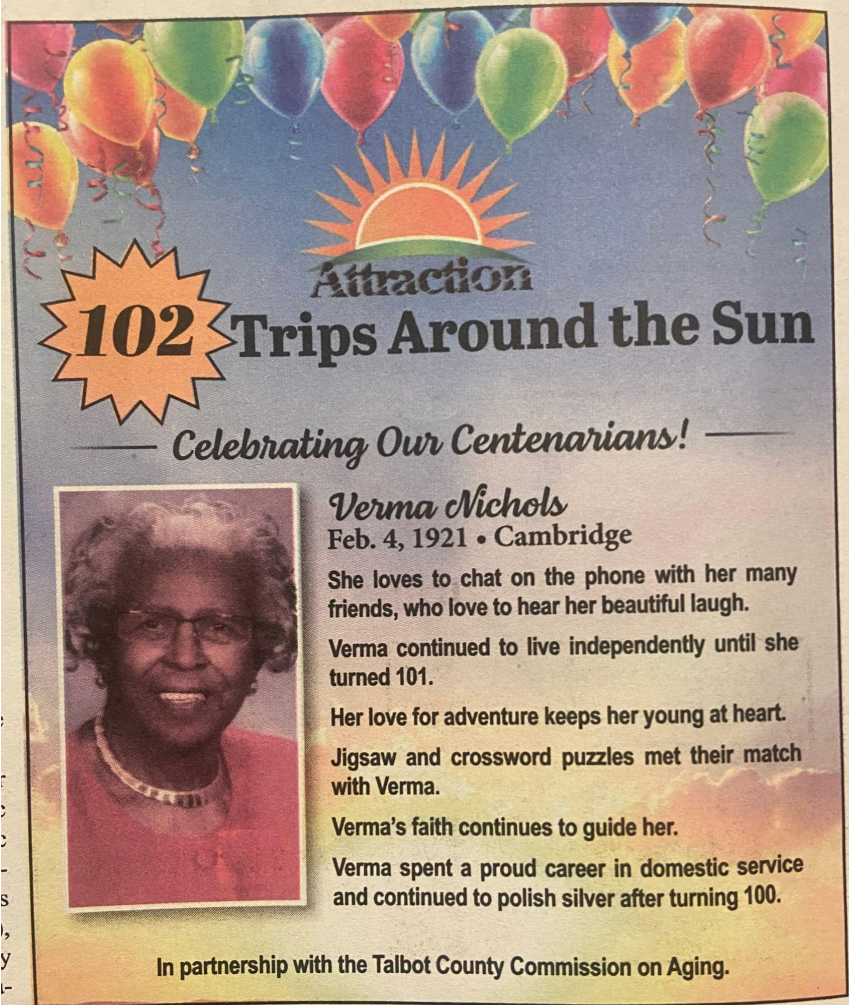


March 25, 2023

To the Washington Grove Mayor and Town Council,

My wife and I recently took a trip to Talbot and Dorchester counties in Eastern Maryland, which put into focus what I would like to say about our proposed resolution on Washington Grove's history of racial exclusion. As I leafed through *Attraction*, Easton's local community newspaper, a short post celebrating a local woman's life made me reflect on what the history of racially discriminatory laws meant to people's lives as each unjust policy compounded the impact of its predecessors.



**Attraction**  
**102 Trips Around the Sun**  
*Celebrating Our Centenarians!*

**Verma Nichols**  
Feb. 4, 1921 • Cambridge

She loves to chat on the phone with her many friends, who love to hear her beautiful laugh.

Verma continued to live independently until she turned 101.

Her love for adventure keeps her young at heart.

Jigsaw and crossword puzzles met their match with Verma.

Verma's faith continues to guide her.

Verma spent a proud career in domestic service and continued to polish silver after turning 100.

In partnership with the Talbot County Commission on Aging.

Consider how a series of unjust, racist policies impacted the life of people like 102-year old Verma Nichols, and how many people in your own lives were likely exempt from similar limitations.

Five years before Nichols' birth, [the city of Easton erected a statue honoring the area's Confederate soldiers](#), sending a clear message as to whose experiences mattered more in remembering this country's inhuman era of slavery and the fight to end it. Domestic workers like Nichols, who were disproportionately Black, were excluded from Social Security until [1951](#), when she was 30. Talbot County Public Schools only began to integrate racially in 1954, when Nichols was 33. They did not fully integrate until [1967](#), when she was 46. Nichols' hometown of Cambridge had a history of discrimination in "[employment, poor wages, schools, healthcare and public facilities](#)," which led to a series of civil rights protests and the imposition of martial law when Nichols was 42. Housing discrimination was not legally banned until 1968, when Nichols was 47. As recently as 2021, on the year of Nichols' 100th birthday, [Talbot County recognized that barriers to equal housing opportunities still existed in the area](#).

I can't help but wonder what sort of opportunities would have been available to people like Nichols if their local, state, and national governments had made policy decisions with their best interests at heart, and especially if people like Nichols had been able to participate in those decisions themselves. It serves to remember that the Voting Rights Act was not passed until 1965, when Nichols was 44, which is older than me. We should condemn the actions of leaders who acted on racial prejudice to exclude anyone from the opportunities that everyone deserves.

Of course, this letter is not about Eastern Maryland- it is about Washington Grove. It seems clear that the past leaders of this community, with the consent of enough of its past residents, acted upon the same prejudices that White leaders throughout this country did. However, I don't think it is appropriate to minimize the impact of their decisions by noting that they belonged to a different era, as sometimes happens when people condemn past leaders. It may seem unfair to condemn people who are no longer around to defend themselves, but it is a fact that **racist, exclusionary policies were always unjust**. It may just be that we never considered the story of our town from the perspective of the people we excluded. The fact that we are doing so now is an important moment as we look to define the future of this community, and especially as we reflect on who we consider as "our community."

There are important implications to condemning Washington Grove's racist, exclusionary past. It means that the perspectives and experiences of this town's Black neighbors in Emory Grove always mattered, and that it was wrong for this town's leadership to exploit Emory Grove residents' lack of a political voice in order to exclude them from equal membership in this community, particularly through the use of racial covenants in real estate sales.

The consequence of admitting that it was wrong to disregard the experiences of our neighbors in the policy making process in the past means that we should strive to be more inclusive today. For example, in the discussion over the bike path connector, we considered how our decision would impact our neighboring communities, which was the correct approach. Ultimately, the benefits to the surrounding areas, as well as to our town, informed our decision to approve the connector.

Some of the objections to the bike path connector came out of a concern that it would change the nature of the town, which so many of us value. However, this entire conversation is an opportunity to reflect on how the town came to be. This resolution is asking us to condemn the explicitly racist attitudes and decisions that came to shape the town whose nature so many of us love.

Speaking for myself, I don't see how we can condemn the town's racist past and also not want it to change. While I don't know what that change looks like (I know it includes a bike path), I think we need to be clear-eyed about the fact that this resolution marks a turning point in our town's history. It is a signal that we are open to considering the members of our neighboring communities as stakeholders in our decision-making process. We are saying that while our neighbors' experiences didn't matter in the past, they matter now. I think that's a good thing.

-Oscar Ramos  
404 Brown St.