

To: Dr. Mun Choi, President, University of Missouri System, and Chancellor, University of Missouri

From: Taskforce for Contextualization of the Thomas Jefferson Statue, Gary R. Kremer, Chair

Date: January 15, 2021

Re: Taskforce Recommendations

The Taskforce for Contextualization of the Thomas Jefferson Statue is pleased to present a report of its activities and recommendations. The process included extensive meetings, research, discussion, and reflection in order to better understand the issues at hand and gain knowledge of efforts around the country to contextualize history. This report is a compilation of the committee's activities and research and its recommendations based upon the charge provided by the president.

The Taskforce for Contextualization of the Thomas Jefferson Statue was created by executive order of the president of the university in July 2020. On July 20, 2020, the president issued an invitation to a number of individuals to serve on this university taskforce. Those individuals included the following: Liz Beal, Darryl Chatman, Terrell Christian, Carli Conklin, Cindy Hall, Erin Holmes, Gary Kremer, Tracey Mershon, Jeff Pasley, Bill Roundtree, Kristin Schwain, Anthony Tretter, Robin Wenneker, Michael Williams, G. Preston Wilson, and Phillip Wood. Terrell Christian resigned from the taskforce prior to its first meeting. GPC President Tori Schafer was invited to join the taskforce prior to the October 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, and resigned from the taskforce on November 13<sup>th</sup>. The president asked State Historical Society of Missouri Executive Director Gary Kremer to chair the taskforce.

The taskforce met for the first time on Tuesday, August 18, 2020. Among the topics discussed at the first meeting was the president's charge to the taskforce, namely, the contextualization of George Lundeen's sculpture of Thomas Jefferson, located on Francis Quadrangle, for the University of Missouri's diverse constituencies. In addition, at that first meeting, taskforce members shared various sources of information, including online sources, that members thought would be helpful to the taskforce's deliberations.

Over the course of the next four months, the taskforce met an additional five times (once in September, twice in October, and twice in December). The one meeting scheduled for November was cancelled to allow taskforce members to participate in the inaugural lecture hosted by the Middleton Center for Race, Citizenship, and Justice.

From the first meeting, it became apparent that the charge to the taskforce was formidable, given the diversity of opinions held by taskforce members and the number of histories that members thought needed to be acknowledged to fulfill the taskforce's charge. While not every committee member agreed with the entire proposal, a significant majority of members approved this recommendation, which addresses the following aspects of Jefferson's legacy:

- treatment of Thomas Jefferson as a complex historical figure;
- addressing the relationship between Jefferson's legacy as a statesman and educator and the University's founding ideals, encapsulated by the donation of the third president's original gravestone to the University of Missouri by Jefferson's descendants in 1883;
- acknowledgment of the Jefferson Club's gift of Lundeen's sculpture to the University in 2001;
- recognition of the location of Lundeen's sculpture on the Quadrangle and its relationship to the campus commemorative landscape, which encompasses the names of buildings, memorials and monuments, and public art on campus, both permanent and temporary.

Given these complicated and interwoven histories, it became clear that a single commemorative sign was only the beginning of a much larger process that exceeds the taskforce's original charge. It should be clear that the University of Missouri is not alone in this effort; universities across the country are developing inventories of their monuments and commemorative public works to ensure their cultural landscapes present – in material form – the institutions' histories, their increasingly diverse campus communities, and their visions for the future. Indeed, during the course of its deliberations, and at the suggestion of a taskforce member, Chair Kremer and several members of the taskforce reached out to Mr. Kevin McDonald, University of Virginia Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Community Partnership, for his perspective. Vice President McDonald was familiar to many taskforce members because of his previous role at the University of Missouri. Taskforce members sought insight from Dr. McDonald, in the hope that the University of Virginia had already addressed the issue of contextualizing the statue of Thomas Jefferson on the UVA campus. Mr. McDonald indicated that the University of Virginia was struggling with that same issue and informed taskforce members that the UVA president had not yet appointed a taskforce to address the issue.

In addition, Jefferson Club Chair, Tracey Mershon, contacted sculptor George Lundeen. The purpose was to make him aware of the task force's efforts and ask for his feedback. Mr. Lundeen responded with acknowledgment of the difficulty of the charge and expressed appreciation for being considered in the process.

After months of discussion, subcommittee efforts, and much work on the part of individual taskforce members, the taskforce makes the following recommendation:

Establish a commemorative wayside sign (see attachment identified as "Version 7") with language explaining why the Jefferson statue is present on the MU campus, as well as summarizing Jefferson's accomplishments, and also his shortcomings, including his role as a slaveowner and the father of children by an enslaved person he owned. This sign should include a QR code that will allow further exploration of the details of all facets of Thomas Jefferson's life by those who wish to pursue further information. One possible QR link could be to the Ellis Library Guide, "Thomas Jefferson Statue at the University of Missouri" (<https://libraryguides.missouri.edu/jeffersonstatue>). Proposed text for the suggested wayside sign, approved by a majority of taskforce members, is also attached to this memorandum.

## Contextualization of Thomas Jefferson Statue

The Trustees of the University of Missouri's Jefferson Club presented the campus with George Lundeen's sculpture of Thomas Jefferson and the garden surrounding it to commemorate Jefferson's belief in the importance of public education, political democracy, and intellectual discovery, which led to the creation of the first public university in the Louisiana Purchase territory--the University of Missouri--on land ceded by the Indigenous inhabitants in the Treaty of Fort Clark of 1808, the Osage Treaty of 1825, and the Treaty of August 4, 1824 (Cession 69).

Lundeen depicts Jefferson drafting the Declaration of Independence, stressing his authorship of the radical notion that "all men are created equal." Jefferson recognized that the United States failed to live up to this principle, asking a decade later:

Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? . . . Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever.

Jefferson later fathered six children with Sally Hemings, one of more than 600 people he enslaved throughout his life, and instigated policies that led to the forcible removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands.

Other American leaders and visionaries, including Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Vine Deloria Jr., Harvey Milk, and others, have used Jefferson's words to assert the rights and freedoms of *all* people. Today, Jefferson's words and his dedication to the pursuit of knowledge encourage students of the University of Missouri to surpass those who came before them as they embrace Mizzou's values of Respect, Responsibility, Discovery, and Excellence.

Version 7

