

# Project Gabriel- President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice

## Minutes

Date: April 20, 2023

Duration: 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Tobi Ojo, Sheryl Garland (Chair), Matt Conrad, Dr. Ed Ayers, Dr. Yvonne Brandon, Dr. Clifton Peay (Chair), Dr. Kevin Harris, Dr. Leonard Edloe, Rhonda Keyes Pleasants, Dr. Faye Belgrave, Verenda Cobbs, Cindy Martin

Guests: Samantha Marrs

**Charge:** Based on the findings of the December 17, 2022 report on Slavery and the Medical College of Virginia, this Commission is charged with recommending to the Administration and Board of Visitors of VCU specific ways in which the institution should:

- (i) memorialize all enslaved individuals who labored on MCV grounds and property; and*
- (ii) provide a tangible benefit such as a college scholarship or community-based economic development program for individuals or specific communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery.*

## Discussion/Updates

- [March 23 meeting minutes](#) were approved.
- *Slides are a summary of the data collected (3 Slides to convey each theme)*
- Matt & Dr. Belgrave Discussed an overview regarding information from each of the sessions
- 7 Themes emerged from the forums
  1. Physical Structure
  2. Events and Activities
  3. Naming a Building
  4. Humanizing enslaved folks (tell their story) “Make ancestors be known”
  5. VCU needs to own our history
  6. Importance of Continuity-sustainable and long-term
  7. Importance of Education & Awareness
- Community Sessions were well attended versus the VCU focused sessions
- Community Members shared that they did not have any follow-up
- Registration was closed for sessions and community members were unable to join the session
- Key Themes and subthemes should be explored
- *Commission Discussion:* Identifying critical themes from sessions
- Matt Conrad reviewed recommendations and themes from each of the Project Gabriel forums. Themes highlighted were:

- Creating a space where students and community members could engage.
- Specialization-Wants something that reflects education & community history as well.
- Expanding the voices within the VCU community (service-related positions-colleagues from departments within Richmond, VA)
- Expanding the voices within the Community at large
- Dr. Harris shared some feedback after talking with VCU colleagues that live within the communities that are in certain departments (maintenance, housekeeping etc.) and were unable to join the Forums.
- Regarding the physical structure of any memorials, we must ensure accessibility for community members.
- Perhaps a shortcoming of this process has been not engaging Richmond's vibrant faith community.
- Ms. Obo asked about the process. Ms. Garland shared that once the Commission has collated findings and potential recommendations, those will be shared online and in additional community forums seeking feedback.
- Dr. Peay reminded the group that the Commission would be posting findings in community newspapers as well.
- Dr. Ayers centered the discussion by asking how might VCU play to its strengths in healthcare by laying out a plan for recompense. By offering concrete proposals the Commission may earn more input/buy in from the community. The Commission should highlight the tangible deeds we may do.
- Dr. Peay asked the group to consider how the Commission's labor can benefit the non-traditional student. As well as how VCU exemplifies leadership in this space.
- *Parking Lot*: Sheryl will create a framework to help capture information from the discussion in three main areas.
  - Memorialization
  - Scholarships
  - Community and Individual Programs
- Ms. Marrs suggested pre-college readiness/access to scholarships for both undergraduate and graduate health professions (playing to VCU's strengths). Integrating this plan into Development's fundraising.
- Dr. Ayers offered that the message could be "More providers from your community and for your community."
- Dr. Belgrave is mindful of the stakeholder perspective. The Commission is offering these suggestions based on the feedback we received from the community. All steps taken going forward must be defensible.
- Dr. Ayers shared that the patterns are very clear in the Project Gabriel-recommendation: honor the people who came, spoke up and are moving the ball forward.
- Dr. Harris advised the group to not fall into analysis paralysis but to make a statement asserting what the Commission is thinking informed by the data then allowing the community to accept, reject or amend the proposals.
- Regarding Leadership, Dr. Ayers believes that the community is looking to VCU for leadership to take the City beyond where it is right now. They are longing for VCU to act and the recommendations are an opportunity to show that VCU is prepared to show Richmond how to proceed.
- Idea shared: Convocation is an opportunity to present faculty awards. Perhaps the Commission creates a new faculty award for someone doing exceptional community focused work.

- Dr. Peay suggests a Gabriel Lecture with topics presented on human rights, environmental justice, etc.
- Mr. Conrad stated that the Commission needs concrete suggestions within the bounds of VCU's ability to offer the President and Board of Visitors and then to the community.

## ● Next steps

- Commission members will join workgroups and focus on specific outcomes from each theme.
- Subcommittees shall work to gather information and share outputs to prepare for April 27<sup>th</sup>
- Goal: At next meeting outline the framework-to develop the tangible components of the ideas that would frame recommendations for themes that will be shared with the President.

### **Workgroups**

Memorialization:

Dr. Faye Belgrave, Lead

Dr. Edward Ayers

Dr. Leonard Edloe

Ms. Pleasants

Scholarships:

Dr. Kevin Harris, Lead

Dr. Clifton Peay

Dr. Yvonne Brandon

Samantha Wheeler Marrs

Individual/Community Programs

Sheryl Garland, Lead

Dr. Nakeina Douglas-Glenn

Bill Martin

Verenda Cobbs