



RESIDENT STUDENT ASSOCIATION

4400 University Drive, MS 3F6, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Email: rsa@gmu.edu



September 29, 2019

President Anne Holton
George Mason University
4400 University Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear President Holton,

The Resident Student Association's primary mission is to act as advocates for resident student needs. We accomplish this by addressing problems, concerns, and questions that resident students may have, and we represent the collective interests of on-campus resident students interacting and voicing opinions with varying partners across the University campus including but not limited to parking, dining, recreation, and student health, among others.

Today, we are reaching out to you as the University President to discuss the announcement of the statues memorializing the enslaved children of George Mason that are to be placed upon Wilkins Plaza upon its renovation.

We, the Resident Student Association, stand behind the University's desire to be inclusive and its intent to "reflect and symbolize" the complex legacy of George Mason IV – which is to include the non-disputed fact that our namesake owned slaves. We do however have grievances with the plan as it exists.

Currently, the plan is inclusive of two of the more than 100 enslaved individuals that George Mason IV is known to have owned. The vision – as shown through the videos easily accessible to the public at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyIKtl-UF5k> – includes things of troubling nature to the Association. While dialogue about the past and its impact to the future is important, the message gets lost as the memorials still depict Penny and James as property and the humanity that allows them to be human is getting lost. The message is important – and that is not where our issues lie, but rather the tone of the message and how it is going to come across.

The Association's fear is that individuals coming to the University will miss the intent of the memorials being a conversation starter and a place to reflect, but rather will see them as being a means of the University glorifying the fact of George Mason IV owning slaves. As an example of this, the statue of Penny depicts her serving tea to George Mason.

We lose her humanity as she is portrayed just as a slave, whereas we should be honoring her – and all the slaves - as humans. Why can they not be honored as the people they were instead of the enslaved lives they lived? Since this is impacting the University and will be central to the campus climate due to its intended location, did the above include any large student groups/populations other than those directly working on the project? If not, why? As an example of a more appropriate memorial, we look to the likes of the one placed at the University of Virginia. It still keeps the dialogue open, but does so in a way that allows for their namesakes to be remembered in a more positive light.

We respectfully ask for your reply. We also invite you to come and discuss this with us at one of our General Body or Executive Board meetings. Our Executive Board meets Thursday evenings in Hanover Seminar Room (1012) at 4:30 pm, and our General Body meets on Wednesdays at 5:00 pm in Piedmont 104. If you would like to attend either, please email us at RSA@gmu.edu so we can reserve the time for your visit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clinton Carlson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Clinton Carlson, *Executive Director*
Xavier Toomer, *Director of Engagement*
Samantha Kocen, *Director of Leadership*
Nalin Bhatt, *Director of Services*
Celiah Greene, *Director of Publicity*
Alison Spence, *Director of Conferences*