

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Fanta Aw, Vice President for Campus Life & Inclusive Excellence

FROM: Rev. Mark Schaefer, University Chaplain

DATE: August 21, 2018

RE: Report from Influence of Slavery Working Group

I. NARRATIVE

The American University Influence of Slavery Working Group was established in April 2018, at the behest of Dr. Fanta Aw, the University's Vice President of Campus Life and Inclusive Excellence, to study the history of the origins of the University with regard to slavery. It was quickly determined that the topic was not only worthy of research, but a necessary scholarship to answer questions about the beginnings of the University that had rarely been answered sufficiently—if at all. Dr. Aw sought student and faculty subject experts from the Antiracist Policy and Research Center, African-American and African Diaspora Studies, Public History, University Archives and the University Chaplain's Office, as well as alumni, to comprise the members of the Working Group.

The topic and the incentive to explore it further were introduced to the AU community by an opinion piece written by an undergraduate student, Nickolaus Mack. Mr. Mack, a junior at SPA/SIS, is the Managing Editor for Opinion of *The Eagle*, the student newspaper of the University. In this capacity, Mr. Mack wrote an op-ed (opinion-editorial) in the newspaper on Feb. 28, 2018,¹ arguing that the University's annual Founder's Day Ball, a popular undergraduate student dance held to help celebrate the life and work of AU's founder, the Rev. Bishop John Fletcher Hurst, should not be held in 2018 at the National Museum of African-American History and Culture (NMAAHC), as scheduled.

Mr. Mack wrote that the founding of AU itself was “a dishonest celebration without acknowledging its direct relation to slavery and the demolition and displacement of Northwest D.C.'s African-American communities.”² Mr. Mack noted that, according to Bishop Hurst's biography³ Hurst had inherited two slaves from his late father, Elijah, upon Elijah Hurst's death in 1849. After serving in several ministerial capacities around the country after becoming a Methodist minister in 1857, Hurst was named resident Bishop for Washington, D.C., in 1888. Soon after, he began to search for a local site that could serve as a Methodist graduate university—one that would rival another local school, Catholic University.⁴ In 1890, Bishop Hurst secured the land on which AU now sits to begin building the University, including the “Friendship House” and adjacent lands on which previous

¹ Nickolaus Mack, “Founder's Day is a celebration of a slave owner and the razing of Black Communities,” *The Eagle*, Feb. 28, 2018.

² *Ibid.*

³ “John Fletcher Hurst—A Biography,” by Albert Osborn, Copyright 1905 by Eaton and Mains.

⁴ “A Methodist Experiment in Graduate Education: John Fletcher Hurst and the Founding of The American University, 1889-1914” (Ph.D. dissertation), p. 65-67, William Edwin Ross, 1992.

owners had owned slaves. In 1893, AU was incorporated by an Act of Congress, with construction of the first building, the College of History—today, Hurst Hall—beginning in 1896.

The University finally opened as a graduate institution in 1914, but no black graduate students were admitted to AU until 1936, despite Bishop Hurst’s support for interracial education.⁵ In addition, the surrounding communities of Reno City and Tenleytown, which had been integrated and home to hundreds of African-American families before AU was established and the campus built, were displaced, never to be replaced again in their previous numbers, in large part because the University’s presence attracted developers to the area.⁶ Mr. Mack thus argued, as he had in a previous op-ed that appeared in *The Eagle*,⁷ that the 2018 Founder’s Day Ball not be held at NMAAHC, and that AU further explore the history of its origins with regard to race, as well as Bishop Hurst’s personal ties to slaveholding within his family.

The Working Group was charged by Dr. Aw with three specific goals, with its findings and recommendations to the University made public by September 2018. The three goals were and are:

- Review preliminary research conducted by the University Archivist and identify any gaps to ensure completeness.
- Suggest recommendations to Dr. Aw for how best to address the history and communicate findings.
- Engage campus community in constructive engagement around the issues.

Dr. Aw sought and received membership in the Working Group from the following individuals:

- Rev. Mark Schaefer, University Chaplain
- Dr. Bette J. Dickerson, Interim Assistant Vice President, Campus Life, Associate Professor Emerita, Department of Sociology
- Christine Platt, Managing Director, Antiracist Policy and Research Center
- Sybil Roberts, Director, African-American and African Diaspora Studies Program
- Leslie Nellis, Associate Archivist
- Dr. Malgorzata J. Rymysz-Pawlowska, Director, Graduate Program in Public History, Assistant Professor, Department of History
- David Aldridge, alumnus (Class of 1987), American University
- Nickolaus Mack, undergraduate student, American University

To date, the Working Group has met three times—in April, May and June of 2018. The meetings have centered on distilling information discovered by members of the Group in their research, as well as determining the relevant information with regard to the charges set forth by Dr. Aw above.

The first meeting, in April 2018, focused on questions raised by Mr. Mack in his op-eds with regard to the history of AU and slavery. Ms. Nellis reported that the office of AU’s Vice President of Communication, University Communications and Marketing, Terry Flannery, had specific questions that it wanted the Working Group to try and answer:

⁵ Ibid., 256.

⁶ Neil Flanagan, “The Battle of Fort Reno,” *Washington City Paper*, Nov. 17, 2017.

⁷ Nickolaus Mack, “Venue selection for Founder’s Day Ball event is racially tone-deaf,” *The Eagle*, Jan. 22, 2018.

- 1) Does AU have direct or indirect ties to slavery?
- 2) If so, what is the nature of those ties?
- 3) Was Bishop Hurst's "wealth" derived from a slave economy, and did this benefit AU?
- 4) Did slaves fund the creation of AU?

Ms. Nellis's initial research indicated that:

- 1) AU would have had to have had at least indirect ties to slavery, as the slave economy of the United States from the first introduction of African slaves to the continent in Jamestown, VA., in 1619 through the end of the Civil War in 1865 created capital and personal wealth for many whites, both in the north and south. AU relied on country-wide fundraising to help purchase the tract of land on which the University was built, to build and develop the campus, and to open the University in 1914; these funds no doubt included wealth accumulated from and during the slavery era in the United States.
- 2) The land on which AU was built once belonged to William D.C. Murdock, whose family owned slaves on the property until the D.C. Emancipation Act in 1862. Members of the family from which AU purchased the land, the Davis family, also owned slaves; the Davis family had bought the land from the Murdock family sometime in the 1870s or 1880s. It is not known specifically if the deeded landowner at the time AU purchased the land in 1890, Achsah C. Davis, had personally owned slaves; we do know that her sister Nancy W. Davis, who lived with her together with their other siblings throughout her life, had owned slaves until the D.C. Emancipation Act in 1862.
- 3) As we already knew, Bishop Hurst had owned two slaves bequeathed to him by his father upon his father's death in 1849. In 1858, Bishop Hurst arranged to manumit (free) his remaining slave, Tom King, in 1862, when Tom King turned 21. (We were not able to locate any records locally for a second slave owned by Bishop Hurst; according to Ms. Nellis's research, the probate record for Elijah Hurst, Bishop Hurst's father, was likely destroyed during a fire where it was probably stored, the Dorchester County (MD) Courthouse.) The question of Bishop Hurst's individual wealth is necessarily tied to his family's wealth; the family had owned slaves to help them run their farms in Maryland.
- 4) The specific answer to the question of whether slaves "funded" the creation of AU is...probably, as detailed in #2 above. The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which oversaw the establishment of AU as a Methodist institution, asked that Bishop Hurst raise a \$5 million endowment before the school could open, in addition to fundraising the cost of the land and buildings. Hurst was not able to raise anything close to that amount before his death in 1903.

The Working Group met again on May 24, 2018. Dr. Rymsza-Pawlowska found photos of the property on which AU currently sits dating back to the 1890s, which helped identify the prior use of the University's land. Ms. Nellis said she was developing a timeline to contextualize the information being collected—which included U.S history with regard to slavery; local Washington, D.C. history in the area around which AU was built, including historical land ownership; the family history of the Hursts through Bishop Hurst's death and the history of the Methodist Church in the United States dating back to the initial founding of the movement in 1766. Rev. Schaefer reported his research on the Methodist Church, including reviewing the minutes of the 1844 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which led to the breaking away of Southern Conferences of the church because of disagreements on slavery with Northern Conferences. Bishop Hurst and his family joined the Northern Conference.

Rev. Schaefer suggested that the primary question raised by Mr. Mack in his op-ed was: how did AU specifically benefit from the institution of slavery? Dr. Aw stated it was indisputable that the United States as a whole benefitted from slavery, but that the Group should be cautious in assuming that AU would not have come to be without it. Ms. Platt noted the Group consider the importance of the current time period, in which the nation is in the midst of reckoning with its racist past, including the removal of Confederate statutes and the renaming of institutions around the country. Therefore, Ms. Platt recommended AU acknowledge any complicity it played in the creation of unjust structures as well as any ties AU had to the institution of slavery, no matter how minor or large the University's role.

The Working Group met a third time, on June 26, 2018. Ms. Nellis updated the Group on her continued research on the overall timeline. The Group determined the division of tasks that would comprise the draft report to be submitted to Dr. Aw by the end of July. The tasks included:

- A summary of what the Group had discovered in its research thus far;
- Continuing to flesh out the timeline of relevant dates in U.S. history with regard to slavery, D.C. history with regard to slavery, the history of the land on which AU was built, the history of Bishop Hurst and his family—specifically, their connection to slaves and slavery in the accumulation of the family's wealth through the use of slaves on the family's farms, and the history of the Methodist Church in the United States with regard to slavery and the separation of the Church at its Northern and Southern Conferences in 1844;
- Recommendations for placement of memorials and/or markers on campus to commemorate the history of slavery on the land that became the University;
- Determining remaining questions that had not yet been answered through research—including the role AU played after its establishment during the Jim Crow era, segregation in the District and nationally, and the era after desegregation was enacted nationally and locally. Was AU a leader or a follower during these roiling eras in U.S. history? Further exploration of the nature of the Fort Reno neighborhood and its history would also be beneficial.
- Recommendations for whether the dissemination of the Group's report would be best in September of 2018, as originally planned, or at another time that may be more inclusive of a larger portion of the University, such as All-American Weekend in October—where there is a much larger alumni presence on campus.

II. TIMELINE⁸

A full timeline has been produced and may be found in interactive graphic form online at: <https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/1070441/Influence-of-Slavery/>

Some highlights from this timeline include:

1713 • Friendship Tract

⁸ Sources used for the timeline include: Helm, Judith Beck. *Tenleytown, D.C., country village into city neighborhood* 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: Tennally Press, 2000; Osborn, Albert. *John Fletcher Hurst ; a biography*. New York: Eaton & Mains, 1905; and Reynolds, John R., and King, Joanne E. *Highlights in the history of the American University*, 1889 1976 s.l.: s.n., 1976.

In 1713, the “Friendship tract” is granted by Charles Calvert to Colonel Thomas Addison and James A. Stoddert, the southern part of which becomes the site of American University. [View on timeline](#)

1760 • Murdock family builds Friendship house

John Murdock, whose relatives married into the Addison family and inherited the land, builds Friendship house (current site of the President’s house), the first substantive country manor in the area. Murdock inherited from Anthony Addison, who at the time of his death had “20 Negroes” who would have worked the tobacco farm; however, it is not clear if anyone was living on the property itself aside from treating the home as a “country house.”

[View on timeline](#)

1766 • Introduction of Methodism to North America

The Wesleyan Methodist movement introduced to North America in 1766 by Irish immigrants near Strawbridge, Maryland. [View on timeline](#)

1775 – 1783 • The American Revolution

The 13 colonies declare independence from Great Britain and engage in the American Revolutionary War as the United States of America. [View on timeline](#)

1784 • 1784 Book of Discipline

1784 Book of Discipline gives two options to slave-owning Methodists: free their slaves or leave the church. [View on timeline](#)

1784 • Founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church

At Christmas Conference at Lovely Lane Church in Baltimore, Maryland, the Methodist Episcopal Church (ME Church) is founded. Francis Asbury named first Bishop. [View on timeline](#)

1785 • Suspension of the Rule of the 1784 Discipline

The Rule of the 1784 Discipline is suspended for a time for “practical” reasons, with the caveat: “We do hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of Slavery, and shall not cease to seek its destruction, by all wise and prudent means.” [View on timeline](#)

1788 • U.S. Constitution

The U.S. Constitution is ratified and includes the Three-Fifths Compromise, found in Article 1, Section 2, which counted slaves as three-fifths of a person for purpose of the federal census. [View on timeline](#)

1788 • Maryland cedes land

Maryland cedes land to the federal district. [View on timeline](#)

1796 • ME Church establishes new slavery rule

The ME Church adopts the Rule: “No slaveholder shall be received into society till the preacher who has the oversight of the Circuit, has spoken to him freely and faithfully upon the subject of slavery.” [View on timeline](#)

1800 • ME Church adopts additional slavery rules

An additional Rule: “When any travelling preacher becomes an owner of a slave, or slaves, by any means, he shall forfeit his ministerial character in our church, unless he executes, if it be practicable, a legal emancipation of such slaves, conformably to the laws of the State in which he lives.” [View on timeline](#)

1801 • Slavery is extended into the District of Columbia

Congress extends the Virginia and Maryland slavery laws into the District of Columbia. [View on timeline](#)

1808 • ME Church changes slavery rules

General Rules softened with the effect of permitting slaveholding (especially in the South). In subsequent years, southern ministers would declare the General Rule against slaveholding “a dead letter” in the South. [View on timeline](#)

17th August 1834 • Birth of Bishop John Fletcher Hurst

John Fletcher Hurst is born at “Weir Neck,” Salem, Dorchester County, Maryland to Elijah and Ann Catherine (Colston). The Hurst family historically owned slaves to run their mid-Atlantic Maryland farms. [View on timeline](#)

1835 • ME Church faces debate about slavery

The 1830’s begin to see the rifts emerging in American Methodism as Northern conferences push for anti-slavery and abolition and Southern conferences seek to preserve the status quo. The Baltimore Annual Conference adopts a statement in favor of “peaceable, gradual emancipation” rejecting radical abolition. [View on timeline](#)

1836 • ME Church debates abolition

The fraught political environment leads the bishops to instruct the clergy not to engage in abolition work, a move resisted by a number of the Northern conferences, who attempt to issue statements condemning the Baltimore Conference resolution. [View on timeline](#)

1836 • Georgia Annual Conference

The Georgia Annual Conference declares that slavery is not a “moral evil” and is a civil institution about which “ministers of Christ” have nothing to do. The move is condemned in the North and followed by other conferences in the South. [View on timeline](#)

3rd May 1841 • Bishop Hurst's mother dies

Ann Catherine (Colston) Hurst, Hurst’s mother, dies after long bout of asthma. [View on timeline](#)

1844 • Schism in ME Church

A breaking point is reached: General Conference votes to censure a bishop for ownership of slaves. Southern conferences express displeasure with censure. Plan for separation introduced. Southern Churches break away to form Methodist Episcopal Church, South. [View on timeline](#)

1845 • Bishop Hurst's father remarries

Elijah Hurst, Hurst’s father, marries Emily L. Travers. [View on timeline](#)

4th August 1849 • Bishop Hurst's father dies

Hurst’s father Elijah dies, bequeathing one or two slaves to him at age 15. [View on timeline](#)

1850 • Bishop Hurst enrolls in Dickinson College

Begin college at Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA at age 16. [View on timeline](#)

1850 • Bishop Hurst debates slavery

As a freshman in college, Hurst argues for abolition as part of the Union Philosophical Society, prevailing in the debate. [View on timeline](#)

1854 • Bishop Hurst graduates from Dickinson College

Hurst graduates from Dickinson a month before turning 20. [View on timeline](#)

1856 • Bishop Hurst studies abroad

Traveled to Germany to begin theological studies at Halle in Germany. [View on timeline](#)

1857 • Bishop Hurst becomes a circuit preacher

Returned home, resolving on the way, to enter the Methodist ministry. Upon returning home, became a circuit preacher in the East Baltimore Conference. [View on timeline](#)

April 1858 • Bishop Hurst awarded a pastorate

Appointed to a pastorate at Irvington, New Jersey. (Age 24) [View on timeline](#)

27th May 1858 • Bishop Hurst manumits slave Tom King

Authorized the manumission of Tom King, a slave he'd inherited from his father, to take effect in 1862 when Tom turns 21. [View on timeline](#)

12th May 1859 • Bishop Hurst debates slavery

Hurst writes in his diary: "12. — (New York) Tract Society Anniversary. Speeches by Dr. Kirk, Missionary Vrooman, and Henry Ward Beecher. The last was a great one and well done. It was a rebuke to the American Tract Society on slavery issues. He far surpasses Spurgeon in several characteristics of greatness. Without indorsing his antislavery ultraism, I admire his boldness and steadfastness of purpose. He preaches with an aim." [View on timeline](#)

8th April 1860 • Hurst becomes a deacon

Hurst ordained deacon by Bishop Levi Scott; reappointed to his post in Passaic. [View on timeline](#)

1860 • Changes to Maryland's manumission laws

Maryland outlaws manumission through will and deeds. [View on timeline](#)

12th April 1861 • U.S. Civil War begins

The Civil War begins at Fort Sumter in South Carolina. [View on timeline](#)

August 1861 • Fort Gaines is established on the Friendship tract

Fort Gaines is established in Tenleytown (on future American University grounds) owned by William D.C. Murdock (only son of Addison Murdock and great-grandson of Colonel John Murdock). [View on timeline](#)

1862 • Slavery abolished in Washington, D.C.

Slavery is abolished in Washington, D.C. [View on timeline](#)

1862 • Hurst becomes an Elder

Hurst ordained an Elder by Bishop Thomas A. Morris. [View on timeline](#)

1862 • Murdock family emancipates slaves under D.C. law

William D.C. Murdock, land owner of “Friendship” in 1862, frees his 9 slaves, believed to be living in Georgetown, unclear if Murdock’s slaves would have been working on Friendship property at the time. [View on timeline](#)

1862 • Davis family emancipates slaves under D.C. law

Nancy W. Davis, sister and housemate to future “Friendship” landowners James L. Davis and Achsah C. Davis, frees her four slaves. [View on timeline](#)

1st January 1863 • Emancipation Proclamation

President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation take effect, which frees all slaves in the territories currently in rebellion. [View on timeline](#)

13th May 1863 • Hurst writes about the New York City draft riots

Hurst writes in his diary: “18. — On my knees I declare that in future I will be the black man’s friend, and if my previous course has seemed dubious may God forgive me. The riots in New York have disgusted me with conservatism.” [View on timeline](#)

1863 • Hurst sells the family farm

Sold the farm left to him by his father, severing the most significant tie to his birthplace. [View on timeline](#)

1st November 1864 • Maryland abolishes slavery

Maryland abolishes slavery. [View on timeline](#)

15th April 1865 • Assassination of President Lincoln

President Lincoln is assassinated and dies. [View on timeline](#)

9th May 1865 • End of the U.S. Civil War

The Civil war ends

III. MEMORIALIZATION

A. Memorials: An Overview

In their appearance and the ways that they make meaning, memorials change in tandem with larger cultural shifts. Scholars and critics have noted that while older memorials were monumental and figurative, newer ones are metaphorical and environmental—rather than the reverential gaze, they invite immersion and contemplation. Perhaps the best illustration of this contrast is the difference, here in Washington, between the Lincoln Memorial (1922) and the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial (1982).⁹ Memorials in the past and the contemporary ones remember, honor, and

⁹ For further reading, see Sanford Levinson. *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Kirk Savage. *Monument Wars: Washington D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

commemorate people, institutions, and events. The most effective memorials also encourage reflection and meditation, start conversations, and build and strengthen communities.

B. Memorializing Slavery

Many new structures memorializing slavery have been erected in the last two decades, and this iconography is still developing. However, it is possible to identify several shared characteristics between these memorials, which will be useful for our own recommendations. Many make their meaning through metaphorical, as opposed to figurative forms—i.e., they are often abstract or minimalist in shape. Like many monuments, they address local people, places, or incidents, but in ways that then relate them to more global theme. In their design and appearance, many reference archival material: names (if known), dates, numbers, manifests, etc. But they are a beginning, not an end: they invite viewers to learn more and contemplate further. Likewise, they are conscious of and in dialogue with their physical settings: the natural and built environments, as well as the “memorial landscapes” that surround them.

Several college campuses have created or are in the process of establishing memorials that address their own relationships to slavery.¹⁰ These include Brown University (a sculpture by artist Martin Puryear, described here: “Reminiscent of a ball and chain, the dome also represents the weight of history still half buried, while the reflected sky symbolizes hope for the future,”)¹¹, the University of Virginia (a curved wall surrounding a “gathering place,”)¹² and the University of North Carolina (a granite tabletop held up by small bronze figurines)¹³. Other ways that some universities have acknowledged and begun to come to terms with their own institutional relationships with slavery via interventions in their physical landscape (thus, this does not include centers, hires, and other initiatives) is through creating walking tours, renaming buildings on campus, and holding memorial events.¹⁴

C. American’s Memorial Landscape

Any new memorials or markers will become a part of American’s existing memorial landscape, which currently includes plaques, memorial benches, and small sculptures.¹⁵ It is important that any new memorial be distinctive from these extant markers and that, in its design, it be conscious of not only the emerging iconography of slavery memorialization (see above), but the history and legacy of its own surroundings: what was once the tobacco plantation, “Friendship.”

D. Recommendations for Memorialization/Markers:

Rather than concrete recommendations at this point, a set of themes that might be kept in mind as plans for a memorial or markers move forward:

¹⁰ Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013)

¹¹ <https://www.brown.edu/initiatives/slavery-and-justice/about-us/buildinggalleries/slavery-memorial>

¹² <https://news.virginia.edu/content/design-uva-memorial-enslaved-laborers-wins-approval>

¹³ <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/slavery/item/3380>

¹⁴ One such model is the markers and walking tour created at Rutgers University: <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/campus-history-as-public-history-interpreting-slavery-through-historical-walking-tours/>. Buildings have been renamed at Georgetown and Yale Universities.

¹⁵ American’s Student Historical Society has been documenting and creating a digital repository of all such markers presently on campus: <https://auprojectplaque.omeka.net/>

- **absence and erasure:** it is difficult to know fully the history and experiences of slavery and enslaved people—these records are absent from the archive.
- **multiplicity or decentralization:** slavery as institution and enslaved people as individuals were present on the land where AU is now located, at multiple spaces and points of time.
- **contemplation:** continue to reflect upon remaining questions, and to make connections between the past to present
- **conversation:** pair with projects and programming from across American and partner institutions to call attention to American’s own story/ies, as well as the larger histories of slavery in Washington and Maryland.

IV. QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

“If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can make the world safe for diversity.” —President John F. Kennedy, Commencement Address at the American University, June 10, 1963

During his commencement address in 1963, John F. Kennedy illuminated the mission and goals of the founding of American University.¹⁶ Certainly while it is acknowledged that the Hurst family were indeed slave owners, and that includes John Hurst, this does not address the complex moral, spiritual, and political relationship that he had with the institution of slavery itself. It is actually the founding of American University that speaks more directly and clearly to the politics and person of John Hurst. Hurst admired the works of Harry Beecher Ward for its “boldness and steadfastness of purpose” yet he seemed to eschew any position that demanded radical action, for he was a man of his times. But he envisioned American University to be a higher institution that was open to all, even though the first African-American student did not enroll until 1936.

By 1963 American University had a substantial African-American population and was invested in the struggle for Civil Rights during a period in which Washington DC was still largely segregated. American University students would be further galvanized by John F. Kennedy’s commencement address, called “A Strategy for Peace,” in which he said, “[so] let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s futures. And we are all mortal.” In this statement Kennedy charges all the members of the AU community to look beyond themselves and their own interests, and to truly invest in what it means to be a community in spite of race, class, gender, etc. This is precisely what Hurst envisioned as a University governed by the Methodist principle of social community, “[we] affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened.”¹⁷

American University continues to strive to build a community of difference by wrestling with the large moral and social issues of the day. To be clear, it is not always a peaceful process as the campus has been the site of a number of incidents of racial and sexual violence that have threatened to

¹⁶ <https://kr.usembassy.gov/education-culture/infopedia-usa/living-documents-american-history-democracy/john-f-kennedy-american-university-address-1963/>

¹⁷ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-social-community>

divide us irrevocably. Nevertheless, we still continue to focus on our common interests and to do what we believe is right, even when it is most difficult.

In that spirit, we turn to history, and as a Committee, we honor the lives of those African-Americans once owned by the Davis family, the Murdock family, and those owned by Hurst himself. We honor them by remembering, and we redeem and hold sacred their lives, continuing to build a community where their value would have been recognized and strengthened – but most of all where they could have been free.

V. REFLECTION ON CONTEXT

The context for the founding circumstances of American University’s founding must be considered within two overarching domains: the Washington, D.C. context and the national context.

A. Washington, D.C.

Of the six major universities in the District of Columbia, only two were established prior to the abolition of slavery in the District: Georgetown (1815) and George Washington University (1821). The remainder—Gallaudet (1864), Howard (1867), Catholic (1887), and American (1893)—were all established after the 1862 abolition in D.C. As a result, only Georgetown and George Washington operated at a time when slavery was in effect and each has a problematic interaction with slavery.

Georgetown benefited explicitly from its possession of slaves and the proceeds of their sale to ensure the institution’s survival.¹⁸ At least two of the presidents of Columbian College (GWU’s former name) owned slaves and in 1847, a student was expelled for trying to help an enslaved man.¹⁹ As a result of the different times of establishment, the institutions founded post-1862 can only have had an indirect benefit from slavery, through wealth gained via slavery prior to abolition or through other similar channels.

B. The United States

At the time of the founding of American University, significant portions of the country, especially in the former Confederacy, were governed by Jim Crow segregation laws, including surrounding jurisdictions of Maryland and Virginia. While having relatively few Jim Crow laws itself, the District of Columbia was nevertheless a segregated city and bore the brunt of President Wilson’s institution of segregation in Federal government agencies.²⁰

¹⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/18/georgetown-university-hosts-service-of-repentance-dedicating-building-to-slaves-it-sold-in-1938-to-secure-schools-future/?utm_term=.809ec8fb8229

¹⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/as-colleges-investigate-slavery-ties-george-washington-university-joins-in/2017/12/10/23fe3aa2-d466-11e7-b62d-d9345ced896d_story.html?utm_term=.8c759543b39e

²⁰

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In conducting its review, the working group has identified a number of recommendations going forward:

A. Educational

1. *Public Release of Findings*

A public event—perhaps a panel discussion or other event at which the findings of the Working Group’s research can be shared

2. *Online Resource*

A page on the University website dedicated to sharing this information and including or linking to the timeline (see, part II, above)

B. Memorial

Markers and spaces commensurate with the recommendations in part III.D, above, should be established.

C. Missional

1. *Rededication to Anti-Racism Work*

Knowledge of one’s past is essential to identifying a course for the future. Opportunities for AU to incorporate its history, both positive and negative, into its commitment to antiracism work and support of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center.

Respectfully submitted,

David Aldridge
Bette Dickerson
Nickolaus Mack
Leslie Nellis
Christine Platt
Sybil Roberts
Malgorzata J. Rymysz-Pawlowska
Mark Schaefer