
Dear President Sullivan,

We are writing in response to the e-mails you have sent out to the university community in regards to civility in the current political climate. We appreciate you taking the time to acknowledge the issues facing our community and to encourage unity and inclusivity. We also wanted to take the opportunity to provide you with some constructive and respectful feedback regarding your messages.

Despite the potential usefulness of a historical political leader to bring the community together in times of need, we are disappointed in the use of Thomas Jefferson as a moral compass. Thomas Jefferson owned hundreds of slaves and was deeply involved in the racist history of this University. Other memorable Jefferson quotes include that Blacks "are inferior to the whites in the endowments of body and mind," and are "as incapable as children of taking care of themselves." Though we realize that some members of our university community may be inspired by quotes from Jefferson, we hope to bring to light that many of us are deeply offended by attempts of the administration to guide our moral behavior through their use.

In the spirit of inclusivity, we would like for our administration to understand that although some members of this community may have come to this university *because* of Thomas Jefferson's legacy, others of us came here *in spite* of it. For many of us, the inclusion of Jefferson quotes in these e-mails undermines the message of unity, equality, and civility that you are attempting to convey. We understand the desire to maintain traditions at this university, but when these traditions threaten progress and reinforce notions of exclusion, it is time to rethink their utility. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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The University Democrats at UVA

The Declaration

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Bianka Cadet Jeannot, CLAS '18

Chiara Tondi Resta, '18 Law

Camille Leech School of Nursing '18

Yeeji Park, Law '19

Jasmine Alves, Law '19

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Cheryl Wang, '18 Law

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J'Kyra Brown

Njelle Hamilton, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English; African American and African Studies

****Note from Kath Weston, Anthropology: UVA also has yet to come to terms with the more unsavory aspects of Thomas Jefferson's policy toward Native Americans,** epitomized by this passage from an 1803 letter by Jefferson to William Henry Harrison that promotes getting American Indians into debt in order to acquire their lands: "to promote this disposition to exchange lands which they have to spare & we want, for necessaries, which we have to spare & they want, we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good & influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop th[em off] by a cession of lands" (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-39-02-0500>)

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