Chair's note

July 27, 2020

The VCU Committee on Commemorations and Memorials has opened a public comment period on its recommended actions to commemorate or de-commemorate events, people and places associated with the university. While not required by university policy, we believe that public comment is an important mechanism for the university community to be informed about actions intended to critically engage the cultural, historical, physical and social landscapes of our university. This level of accountability, openness and transparency is an essential step toward reconciling our collective past, present and future.

It is important to note that the public comment is not a poll or a vote. It is a voice. Stated another way, in this public comment, the voices of our first-generation and limited-wealth students are equal to our prominent scholars and major supporters; as are the voices of our employees from across the world and our legacy Virginians. It is not always easy to listen to voices that may differ from your beliefs, ideas and perspectives. But, as an institution of higher learning, we believe it is important to provide you with the context and opportunity to do so here.

The first round of public comment began on July 13th and concluded on July 24th. Upon review of the public comments -- in excess of 2,000 unique statements -- we elected to extend the public comment period to a total of 30 days (August 14, 2020 at 5p.m.). In this second round of public comment, we have forwarded our invitation to additional stakeholder groups who we learned may not have been included in initial university communications to include many alumni, board and foundation members, and other key constituent groups affiliated with the university.

During the first round, we also heard from a few respondents who requested more information beyond the *brief* background provided on each subject. We respectfully encourage you to conduct your own research (e.g., Google, VCU Libraries) related to each of these commemorations and de-commemorations and to form your own conclusions before commenting. We are very interested in what you think about your findings.

Concomitantly, we have not provided our committee's justification for recommended actions in this particular medium. This will be presented elsewhere at a later time. Nonetheless, we have and will continue to base our recommendations to commemorate or memorialize, as articulated in university policy, on the recognition of significant persons, places or events that relate to the history of the institution or the physical area now encompassing the institution; whereas recommendations to de-commemorate consider whether a recognized person, place or event represents an inherent contradiction to the mission and/or values of the institution, information obtained negates the accomplishments cited as the basis for the commemoration, or the

commemoration injures the reputation of the university or the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Committee on Commemorations and Memorials also considers whether existing commemorations and memorials (honorifics) serve to legitimize an historical era, event, person or place that is in/consistent with what has been discovered or learned in later years; and whether the public acknowledgement and display of commemorations enhances or disrupts the educational, healing and workplace experiences of our diverse population of students, patients and employees. In either case, the university will form workgroups to plan and execute commemorative or de-commemorative activities, which includes, if applicable, documentation of all de-commemorated items/places before their removal and the placement of these documentation resources in the VCU Libraries where they will be available to the university and community for educational and related purposes.

All comments will be reviewed by the committee and publicly viewable, but no personally identifiable information will be associated with them.

Thank you in advance for your important contributions.