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Appendix A: February 25 Institutional History Email from President Crutcher

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APPENDIX A

FEBRUARY 25 INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY EMAIL FROM
PRESIDENT CRUTCHER

Dear Members of the University Community,

I write to share with you two reports that advance our commitment to a fuller, more inclusive University history, *“A Season of Discipline”*: *Enslavement, Education & Faith in the Life of Robert Ryland* and *“The Virginia Way”*: *Race, The “Lost Cause,” & The Social Influence of Douglas Southall Freeman*. As you may recall, I commissioned these reports in 2019 on the recommendation of the Presidential Commission for University History and Identity, which called for research regarding Robert Ryland, Douglas Southall Freeman, and slavery on our landscape.

The University of Richmond is steeped in a long and often inspirational history. There are aspects of it, however, that we have ignored for too long and left out too often. These reports provide an essential corrective. Part of our Inclusive History Initiative and Making Excellence Inclusive plan, they bring to the fore our University’s relationship to the defining moral struggles of our country: slavery and segregation. I am grateful for the leadership of public historian Dr. Luranett L. Lee and the work of researchers Shelby M. Driskill (Robert Ryland) and Suzanne Slye (Douglas Southall Freeman). They have brought their expertise, rigor, and dedication to these important studies. I also want to thank all the students who pushed us to learn more about Ryland and Freeman, central figures in the University’s history in the 19th and 20th centuries, respectively. I urge our entire University community to read and wrestle with the findings of these reports.

As I have reflected on the findings and the best way forward, I have returned again and again to why this inclusive history work is so important. First, quite simply, it is true to our unwavering commitment to academic excellence and intellectual rigor. We cannot be satisfied with a half-told story, which will only lead to a half-consciousness of the past at best. Second, it is true to our values of diversity, equity, inclusion, ethical engagement, and the pursuit of knowledge. These shared values call us to negotiate the tensions in our past as foundational work to becoming the thriving intercultural community to which we aspire.

Finally, this work is true to the bedrock principles of liberal arts education — to the notion of stretching intellectually beyond the place where one begins; to preparing our students to be agile critical thinkers, skilled at grappling with challenging issues and engaging in meaningful dialogue about them; and to understanding the world as it is and has been in order to shape a better future.

Our approach to inclusive institutional history can further distinguish the exceptional education for which we are known. This spirit has informed the next steps that I will outline below, in addition to addressing some of the key findings of the research.

REV. ROBERT RYLAND (1805–1899)

Robert Ryland, for whom one part of Ryland Hall is named, dedicated his life to education and ministry. He was in many ways a paradox, embracing spiritual equality while rejecting racial equality.

Ryland essentially built what would become the University of Richmond from the ground up, first as principal of Virginia Baptist Seminary in Henrico County (1832–1840) and then as the first president of Richmond College (1840–66), near what is now downtown Richmond. Despite early financial strain and setbacks, Ryland persevered and oversaw the remarkable growth of the institution from a small farm-based seminary with two teachers and under a dozen students to a thriving college with over 100 students, expanding academic programs, and a significant endowment. It is no exaggeration to say that there would be no University of Richmond today were it not for Robert Ryland’s tireless work in the institution’s first decades.

During this period, Ryland became one of the state’s most prominent Baptist leaders and was known nationally for his role as pastor of Richmond’s First African Baptist Church, which had a congregation of over 2,000 Black people, the vast majority of whom were enslaved. One of Ryland’s reasons for accepting the position in 1841 was his belief that all people deserved equal access to biblical teachings. He felt a duty to fill the role since Virginia had made it illegal for Black ministers to preach in the aftermath of Nat Turner’s Rebellion.

Yet, as the research findings underscore, Ryland’s legacy is far more complex and challenging, with his educational leadership and ministry entwined with enslavement. While as a young man Ryland had once decried slavery as a “legalized crime,” he came to see it as God’s will and a social and economic necessity. By the time Ryland assumed leadership of what would become the University of Richmond, the report states, “he was both enslaving people and hiring them out, leasing their labor to others for profit,” including to Virginia Baptist Seminary and Richmond College. By 1860, Ryland had personally enslaved over two dozen men, women, and children, and records indicated that he “hired out” at least two of them to the Seminary and the College.

Ryland was not the sole administrator with oversight of the enslaved people hired to work at the University’s precursor institutions. The records of the Board of Trustees, of which Ryland was also president, show the Board’s knowledge of and involvement in these arrangements. Under their leadership, the Seminary and the College hired an unknown number of enslaved people from enslavers and hiring agents to help run daily operations and serve students and faculty. The enslaved individuals filled students’ lamps with oil, polished their shoes, made their beds, tended their fires, and cleaned their

rooms. They also cultivated and harvested crops in the early years of the institution, cooked meals, cleaned the grounds, worked in the garden, and served in the dining room.

Just as Ryland's leadership was essential to the growth of the University, so too was the labor of these enslaved people. Because of this research, we now know some of their names and can begin to pay them tribute. Sam, Fanny, Nathan, Rachel, Miles, Peter, Hannah, Caroline, Isabella, Nancy, Celia, Albert, Abbey/Abby, and Christian labored for the institution in the 1830s and 1840s. Martin operated the campus gas-works in 1858. Sarah, Little John, and Willis worked in a dormitory in 1859. Eleven enslaved people, whose names are not known, worked in two college dormitories according to the 1860 census. We will now acknowledge all these people in the telling of our institutional history.

In his years of ministry, Ryland did promote some autonomy for his congregation, including providing members with opportunities to read and to lead lengthy prayers during services — all activities that, to some, challenged the limits of the laws instituted after Nat Turner's Rebellion. Ultimately, however, Ryland's work served pro-slavery Christian ideology, and he used his position at times to emphasize the racial hierarchy of antebellum Virginia. As he told his congregation in one sermon, white people are “the law-makers — the masters — the superiors. The people of color are the subjects — the servants — and even when not in bondage, the inferiors.”

Like many Virginians at the time, Ryland hoped to avoid southern secession while preserving enslavement. When the Civil War erupted, however, he became a committed supporter of the Confederacy, investing much of his wealth in Confederate funds — and encouraging Richmond College to convert much of its endowment to Confederate securities. When the South surrendered and those investments became essentially worthless, Ryland was financially ruined, and the institution nearly was as well. Ryland worked to help rebuild the College after the war, but he resigned as president in 1866 after he believed he had lost the confidence of the full Board of Trustees. He remained a trustee until 1868.

Robert Ryland, like other key figures in Richmond College's founding and first decades, was, as we knew, an enslaver. Although he held antislavery leanings as a young man and could have chosen another path, ultimately, he embraced enslavement as part of a divine plan — a belief that quickly melded with the economic and social advantages enslavement provided him in antebellum Virginia. We also now understand more fully the degree to which Richmond College itself participated in the enslavement system, both by exploiting the labor of the enslaved people it hired and by compensating their enslavers, including Ryland. The Board of Trustees and I deeply regret the

University's complicity in enslavement and are committed to transparency about this painful history and to commemorating the enslaved persons forced to work at Richmond College. I invite you to read the full statement from the Board of Trustees.

DR. DOUGLAS SOUTHALL FREEMAN (1886–1953)

Douglas Southall Freeman, after whom Freeman Hall is named, was widely considered an exemplar of academic excellence in his time. Graduating from Richmond College at age 18 and completing a Ph.D. in history at The Johns Hopkins University, Freeman went on to become an influential public intellectual whose reach extended from America's living rooms to the Oval Office. Freeman was a historian who earned national recognition for his Pulitzer Prize-winning biographies of Robert E. Lee and George Washington. He was also a military strategist who lectured in the halls of the United States Army and Navy War Colleges and provided the public with accessible analyses of World War I and II battles through radio broadcasts.

Freeman was a newspaper editor who had the ear of the country's most powerful leaders — President Woodrow Wilson was a regular reader of his *Richmond News Leader* editorials during World War I; General George C. Marshall, one of the nation's most decorated soldiers, corresponded with him extensively; and the landmark G.I. Bill providing greater opportunity to veterans — especially educational opportunity — grew out of an idea from Freeman. Freeman was also a trustee (1925–1950) and later rector (1934–1950) of the University of Richmond's Board of Trustees who helped raise the profile of his alma mater, steward it through the Great Depression and World War II, and defend academic freedom for faculty.

Yet, as the research lays bare, for all of his lofty thought and rhetoric, Freeman's views rested on a foundation of racist beliefs that led him to glorify the Confederacy, promote segregation and disenfranchisement of Blacks, and advocate for eugenics. Heavily influenced by his father, who had served as a Confederate officer and venerated the Confederacy for the rest of his life, Freeman became an apologist for southern secession. Seeking absolution for his beloved home state, Freeman flattened the complexity of the past and wrote, "slavery was not of Virginia's seeking" but rather imposed on it by "the crown."

Just as Freeman distorted history to paper over Virginia's racist social order, so too did he use his reach as a newspaper editor to promulgate the view that Black people were an inferior race and to advocate for eugenics. Fearing "pollutions of blood" through interracial marriage and relationships and believing "the more ignorant the parents, the more children they are apt to bring into the world," Freeman supported the Virginia Sterilization Act of 1924 —

which targeted people of color and those whom one eugenicist called “low grade white stocks” — and praised its involuntary sterilization measure for its “beneficent effects.”

In editorial after editorial, the report documents, Freeman “primed the public for an acceptance of eugenics’ principles, primarily through tapping into his readers’ existing beliefs in white supremacy, although at times he also used racial fearmongering.” Of interracial marriage he wrote, “[N]o man can defy social usage, the custom of the tribe, and fail to pay the price.” Freeman insisted that preventing these marriages was a “biological” necessity.

While Freeman opposed lynching and other forms of mob-violence and vigilantism, he worked to entrench social and political inequality. Freeman advocated for “separation by consent” as the best way to segregate society. In his paternalistic view, Virginia could achieve racial stability only if Black people comported themselves as “the best Negroes in America” — and whites then provided them with access to better homes and basic services. When the Truman Administration issued a report calling for an end to segregation in higher education, Freeman dissented. When he worried about the specter of Black voter dominance, he launched a fusillade of editorials to stoke white fear and further dilute Black voting power.

“While Freeman did not think of himself as an extremist and, at times, disagreed with racial purity activists,” the report concludes, “his was a disagreement of approach rather than principle.”

Historically, the University of Richmond held Freeman in high esteem and viewed him as an exemplar of academic excellence, benefitting from his stature in Virginia and nationally as a celebrated historian and public intellectual. And he was, without question, deeply devoted to the University. From our contemporary vantage point, however, it is painfully obvious that the intellectual foundations of Freeman’s success betray our standards for academic excellence today. Indeed, his views of Black people as inferior to whites, his promotion of eugenics and racial purity, and his insistence on segregation in education and throughout society are abhorrent and wholly alien to the work of our institution today. The University unequivocally rejects and condemns the racist views held and promoted by Douglas Southall Freeman and his advocacy of racial injustice and eugenics grounded in those views.

CONFRONTING THE PAST AND MOVING FORWARD

As a 73-year-old Black academic, I have found myself countless times walking through the halls of various universities and buildings named after men who not only did not look like me or hold my values but would most likely have viewed me as inferior and an interloper simply because of my

skin color. As a university president, I have been tempted to use my position to relegate such men to the ash heap of history

Yet, as I have often said to you, our nation has never fully examined and grappled with slavery, segregation, and the resulting ongoing systemic disparities. This failure to face our history has slowed our progress. As historian Margaret MacMillan reminds us, history is not “a pile of dead leaves or a collection of dusty artifacts,” but rather more like “a pool, sometimes benign, often sulfurous, that lies under the present, silently shaping our institutions, our ways of thought, our likes and dislikes.”

At the University of Richmond, we have made a choice to confront our history with honesty and purpose and to identify gaps and crucial stories of people previously excluded from our institutional narrative.

In its 2019 report and recommendations, the Presidential Commission for University History and Identity stated that we could achieve a more accurate institutional history through a “braided narrative” in which “[t]he story of one group is not the story of everyone, though they intertwine.” The University’s history is neither a singular story nor always one of progress. Our past intertwines with our city, state, and nation in ways that are at once deep and diverse, complex and painful at times, inspiring at others. This conceptualization of our past informs where we go from here.

We will braid memory into the fabric of daily life at the University. In harmony with the campus’s Collegiate Gothic style, we will use our landscape to create meaningful encounters with our past, embedding reminders — such as historical displays, signage, and spaces for remembrance and reflection — that foster greater understanding of our history.

These reminders will put into productive tension the diverse threads of our history, representing both the University’s progress and its shortcomings. They will tell of the University’s relationship to slavery and segregation; of the people who endured and resisted racial oppression and those who defended its injustices; and of milestones and pathbreakers not presently part of our institutional narrative.

In response to the Ryland and Freeman report findings specifically, and keeping with our commitment to a fuller, more inclusive, and thus more accurate telling of the University’s history, we will do the following:

- 1) **Ryland Hall.** When Ryland Hall reopens, we will immediately turn our attention to vividly and fully telling there the story of the founding of Richmond College and the role of Robert Ryland, including his role as an enslaver and the complexities of his role at First African Baptist Church. We will also permanently recognize the people Ryland enslaved, including those who were forced to labor on Richmond College’s campus. In addition, the terrace of the new Humanities Commons, which will provide a place

for outdoor reflection and conversation, will be named for an enslaved person or persons whose name/s and stories were recovered through our inclusive history research. Rather than determine the specific name/s at this time, we will make that decision as a community after engaging with the research and through a process led by distinguished scholars on our faculty. I look forward to the campus community's involvement. Finally, we will also digitize and make available to researchers institutional records from the Ryland era to ensure full transparency about the University's history and actions during this period.

- 2) **Mitchell-Freeman Hall.** The Board of Trustees has approved my recommendation to rename Freeman Hall as "Mitchell-Freeman Hall" to honor the life and work of John Mitchell Jr. (1863–1929), a former enslaved person with a complex story, who became the editor of the African American newspaper the *Richmond Planet* — and some of whose descendants are members of the University of Richmond community. Known as the "Fighting Editor," Mitchell "became one of the most powerful Black voices in late 19th- and early 20th-century publishing," according to the Freeman report. As an anti-lynching advocate, Richmond city council representative before disenfranchisement, leader of the boycott against segregated streetcars in Richmond, and founder of the Mechanic's Bank, Mitchell consistently challenged white supremacy. His life was not without controversy. He was convicted of bank fraud and was jailed for two weeks before being released; the conviction was ultimately overturned.

A fearless champion of racial justice, Mitchell often challenged Freeman's editorial stances and never hesitated to denounce his racism. On one occasion, for example, Freeman praised the patriotism of African Americans enlisting to fight in World War I, although in a racist manner saying many of them had "the physique of giants" but "the minds of children." While Mitchell seemed to look past some of Freeman's words about African American patriotism, he did shine a spotlight on the hollowness of his praise. "What are we to receive in the way of recognition for this loyalty?" Mitchell wrote. "We have been promised improved housing conditions. Have we secured these conditions? ... We have been told that the segregation laws recently enacted will work out to our betterment. Have we been able to observe naught else but irritation and humiliation on the part of those entrusted with its enforcement?" As Mitchell made clear, Freeman and others like him were hypocritical in praising African Americans for shouldering the burdens of citizenship while denying them its privileges.

We will recount the history of both Freeman and Mitchell at Mitchell-Freeman Hall, documenting Freeman's achievements and dedication to the University, while also openly recognizing his racist beliefs and advocacy for segregation and eugenics. That is part of telling the full and true story. In addition, we will shine a spotlight on how Mitchell did not allow Freeman's mistaken assertions about African Americans and segregation to go unchecked — and how he embodied personally the kind of intellectual and professional achievement that Freeman believed impossible for Black people.

This juxtaposition provides a more accurate representation of Freeman and the realities of his time, as well as evidence that there were always critical voices and obvious facts that challenged and contradicted Freeman's positions.

THE QUESTION OF NAMING

Our student governments raised the question of removing Ryland's and Freeman's names from the buildings on our campus. The Board and I gave full consideration to this important question but ultimately decided that such action was not the best course for our University or the educational purpose we serve. I firmly believe that removing Ryland's and Freeman's names would not compel us to do the hard, necessary, and uncomfortable work of grappling with the University's ties to slavery and segregation. It would not move us closer toward a fuller, more cohesive institutional narrative. It would not keep a spotlight on how historical University leaders also acted in ways to impede progress. It would not help us achieve a fuller understanding of Black history, which most in our country still do not recognize as an essential part of *American* history. It would instead lead to further cultural and institutional silence and, ultimately, forgetting.

No Richmond graduate should leave us without a deeper understanding of the roles of slavery and segregation in our institution, our state, and our nation. That's why the path we are forging will amplify the nuances and tensions of our history in a way our University has never done before, expanding upon the more common but woefully incomplete narrative of our past.

With Mitchell-Freeman Hall, for example, I want to use Freeman's name as a vehicle to open our eyes to the ways in which prominent and well-regarded people embraced white supremacy and promoted the idea that the Black race was inferior to justify oppression and exclusion. I want to add Mitchell's name to highlight the lived experience of those on our campus and in our city who both suffered through and subverted racial oppression — and to recognize the resilience of African Americans in the face of centuries of injustice. I want Mitchell's name next to Freeman to remind us of the courage, creativity, and tenacity it takes to dismantle systemic racism and build a more inclusive society.

ADDITIONAL NEXT STEPS

Over the coming months, we will hold a series of forums about our research on Ryland and enslavement, Freeman and segregation, and the enslaved burying ground on what is now our campus to engage our community in confronting our history. I encourage and invite all community members to

participate in these important conversations. You may register for them here. Informed by the research findings, we will also seek the campus community's input on naming the Humanities Commons terrace. In addition, the Burial Ground Memorialization Committee will continue working with campus and descendant communities to recognize and appropriately memorialize the enslaved burying ground desecrated by the University in the mid-20th century. This, too, is part of the braided narrative of which we are stewards as is recognition of the True Reformers, a leading African American mutual benefit association of the post-Reconstruction era who owned a portion of the land that is now our campus from 1897–1909. Theirs is another often overlooked story of African American self-determination.

As we have done throughout our inclusive history work and through the Race and Racism Project and inclusive history classes, we will incorporate faculty expertise and offer student learning opportunities to advance our work and foster greater understanding of our inclusive history. I will share more information about how our community can contribute to these efforts in the coming weeks.

CONCLUSION

Uncomfortable pasts can lead to challenging conversations that point to ways forward. Such conversations will most certainly be difficult and painful at times. But they are just as necessary as they are difficult if we are to live up to our promise as a truly inclusive community, welcoming Spiders from all backgrounds. I am proud that our community has taken on this challenge and resolved to tell a fuller, more inclusive story of who we were, are, and aspire to be as a University. I look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,



Ronald A. Crutcher President