

Essential Questions of Race and History

by **Leslie Greene Bowman** - June 28, 2017

Recently, Charlottesville has been a focal point in the national conversation on race. We have seen crowds gather in our town square to debate essential questions of race and history. We are aware of – and deeply concerned by – a planned march by a hate group in our community.

While it is not our policy at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation to address every contemporary issue or headline, recent events emphasize how the unresolved legacies of slavery and racial inequality continue to impact our society. Monticello is a place to understand the history that underscores those legacies. For that reason, and as concerned neighbors and citizens of this community, we believe it is appropriate to engage in the conversation.

The Foundation stands against racism and bigotry in all its forms. Our country – and indeed, the Commonwealth of Virginia and Charlottesville – has a long and troubling history on race. Slaves were owned here. Jim Crow prevailed here. And Charlottesville's citizens of color, especially African Americans, bore the brunt of discrimination and pain. Monticello is part of that story, as is Thomas Jefferson. We have spent decades engaging with Jefferson's legacy as a visionary Founding Father and a slave owner. Through archaeology, research, and oral histories – still ongoing – we have also brought remarkable individuals out of the shadows of slavery, revealing stories of families, work, struggle, triumph, and everyday life on the plantation.

[Read about the Getting Word Oral History project \(https://www.monticello.org/slavery/\).](https://www.monticello.org/slavery/)

[Read about our work to reveal the history of slavery in the Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/for-decades-they-hid-jeffersons-mistress-now-monticello-is-making-room-for-sally-hemings/2017/02/18/d410d660-f222-11e6-8d72-263470bfo401_story.html?utm_term=.cc9abf8695a5)

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The Foundation values an honest, complicated, and inclusive view of our history. The past is messy, and at many times difficult – but it cannot be ignored. We encourage all Americans to engage with our shared history so that we can learn from its lessons, replicate its successes, and never repeat its most devastating failures. Much can be gained from bringing history forward into dialogue.

Monticello will continue to foster these conversations. At the same time, we oppose any display of hatred in our city, and stand with those who have been marginalized. We look forward to continuing to work with our community to engage the past, and create a more tolerant, informed, and democratic future.

[BRINGING HISTORY FORWARD \(HTTPS://WWW.MONTICELLO.ORG/EXHIBITS-EVENTS/BLOG/?CATEGORY=BRINGING-HISTORY-FORWARD\)](https://www.monticello.org/exhibits-events/blog/?category=bringing-history-forward)

[SLAVERY AND THE LEGACY OF RACE \(HTTPS://WWW.MONTICELLO.ORG/EXHIBITS-EVENTS/BLOG/?CATEGORY=SLAVERY-AND-THE-LEGACY-OF-RACE\)](https://www.monticello.org/exhibits-events/blog/?category=slavery-and-the-legacy-of-race)

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