

**AUTHORITY TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE STATUE OF THE UNIVERSITY'S FOUNDER,
THOMAS JEFFERSON, ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE ROTUNDA**

WHEREAS, the life of the founder of the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, is a complex one that until recent times has been explained almost exclusively with a focus on his many accomplishments as a thinker, writer, orator, politician, architect, inventor, and scientist; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Jefferson was one of the founding fathers of our democratic system, which fundamentally changed the relationship between a government and the governed by resting the power to govern in the hands of the people rather than the sovereign; and

WHEREAS, Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, and in the Preamble he declared, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness;" and

WHEREAS, Jefferson also drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which doctrine formed the basis for religious freedom protections contained in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and is commemorated at the University by a statue of Jefferson standing atop the Liberty Bell on the north side of the Rotunda. The Liberty Bell is surrounded by figures representing Liberty, Equality, Justice, and the Brotherhood of Man. The figure of Equality holds a bronze tablet inscribed with "Religious Freedom" and the names of the deity as described in several different religions: "God", "Jehovah", "Brahma", "Atma", "Ra", "Allah", and "Zeus"; and

WHEREAS, throughout his lifetime Mr. Jefferson owned slaves and slave labor was employed by the University's founders to construct and maintain the University's Academical Village, in direct contradiction of the American ideals of liberty and equality that Jefferson had expressed so eloquently in the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom,; and

WHEREAS, in the last decade the University has made efforts to study the University's historic landscape more fully and to educate the public on all aspects of its early history. This in-depth examination was undertaken by the President's Commission on Slavery, established in 2013 by President Sullivan, that sponsored courses and symposia on slavery; developed an Enslaved African Americans Walking Tour Map to recognize and interpret the important contributions of free and enslaved African Americans on Grounds and in the Charlottesville community; and spearheaded the design and construction of a Memorial to Enslaved Laborers; and

WHEREAS, the work of recognizing inequities and taking action toward achieving a racially equitable University was furthered by the findings and recommendations of the President's Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation and, more recently, the Racial Equity Task Force, appointed by President Ryan in the spring of 2020; and

WHEREAS, it is apparent that crucial to improving the racial climate is to reframe the historic landscape to tell a broader story about all of those who contributed to building and operating the University over its 200 year history, including recontextualizing the monuments to its founder Thomas Jefferson;

RESOLVED, the Board of Visitors authorizes University leadership to engage historians and other experts to contextualize the statue of Thomas Jefferson on the north side of the Rotunda to tell the broader story about his contributions to the University, the nation, and the world, as well as contradictory writings and actions that were an integral part of his life and work.