Statement from PCUAS Co-Chairs on Recent Events

The President's Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation was established in 2018 at the University of Virginia to continue the truth-telling project begun by the President's Commission on Slavery and the University. In forming the Age of Segregation commission, Presidents Teresa Sullivan and James P. Ryan recognized the importance of understanding UVA's participation in and benefit from both human bondage and white supremacist rule while also honoring the resilience, resistance, and hopes of generations of African Americans. That work remains a necessary component of the university living up to its twenty-first century commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and educational leadership. The atonement process requires more than acknowledgement and education, it demands a commitment to equity both on Grounds and when we engage with our local community.

With you, we have watched events unfold across America in the past few weeks. We share the anger and grief pouring out of community after community, including our own here in Charlottesville. Sadly, none of this is new or shocking. We can see the legacies of centuries of dehumanizing and denigrating Black people in policing, in the legal system, and in the continuing use of state-sanctioned violence against people of color.

Though these truths are uncomfortable for some to hear, we know that we must continue to emphasize these historical connections to understand the present. We see these legacies in the brutal murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Kendra James, Sean Bell, Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Koryn Gaines, Deborah Danner, Philando Castile, Amadou Diallo and so many other men, women, and children.

We must add to that list by acknowledging some of our own local history:

• Enslaved man Willis in 1822 jailed for seeking freedom from slavery at UVA

• The use of slave patrols to surveil and discipline the enslaved at UVA and locally before 1865

• Enslaved man Thornton, accused of stealing, was publicly whipped in 1829 without trial

• In 1834, UVA students rampaged and destroyed free woman of color Catherine Foster's property

• Enslaved man Fielding & several free blacks savagely beaten on a road in 1838 by UVA students

• John Henry James lynched by a white mob in 1898 just a couple of miles west of the university

• Hampton Crosby & Richard Jones shot at & beaten by police in 1917 for allegedly stealing a ham

• The local KKK marching in Black neighborhoods & burning crosses at a Black church in 1924

• The 13-year struggle to desegregate local schools that began in 1954

• The violent ABC officers' assault on unarmed Martese Johnson in 2015

• The white supremacist marches and domestic terrorism in Charlottesville in 2017

George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis thus stands in a long line of national and local histories of often state-sanctioned violence against African American people and their property. For so long and for too many white Americans, Black lives have not mattered. That must change, NOW.

We stand by the generations of Black students, faculty, staff, and community members who have faced racism on and off our Grounds. We grieve with you. We commend your bravery in standing up to racism and violence. We stand by you and we join your efforts to eradicate white supremacy. We will continue our work to publicly acknowledge the truth about our past, to educate about how this past shapes our present, and to work for a better and more equitable future now.

The work of both commissions as well as the work of our partners—the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, the Carter G. Woodson Institute, community faith leaders, the local NAACP, as well as community scholars and activists—shows how Black people for generations have persevered, simply seeking the full fruits of freedom including happiness, family, employment, education, community, safety, and security. They did this, and continue to do it, often in the face of systemic racism and violence.

Yes, Black lives matter. Simply acknowledging that fact is not enough.

Thanks to sustained community engagement, commission recommendations first published in 2018 represent the beginning of the hard work needed to address student and community demands. We reiterate those now:

- Continue expansion of interpretation and recontextualization around Grounds to support a more complete narrative and to make Grounds a safer space for marginalized people
- Support and expand African American scholarship programs
- Create community-focused scholarship opportunities
- Increase institutional funding, support, and promotion of the Carter G. Woodson Institute and the Office of African American Affairs
- Commit to supporting community institutions such as the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center that have been doing this work for years, and work to encourage a new generation of African American storytellers
- Incentivize departments to create introductory level courses across the disciplines at UVA that focus on racism in history, culture, and science and count toward general education requirements
- Institutionalize and support pre-matriculation educational programs such as the Cornerstone Summer Institute
- Institutionalize, support, and expand Universities Studying Slavery as part of a commitment to reparative justice beyond UVA Grounds and even beyond Virginia
- Continue to fund a University-level staff position dedicated to outreach and to engagement with descendants of those enslaved at the University of Virginia

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