



The Peninsula's Community College

February 5, 2021

We, the members of the Social Justice and Societal Change Committee, officially support changing the name of Thomas Nelson Community College. Our current College name serves as a constant reminder of, and association with, the racial oppression Thomas Nelson, Jr. perpetuated and personally benefited from. The call for the removal of Thomas Nelson from our institutional name is not a demand to erase or change our history, but rather recognizes a more complete history, which includes the experiences of African Americans. We, collectively, advocate for an end to the celebration of a historical figure representative of values incongruous with core values of our community college.

This committee, made up of a cross section of all areas of the College, supports this name change not as an isolated action, but as a first step in perpetuating institutional changes in our College to create a safe, respectful, and meaningful environment for all employees, students, alumni, and the residents of our community. We have carefully reviewed the facts presented about our College's namesake, Thomas Nelson, Jr. We are aware of his connection to the American Revolution and his influence on local government. We know Nelson, Jr. held several important positions and offices in Virginia during his lifetime and we acknowledge these are typically the elements of a legacy that makes a historical figure such as Thomas Nelson, Jr. worthy of being immortalized in the naming of buildings or lands to be used by the public.

However, Nelson's legacy is also that of a man who benefited tremendously from the wealth, privilege, and position of his family. Thomas Nelson and his lineage came to their wealth through the enslavement of human beings, and Thomas Nelson, Jr. routinely bought and sold hundreds of enslaved people in his lifetime. This is well documented in Nelson's own papers, including his household inventory and will. Thomas Nelson, Jr. vigorously advertised substantial rewards for the return, capture, or imprisonment of slaves that had fled from slavery and he did so in the newspaper of record, *The Virginia Gazette*. Upon Nelson's death, every one of the people he owned at that time, save his blacksmith who was granted freedom, were transferred as possessions to his family members or sold to settle Nelson's substantial debts. All of this information is publicly available.

We do not believe this institution should continue to honor a man who fought so powerfully for freedom from England, yet relegated thousands of human beings to a life of enslavement for his personal enrichment. To have our College named for someone who did not recognize the humanity of African American people and who willfully participated in the horrors of slavery throughout his lifetime is not respectful of our former and current students, faculty, staff, and surrounding community.

As one of the largest institutions in the Virginia Community College System, we take seriously our mission to change lives, empower students to succeed, and enhance the civic and economic vitality of the Peninsula. We, by signing below, respectfully ask for the College's name to be changed to demonstrate our commitment to our core values.

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