

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

Agenda

Date: March 23, 2023

Duration: 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Tobi Ojo, Sheryl Garland (Chair), Matt Conrad, Dr. Ed Ayers, Bill Martin, Dr. Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, Dr. Yvonne Brnadon, Dr. Clifton Peay (chair), Dr. Kevin Harris, Dr. Leonard Edloe, Rhonda Keyes Pleasants

Guests: Magnus Johnsson, Samantha Marrs, Elvatrice Belsches

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

- **All members and guests provided introductions.**
- **[March 9 meeting minutes](#) were approved.**
- **Guest presentation—Elvatrice Belsches.**
 - Elvatrice presented questions/comments for the Commission to consider, as she has been doing her own work around enslaved individuals in Richmond.
 - (E. Belsches) Does Commission have field notes from Wosh's report?
 - (M. Conrad) M. Conrad will request this information from Dr. Wosh, as Dr. Wosh has been very transparent throughout the process.
 - (E. Belsches) What role will the Commission play with enslaved individuals and medical research?
 - (E. Belsches) Have the mothers of gynecology been brought up by the public?
 - (Garland) No, but discussed difficulty in tracing this history;
 - (E. Belsches) This topic may arise soon; Commission should consider evaluating further.

- (E. Belsches) Explained that there exist pathways to determining information related to medical experimentation history. Belsches recommended reviewing the report and appendices, then examining doctors and publications in that timeframe to see if they published or named subjects they utilized. Belsches further emphasized this topic will surface.
 - (E. Belsches) Can it be done? It can be done; Belsches personally researched this topic and noted there are very unusual names that make it easier to identify individuals—easier than Well Project to identify descendants.
 - The next step was to see if any people identified were utilized by the university.
 - PM Tabb; EM Edshoe—two of biggest slave trading firms in town. In addition to selling slaves, they also leased and hired; One can view the ledgers and work back to people they leased to/from; Mulpins—are also a group the Commission may want to consider to help identify individuals. The Mulpin family papers may list enslaved people.
 - (S. Garland) Recommendation for Commission to think beyond Dr. Wosh’s report and do additional exploration around others enslaved/affiliated by MCV in the future; this could be included in the initial BOV recommendations.
 - (Dr. Harris) Author JC Hallman, author of *Say Anarcha*, contacted Dr. Harris recently and discussed his works which document the mothers of gynecology and is open to engaging further with the project.
 - (E. Belsches) How do you plan to engage with the greater community and broaden scope of project?
 - Recommendation to open up engagement process to other black churches, others around state; Black Genealogy Society has already done much of the research.
 - (E. Belsches) Will the Commission invest in contracting additional historians to continue the work of Dr. Wosh and expand the narrative in future? (ie: MCV’s interaction with individuals post-Civil War)
 - Some findings are not so positive, but there is positive history. St. Phillips Nursing School was mentioned, as black doctors could not practice there. However, MCV sponsored post-graduate continuing education seminars for black doctors in the 1930s & 40s because clinical education was hard to come by. How far will this thing reach?
 - (S. Garland) Looking beyond the period of slavery in the region and expanding community connections are good ideas for the Commission to think about as developing recommendations, especially as it relates to the Commission’s future work. M. Conrad has guided that the legislation is the floor, but it does not mean the group cannot come up with ideas about additional things for VCU to explore.
- **(Garland) Opened the floor to the Commission for comments/questions.**

- (Dr. Edloe) Noted experiences when serving as a speaker when the pediatric emergency room was opened as well as his wife's experiences at St. Phillips. Dr. Edloe noted stories like this need to be acknowledged and worries about care as one who worked to improve it.
 - (B. Martin) Dr. Wosh did most of the research during COVID and could have experienced archive closures where non-digitized records could not have been available. There may be extra opportunities for new information in private and public records.
 - Reflected on looking beyond the campus; Can we use names to link back to the campus and look at the bigger impact?
 - (Dr. Ayers) The Commission needs to frame what is released as the beginning, not the end; the conclusion is that we're beginning. The Commission needs to respond to the House Bill, but in the process of doing work, we have discovered there's still so much to learn.
- **(J. Calloway) Themes from the March 21 public forum were recapped; the floor was opened for comments/feedback related to the first forum.**
 - VCU News article shared: <https://news.vcu.edu/article/2023/03/vcus-project-gabriel-holds-its-first-community-forum>
 - (Dr. Peay) The Commission has a long-term agenda; there is a need to recommend to the BOV the necessity for a longer life and support.
 - (B. Martin) Unrelated to the Commission, but topic of conversation at his table was the status of other projects at VCU; talk about VCU's efforts already underway and the need to be updated on their progress.
 - (S. Garland) This raises a question— how do we communicate about existing projects? Possible need to engage VCU communications.
 - (R. Pleasants) The Well Committee (Family Rep. Council) met recently. She noted they have had some of the same concerns around pace and movement of the project; they want to have a greater collaboration with the Commission and are ready. There is uncertainty around what that looks like, but the groups understand the importance and need.
 - (Dr. Douglas-Glenn) Are there churches we can visit on Sundays? When you look at data in the aggregate, you can see how the output is framed in a way that those with resources think about those things. Some people are thinking about basic living needs. How do the efforts that come out of this help folks meet basic needs?
 - A “cradle to college” example was presented—a university in Camden invested in students from the cradle to college, providing wrap-around services and then preparing with scholarships. It is challenging to think outside of the norm; we can be getting into churches and bringing the model to places versus bringing the people to the model.

- (Dr. Belgrave) Overall, the process was engaging and was slightly surprised to hear attendees say they would be at the Monday forum. The attendees seemed to be genuinely engaged and wanted to provide a voice.
- (Dr. Ayers) Establishing a sense of what VCU is best positioned to accomplish is important; its very nature is expansive—what is VCU in a position to accomplish that others cannot? Harvests from conversation to conversation is not to make things broader, but to narrow down. We can take the feedback and bring it to the community. We don't want people being angry, but hopeful that we can accomplish what we said.
- (S. Garland) Commission will need to consider the framework we are going to have to use to take the information and create recommendations.
 - (Dr. Peay) Questioned the relationship with VCU as an urban university
 - (Dr. Belgrave) The Wayne Commission Report can provide guidance - <https://gallery.library.vcu.edu/exhibits/show/making-vcu/bird-and-wayne-commissions>
 - (Dr. Ayers) There needs to be an honest acknowledgement to the cost of implementation—think about responsibility, recognizing itself as a resource and the responsibility of its inherent nature, so process will be constructive and as honest as possible.
 - (Dr. Peay) Commission may want to revisit the common principles of the Wayne Report to see if there's alignment
- **Conversation with VCU Development regarding fundraising, needs, etc. (Magnus Johnsson, Samantha Marrs)**
 - Johnsson and Marrs discussed the role of their respective departments.
 - (S. Marrs) All VCU fundraising and goals are aligned with the existing campaign to support VCU and VCU Health with private dollars.
 - (Dr. Peay) How does your work with foundations match with what the Commission is trying to achieve?
 - (S. Marrs) Existing foundations, ie: MCV Foundation, have established commitment for diversity scholarships
 - (Dr. Peay) Case for support?
 - (S. Marrs) Can see if there's alignment for other cases in the strategic plan; there are already peices being developed and can possibly be weaved int. Development will need to know goals, outcomes, how much is it going to cost?
 - (Dr. Peay) Can we assign someone from Development to the Commission?
 - (S. Marrs) This is welcomed. My vision is that every fundraiser would be well steeped in the needs and goals and build them into their plan.
 - For instance, helping RPS students qualify to attend VCU is an existing effort and there is some alignment with the feedback presented.

- (Dr. Brandon) One of the critical elements in investigating past graduation stats was the fact that they had students who chose to go elsewhere other than VCU; part of this was financial backing and students didn't see VCU as great option. We have to do more earlier with helping students understand that it has more to offer them early on and building their understanding of what it is going to take to be successful at VCU. The only drawback is that the plan needs to be sustainable. We cannot afford to promote possible scholarship/assistance as an option if it cannot be sustained. A viable objective for the Commission can be to make sure it happens.
 - (B. Martin) Are there projects with similar goals across the university?
 - (S. Marrs) SOM- All unrestricted dollars were dedicated to diversity scholarships.
 - (S. Marss) VCU also has successes in the pre-college space—afterschool programs, STEM programs; will be looking for alignment.
 - (S. Garland) An assessment of VCU programs that align with recommendations that the Commission comes up with is needed. We can then figure out where gaps exist.
 - (Dr. Harris) Noted there is already unmet need within the existing dollars and did not want to compromise access for current in-demand programs; more robust philanthropy is needed.
 - (Dr. Peay) Recommendation made to engage Development in co-chairs meetings, then have them return to Commission.
- **The discussion around key themes gleaned from subject matter experts was tabled; members encouraged to email their insights. Additional comments related to the forum was shared.**
 - (Dr. Ayers) How many more community sessions to have?
 - (M. Conrad) One virtual forum is remaining. If the Commission would like to host more forums, the team can assist—just a matter of timing. It may be possible that the Commission can draft initial recommendations that involve additional engagement.
 - (Dr. Brandon) Recommendation to provide more clarity on the forum's mission and customize the mission to the audience. Put more energy in this as well as customize message.
 - (Dr. Peay) What are the target dates in terms of fulfilling statutory requirements? How do we target a different audience?
 - (B. Martin) Before we talk about more, have to talk about why. People did not know what they were responding to. We can provide information on what else VCU is doing.
 - (Belgrave) It seemed that the message was that we want to be involved and share our voices early on in terms of defining the program; didn't get the sense of what VCU is doing, but how does this impact our communities; strong sentiment that additional input was needed early on in the process.

- (Dr. Douglas-Glenn) Most people just want to be in a space to be heard, to have an opportunity for their voice to be on record.
- (B. Martin) Felt that the group that was there has been over facilitated—they have heard promises of the Well, among other things and want to know what is VCU doing about the earlier meetings.
 - (S. Garland) This point could be a recommendation. In addition to HB1980, what we're hearing is VCU starts things and people don't know what's happening; how are we more transparent in activities and creating opportunities for ongoing dialogue?
 - As we're putting together recommendations, we can think about that in addition to how we're responding to the specific charge. We have opportunity to hear rich and valuable input from community members.
 - In regards to additional forums, what is our timeline? In the work plan, we've built in a couple of months to take the preliminary recommendations back out into community forums to communicate what we thought we heard from them.
 - Does this make sense and can we get the input? Commission has to manage the time they need to do this with the President's request to submit recommendations by the end of the academic year. We can take the themes to the Board and use additional time to massage them and work with the community to make sure we've gotten it right.
- (Dr. Peay) Recommended incorporating into the BOV letter phrases— “continuous community engagement, transparency, timeline, mission statement.”
- (Dr. Harris) There needs to be a separate conversation about what we ought to do as a university.

Action

- Elva offered to be resource to the Commission
- Commission to forward key themes from SMEs

Next steps

- Matt to follow up with Wosh on field notes
- Jonsette, Matt to schedule Development for a future co-chairs meeting
- Planning for upcoming forums at VCU and on Zoom
- Matt to provide additional clarification on Commission's mission and purpose of forums at the next events