

The University of Virginia has an interesting and complex history. As students of this institution, we believe that it is important to know the history of the place that we love so much. While “Mr. Jefferson’s University” was founded as a shining beacon of education and scholasticism, UVA has not always been a safe place for all students. Failing to acknowledge the harm done to students of color at UVA would be a failure to learn and grow as we aspire to be “both great and good,” as President Jim Ryan says. Though not an exhaustive list, here are some important events and people that helped shape the university into what it is today!

Looking Back

- **Thomas Jefferson:** UVA’s history is inextricably tied to slavery. The University’s founder, Thomas Jefferson, enslaved over 600 people over the course of his life. Jefferson imagined the University to breed “masters of men”, white southern gentlemen - in other words, the University was built for white men. However, hundreds of enslaved laborers brought Jefferson’s vision to life. At the time of the University’s construction, more than ten thousand enslaved laborers lived in Albemarle County, including many who helped build and maintain the University. Slavery formed the foundation of UVA. Due to Jefferson’s own complicated views on slavery, students were not permitted to bring their personal slaves to Grounds; however, those enslaved by faculty residing in the Academical Village were subject to cruel, violent, and racist treatment by the students, who nevertheless viewed themselves as masters of all slaves.
- **Walter Ridley & E. Louise Stokes Hunter:** In 1953, Walter Ridley became not only the first black man to receive any kind of degree from the University of Virginia, but also the first black man to receive a doctorate at a major white Southern university. Also in 1953, E. Louise Stokes Hunter became the first black woman to receive a degree from the University of Virginia. Both Ridley and Hunter received degrees from the school of education.
- **Robert “Bobby” Bland, Theodore Thomas, & George Harris:** In 1955, Bland, Thomas, and Harris enrolled as the first black undergraduate students at the University. All but Bobby Bland ended up leaving the school before graduating due to harsh discrimination from faculty members as well as other students. Because of this, “Bobby Stayed” became a popular saying and rallying cry amongst black students at UVA. Bobby became the first and only black man to graduate in the Class of 1959 at the University.
- **Wesley Harris:** Wesley Harris was a member of the Thomas Jefferson Council on Human Relations in Virginia, an interracial committee of faculty and students committed to addressing racism at the University. In 1964, Harris invited Dr. Martin Luther King to the University, where he spoke in Old Cabell Hall.
- **Black Bus Stop:** The Black Bus Stop was a hub of black student life and expression during the late 1970s to early 2000s. Located just outside of Monroe and across from the

amphitheater, the Black Bus Stop became a place where black students could gather and be themselves on Grounds. During this time, black culture flourished at UVA.



Looking Forward

Memorial to Enslaved Laborers

UVA has begun the difficult work of confronting its history of racism, eugenics, and oppression. The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers honors the 4,000 slaves who built this University. Construction on the memorial began in 2019, and the memorial has a formal, public dedication, encouraging a deeper understanding of the role that enslaved laborers played in creating “Jefferson’s University”.



Renaming a Building in the Curry School

In March 2020, the Board of Visitors received a recommendation from a UVA committee to change the names of the Curry School of Education and an education building, Ruffner Hall. J.M. Curry and William Ruffner were slaveowners, Confederate officers, and staunch defenders of slavery and segregation. Neither men were graduates of or had any connection to UVA. President Ryan endorsed this renaming recommendation, and soon after, the BOV voted to rename Ruffner Hall. The building will now be named Ridley Hall in honor of Walter N. Ridley, a Howard University graduate and the first African-American to receive a doctoral degree from UVA.



Change in UVA Athletics Logo Design

Originally, the V-Sabre logo and the Cavalier Shield had curved sabre handles which were supposed to represent the serpentine walls* that stand on Grounds. The design had no intentions of harm, but rather aimed to emphasize a historical aspect of the UVA



campus. However, after realizing the negative connotation between the serpentine walls and slavery, the new logos have been changed to remove the curves.

*Serpentine Walls were originally eight foot tall and were built to muffle the sounds of slaves and hide them from public view.

For more information on the historical role of slavery at the University and steps being taken to address this history, check out the President's Commission on Slavery and the University:

<https://slavery.virginia.edu/>