



PROJECT  
**Gabriel**

*President's Special Commission on  
Slavery and Justice*

*Co-chairs: Dr. Clifton Peay & Sheryl Garland*

***Preliminary Recommendations***



## Who is Gabriel?

Gabriel Prosser was an enslaved Richmond man who organized a rebellion in 1800 intended to end slavery in Virginia. In 2022, VCU renamed its African American Studies building in his honor.

Inspired by Gabriel's boldness, courage and conviction, the Project Gabriel commission is deliberate in its efforts to guide VCU on a path toward reckoning with its past, engaging with its present and strengthening all communities for the future.

*The Commission honors those individuals whose humanity was stripped away due to the institution of slavery.*



# About Project Gabriel

Formed by the president and board of visitors of the university in December of 2022, the Project Gabriel Commission began its work in January of 2023 in response to both the ongoing work of the East Marshall Street Well Project and the Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program (HB1980) enacted by the General Assembly in 2021.

Grounded in research of Dr. Peter Wosh and Dr. Jodi Koste that determined “[t]he Medical College of Virginia remained thoroughly embedded within the institution of slavery from its founding in 1838,” the Commission met nine times and held three community forums between January and April.

The purpose of the forums was to elicit feedback from the community on each of the three charges of the commission:

- 1) memorialization of the enslaved individuals who labored on MCV's grounds and property;*
- 2) scholarships for individuals with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery; and*
- 3) community-based economic development programs for individuals or communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery that will empower families to be lifted out of the cycle of poverty.*

# Memorialization of the enslaved individuals who labored on MCV's grounds and property



## Recommendations:

- Explore the use of First African Baptist Church (Randolph-Minor Hall) as a memorialization site
- Collaborate with the Family Representative Council (FRC) of the East Marshall Street Well Project (EMSWP) to align memorialization initiatives
- Establish FABC as a hub for educational, social and economic revitalization while honoring its legacy of leadership and advocacy as the moral center of the free and enslaved black communities



# First African Baptist Church

- Founded in 1841, First African Baptist Church is home to one of the oldest Black congregations in the Commonwealth, and was established by slaves and freed Blacks. The Encyclopedia of Virginia recognizes it as the first all-Black Baptist Church in the city.
  - A quarter of the city's total black population, free and enslaved, attended the institution, making it one of the largest Protestant churches.
- The church has since had a major influence on the local black community, becoming a center for Christian worship and an anchor for African American community development at a time when gatherings outside of church were prohibited.
- The First African Baptist Church congregation moved in 1955 and was then sold to the Medical College of Virginia for \$60,000.
  - Some church members deemed the sale as insensitive to the church's contribution to African-American history.

[American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond](#) (Gregg D. Kimball)



## Scholarships for individuals with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery

### Recommendations:

- Establish no less than five to eight additional full-cost-of-attendance scholarships, to include:
  - “Gabriel Scholars” perpetual scholarship program that leverages the established MCV Foundation equity scholarships
  - Student Success Programs for multidisciplinary subjects, with a focus on the STEM/H and education fields
- Explore ways to collaborate with VCU’s new federally-funded Richmond Talent Pathways programs focused on engaging RPS students from 5 high schools.
- Introduce an annual Gabriel Scholars ball



# Community-based Economic Development Programs for individuals or communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery

## Recommendations:

### Programs to Support *Individuals*

- Provide opportunities for youth focused on college and career readiness
- Design programs that target underperforming schools in the Greater Richmond area to increase the number of students who enroll at VCU



# Community-based Economic Development Programs for individuals or communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery

## Recommendations:

### Programs to Support *Communities*

- Create inclusive and accessible skill-building educational modules
- Enhance the small minority business development community ecosystem
- Build a VCU “connector” model that enhances partnerships with community organizations and community colleges to support workforce development
- Work with community partners to establish “hub” models
- Address community grand challenges through vertically integrated projects and team-based approaches that prioritize community input and measure outcomes
- Leverage VCU’s resources to create strong youth development and family support opportunities



## Next Steps

VCU has been mandated by the General Assembly to implement recommendations and report progress to the State. As a result, the following steps are proposed:

- Host additional community forums to confirm recommendations
- Prioritize recommendations based upon feasibility and timelines
- Develop operational plans to include responsible parties, projected costs, and proposed resources
- Present final recommendations and operational plans to the Board in September



## Questions?

- Do you have any feedback regarding the preliminary recommendations?
- Are there additional opportunities the Commission should explore?
- Should the Commission engage additional groups to finalize the recommendations?



# Thank you

- Project Gabriel Staff
  - Matt Conrad, Miles Gordon, Jonsette Calloway
- VCU Enterprise Marketing & Communications
  - VCU Events
  - VCU Marketing
  - VCU Public Affairs
- Special guests/contributors
  - Dr. Peter Wosh- Clinical Professor, Historian
  - Jodi Koste - University Archivist
  - Dr. Jody Lynn Allen, Dr. Fanchon Glover- William & Mary Lemon Project
  - Elvatrice Belsches- Historian



# Commission Members

## Co-Chairs:

- **Sheryl L. Garland, MHA, FACHE**- Chief of Health Impact-VCU Health System; Executive Director- VCU Office of Health Equity
- **Clifton L. Peay, MD, MBA**- VCU Board Member; Founding medical director- The American Eye Center; Ophthalmologist

## Members:

- **Edward "Ed" Ayers, PhD**- Tucker-Boatwright Professor of the Humanities and President Emeritus- University of Richmond; Historian
- **Faye Belgrave, PhD**- Associate Dean for Equity and Community Partnerships in the College of Humanities and Sciences; Professor of psychology, and founding director of the Center for Cultural Experiences in Prevention, VCU
- **Rhonda Keyes Pleasants, CFSP, CCO**- Manager-Henry W. Dabney Funeral Home, Inc.; Associate Professor
- **Leonard Edloe, PharmD**- Retired CEO and Pharmacist of Edloe's Professional Pharmacies; Pastor of New Hope Fellowship; consultant
- **Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, PhD**- Director and associate professor of the Research Institute for Social Equity, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs
- **Yvonne Brandon, PhD**- Managing Director- The Aria Group; Former Richmond Public Schools Superintendent
- **Kevin Harris, PhD**- Senior associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion for VCU School of Medicine
- **William "Bill" Martin**- Director-The Valentine
- **Tobi Ojo**- Undergraduate student-VCU
- **Maya Johnson**- Medical School student-VCU

## Ad-hoc:

- **Lauranett Lee, PhD**- Adjunct Assistant Professor, Liberal Arts (SPCS); Historian