HB1980 Committee Meeting

Agenda

Date: January 26, 2023  
Duration: 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Dr. Edward Ayers; Dr. Lauranett Lee; Dr. Kevin Allison; Matt Conrad; Dr. Leonard Edloe; Dr. Nakeina Douglas-Glenn; Dr. Clifton Peay (Chair); Sheryl Garland (Chair); Jonsette Calloway

Discussion/Updates

- Introductions for new members were made by Dr. Peay
- (Dr. Peay) Meeting minutes were presented for approval
- S. Garland discussed the commission’s timeline, key components of the work. 
  - Commission holds a May deadline; will need to develop a tight work plan; input is needed from the community to develop thoughtful recommendations to share with appropriate bodies
- M. Conrad provided an overview of HB1980, the research process and noted that the team should consider the timeline as baselines
- (Dr. Ayers; Dr. Lee) Paul Pleasants’ free/enslaved status was discussed following a posed question
  - Potential resources: the free black registers and account books of enslavers (Library of Virginia—Virginia Untold; African American History and Genealogy Association in RVA)
  - Legally, slavery did end at 1865, but forms of injustice became more dangerous
  - There was additional discussion surrounding MCV’s relation to the penitentiary in Richmond and the line between what was discovered about the well and other forms of injustice from MCV
- S. Garland noted that the commission can define who to identify and memorialize as part of recommendations, and reviewed details of HB1980
  - The commission can go beyond the definition as part of the work and may also wish to consider identifying and memorializing other populations to be more inclusive.
  - Dr. Allison can assist with EMSWP in ensuring recommendations align with and build upon these individuals as well because the line of separation is difficult
- M. Conrad noted that the legislation requires reporting annually, so there is opportunity to update the research
- Dr. Ayers discussed University of Richmond’s efforts
UR discovered people who labored there were often hired from enslavers versus owned by the institution itself; if the commission considered those who labored, the number would be significantly larger than those owned; UR has done research on how you trace hiring and leasing–time, categories of labor.
- Free and enslaved persons were used on an annual basis
- Dr. Lee discussed medical experimentation and the need to explore this topic
  - There are further ways to track
    - Can we determine how many and who leased?; consider gender perspective–(ie: James Miriam Simms did medical experimentations on enslaved women without anethsia)
    - What do we know of medical experimentation–dig into medical records; *(Resource: Birthing a Slave–2010)*
- S. Garland noted that specific patient records are difficult to track, but work from EMSWP is a good testimony to activities that occurred–commission can acknowledge the work of the past in recommendations
  - Dr. Douglas noted the commission should consider how geography plays a role and that mapping will be important to consider, as VCU is not insular

**Dr. Allison noted opportunities to leverage EMSWP research**
- Geography–It was recommended by the advisory body to undertake biocultural analysis
- Institutional history of active faculty during the time–EMSWP research agenda would include some examination to build upon the identification of faculty and understand curricular impact and connection
- Three post-docs are working on DNA and historical analyses
- ACLS- Engaged Lenor McQueen who has been involved with Shockoe project; assisting in implementing the public history aspect of work to transcribe records

**Dr. Peay–What other competitive parts of the South were at the level of Richmond?**
- Dr. Ayers noted that RVA was important and unusual–more industrial, distinguishing characteristics is that it was a major place because people were exported; enormous responsibility on a national level
  - Businesses in Richmond provided clothing, were fed well to look as healthy as possible
- Dr. Allison recommended the commission should have a conversation with Jodi Koste who was a valuable resource for the development of MCV and the ways in which MCV advertised in relation to slavery
- Dr. Peay discussed the participation of experts as resources, but must consider nature of contribution
  - Minutes from these discussions will be taken by J. Calloway

**The need to incorporate public feedback early was discussed**
- S. Garland noted that the commission will have forums, but want to ensure they are inclusive–*Where do we want to secure input?*
- Dr. Peay further discussed the timeline and further questions to consider:
  - How do we gauge and target ourselves to meet milestones?
  - (Dr. Ayers) How/when do we engage the public and determine logistics around this?
    - If people wait to respond, you lose the benefit of public comment; would suggest sooner rather than later
    - Learned from the Monument Avenue commission that you cannot assume people have access to web-based mechanisms
    - Commission would need to have a public meeting for people to speak unscripted and schedule as soon as possible; promote
  - Dr. Allison discussed EMSWP engagement
    - Series of five community consultations–first four were for input; taped presentations, informational in nature. People proceeded to tables that weren’t recorded; notes were captured in real time to document recommendations from community around research, memorialization.
    - Information was used to inform recommendations, which were presented before being made final
    - Worked with a consulting group
      - Tactics: open invitation to community–radio, newspapers
      - Participation–50 at the start and grew to 125-150 people
    - Dr. Allison noted that with the ACLS grant, they will have a series of community engagements (May) where they will update on work and use as opportunity to provide community input and there may be an opportunity to partner

- M. Conrad noted that HB1980 is silent on public engagement, but VCU has always contemplated community engagement as part of its process
- Dr. Peay clarified the role/value of consultant and associated budget
  - Dr. Allison noted that Dr. William Blakey was invaluable; helpful in organizing and putting process into place
  - M. Conrad noted the staff team can handle community engagement process
- S. Garland noted the work plan should include constituent groups in room, timeline, community engagement, steps need to cover
  - The communications plan will be essential
  - Dr. Ayers–Can the EMSWP Advisory group meet with the commission and the commission utilize EMSWP community?
    - Dr. Allison did not see issues
- Dr. Lee-perspective on archivist work to get a professional read
  - Experimentation on enslaved women, descendant communities (Resources: Library of VA, “Help me Find my People”, African American History and Geneology);
  - Dr. Edloe–treatment of males (Resources: Josh Rothman “Ledger and Chain”, Mary McGinnis, Library of VA curated an exhibit)
- Dr. Peay posed the question of committee size and additional expertise to add as commission members
  - Dr. Lee noted she can help on ad-hoc basis
  - School of Medicine student representatives (more than one)
  - Faculty/staff from VCU School of Medicine (MCV Campus and Monroe Park Campus)
  - Faye Belgrave

Action

- Minutes from meetings with guests will be taken by J. Calloway
- Staff team to handle engagement planning internally
- Topics to potentially explore: Medical experimentation and gender perspective; acknowledging the work of the past in recommendations; geographical landscape

Next steps

- J. Calloway will send a name vote for the commission
- J. Calloway to draft work plan with co-chairs
- M. Conrad to work with Cindy send out all invites to committee members
- S. Garland, Dr. Peay to finalize member recommendations and distribute invites
- M. Conrad to handle student representative