

Commission named to study Baylor links to slavery

July 7, 2020

WACO—Baylor University named a 26-member commission to study the school's historical links to slavery and racial injustice, and it set a Dec. 20 deadline for the group to present its final report to Baylor's board of regents.

The commission's study of "the complete history of Baylor and its founders and early leaders" could lead to some campus landmarks being removed, buildings renamed and additional historical context added.

Co-chairs of the commission are Alicia D.H. Monroe, provost and senior vice president at the Baylor College of Medicine and a Baylor University regent; Gary Mortenson, dean of the Baylor School of Music; and Walter Abercrombie, associate athletic director for the Baylor "B" Association.

Baylor President Linda Livingstone and Mark Rountree, chair of the board of regents, announced July 6 the names of the commission's members and charged the group to:

- "Review the complete historical record and context of the university and its founders and early leaders, including historical connections to slavery and racial injustice.
- "Propose a plan for documenting and communicating the complete history of Baylor and its founders and early leaders, including historical connections to slavery and racial injustice.
- "Evaluate all statues, monuments, buildings and other aspects of campus within this complete historical context and in reference to the original intentions behind their physical location, placement and naming and provide observations for consideration.

- “Prepare a final report to be provided to the board of regents and the president no later than Dec. 20, 2020.”

Livingstone and Rountree said the commission will guide Baylor in presenting its “complete history as the university continues striving to foster an environment through which racial equality is inextricably linked to our mission” and in which people of color who are students, faculty, staff, alumni and supporters of the university “know they are valued and loved” throughout the extended “Baylor Family.”

“We believe now is the time for Baylor, as a Christian university, to lead by listening and learning with humility about our past and from voices that have been unheard for years while also taking tangible steps forward,” Livingstone and Rountree said in a public statement. “In addition to making an important and visible contribution to today’s campus and Baylor community, the commission’s work will create a lasting legacy for future generations of Baylor Bears.”

Members of the commission

Commission members include Michael A. Evans Sr., president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield and a Baylor regent; Joel Allison, retired president and chief executive officer of Baylor Scott & White Health and former chair of the Baylor regents; Alan Lefever, director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection; and Malcolm Foley, special advisor to the president for equity and campus engagement at Baylor and director of Black church studies at Truett Theological Seminary.

Also on the commission are Trent Hughes, vice president of sales at Curazene and vice president of the Baylor Alumni Board of Advocates; Mark Lovvorn, chairman and chief executive officer of Providence Bancshares Corporation in Dallas and a Baylor regent; and Michael

McFarland, superintendent of schools for the Crowley Independent School District and a Baylor regent.

Baylor faculty and administrators on the commission include Cheryl Gochis, vice president for human resources and chief human resources officer; Dominique Hill, director of wellness and past president of the Black Faculty and Staff Association; Sandra Lene, associate vice president for operations and financial services and advancement; Bill Neilson, retired associate dean of the Honors College and clinical professor in medical humanities; Michael Parrish, the Linden G. Bowers Professor of American History; Coretta Pittman, chair-elect of the Faculty Senate; Mia Moody-Ramirez, chair of journalism, public relations and new media; Marcus Sedberry, senior associate athletics director for student-athlete development; Tyrha Lindsey-Warren, clinical assistant professor of marketing; and Doug Weaver, professor of religion and director of church-state studies.

Students serving on the commission are Katie Adair, president of the Graduate Student Association; Jayson Baldrige, a senior student-athlete in track and field; Lexy Bogney, a junior who is secretary and community coordination chair of the Baylor NAACP; Sutton Houser, senior and student body president; Sher Isada, junior University Scholar and student regent; and Mya Ellington-Williams, senior and member of the Black Student Union.

Ex-officio members of the commission are Kristy Orr, Baylor board professional; Todd Copeland, director of advancement marketing; and Karen Kemp, associate vice president for university marketing and brand strategy.

Less than two weeks earlier, Baylor regents approved a “[resolution on racial healing and justice](#)” that acknowledged some early founders, trustees and leaders of the university supported slavery.

In an [article](#) published in February 2017, Chris van Gorder, a Baylor religion professor, noted Judge R.E.B. Baylor owned at least 20 slaves in 1860 according to tax records, and 11 of Baylor's first 15 trustees were slaveholders.