



GOOD MORNING,

A lot was said yesterday. This hall bore witness to ugly truths and difficult conversations, ones that were absolutely necessary and, I hope, mind-opening.

I hope you listened to them. I hope you read those materials we gave you. I hope this is a time of immense reflection. I hope everything yesterday, from the committee discussions to the Bray School Event, has made you think about how we enter into these conversations.

I come before you today emotionally exhausted and weary, but I am going to do my best to still advocate for my constituency—to advocate for my fellow BIPOC students. I want to offer you my perspective of where I mentally entered these conversations and, now, where I am leaving them. To offer a full glimpse, I want to backtrack to July.

My grandmother, rest her soul, was someone I always went to for advice. She always had some piece of wisdom for me to hear, regardless if I wanted to hear it or not, for there was no way that she would let her Black grandson get on in the world without the gospel truth. I remember telling her about this naming and renaming mission one day in July, the excitement I felt, the hope I had in this process, that “the winds of change were coming, finally.”

She looked at me, smiled sweetly, and said squarely, “don’t hold your breath.”

I was frustrated with her! I tried to understand where she was coming from but I couldn’t! When she was young, she was an activist. She marched on Washington with Dr. King. She sat on lunch counters to integrate diners and encouraged people to vote. She lived that life! I tried to relate to her, but I couldn’t, as I felt that her feelings—while justified—were reminiscent of a previous era.

And since her passing, that last piece of advice has been the only thing I have thought about and has kept me up at night, endless hours into the morning of me thinking about all of this and wondering if she was right - if I put too much faith into this.



Was she right?

I understand that some of you didn't enjoy my tone yesterday, but I spoke with the persistence that my constituency demands. And, I want to remind you that I have been a good-faith actor throughout this entire process. I have said the same things in different ways since July. I ask you, honestly, how could I have communicated this better? How can I more effectively convince you that the process is broken, that there are too many loopholes, and that the Black community doesn't trust it? To characterize this process, it is much like 4th amendment case law, with exceptions to illegal searches and seizures expanding broadly to the point that they nullify the essence of the 4th amendment and the exclusionary rule. How can I make it clearer that this process is too broad? I would also like to point out the historical tone policing of Black people in this country, whether they are as eloquent as Frederick Douglass or as direct as Chairman Fred Hampton.

And I shudder even to invoke myself amongst their names, but I ask you to tell me, how can I convey this message to you so that you hear it?

How can I further convince you that a process without a definitive stance on racists, white supremacists, and enslavers is broken? How can I further convince you that a process that allows a donor to be involved in the committee will not work because it still offers them the ability to leverage their money in said committee? How can I further convince you that racists should not be honored, no matter the circumstance? How can I convince you that this is in direct contradiction of our Values that we love to exalt?

All of these questions revolve around one that the Student Assembly grappled with and unanimously agreed on: Could you look a Black person in the eye and give them an award named after their oppressor? I would argue no. I am not the monolith of Black opinion, but I know, based on the feedback I have received directly from the BIPOC community, that this does not honor them. That is the master commending the slave for its good work. That is demeaning. That is wrong. Jason Reynolds, the activist and National Ambassador for Young People's literature that Swem brought to campus, said as much! Even from our visitors, we receive serious concerns.



And this doesn't even get to the conversations we ought to have. I detest belaboring a point. I want to talk about how we get Dr. Glover, our humanitarian award recipient, an adequate staff in the next five years that meets her merits. She does the work of several and moves mountains! I want to talk about how we can staff Dr. Allen's Lemon Project in the next five years. I want to talk about how we can provide more financial support to the Center for Student Diversity and get them more staff—to make the center a shining beacon for students of color and not some hole in the wall. But, if we cannot agree on what students consider the simple things, then we will not get anywhere.

If you do not effectively stand against racists, they will always come back. Those systems will always prevail if not dismantled. They will buy their way in. History has demonstrated so. And if you don't want to take my word for it or take the Student Assembly's word for it, I hope you at least consider the opinions of the community that has struggled here for 328 years.

MomMom told me to don't hold my breath, and yet, despite everything in my body telling me to do so, I have not exhaled because I want to believe. I want to believe in this Board. I want to believe in you, but if you're not going to prioritize voices that have never been heard—voices that we have actively cut out in our 328-year history—then your good intentions are for not. After all, if you don't have the Black community's—or William & Mary's for that matter—trust, then are we really making genuine efforts towards reconciliation and healing? We have been on the wrong side for most of our history; when are we finally going to make a stand and actually **be bold?**

I gave you the Student Assembly's memorandum. I gave you an op-ed written by eight Black-identifying student organizations. I gave you Jamelah Jacob's request to change the names, including the Monroe Prize. The panel gave you data and facts that we have collected. This is our hard work we offer to you and what you do next with it - what you decide in this hall today and in the weeks to come will either speak to this or disregard it entirely. Many BIPOC students, like many of our BIPOC alumni, are prepared to leave this university and never look at it again. **This is a place to get a degree, not their home, and the racists honored on our campus constantly remind them of that.** No wonder why some of the buzzwords and phrases around people our age regarding William & Mary are "**antiquated**," "**lack of diversity**," and "**racist**." I saw these in my transition files in a presentation done by Simpson and Scarborough. It's not a coincidence that all of these phrases and words are part of the word cloud.



Many students believe that they know the answer to the questions I laid out above and whether this university actually cares about them, and while the Black skeptic in me screams that he knows too, I am continuing not to exhale. Despite this sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, despite every logical and emotional processor in my body telling me how stupid I am, I am hanging on for dear life. I hope you prove my instincts wrong. I hope you prove all of us wrong...

Because I will hate to see how this will affect our community if you don't.

Anthony 'AJ' Joseph
Student Assembly President