

Public Comments for Virtual School Board Meetings #146

I would like to provide: * Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: * School Renaming

Topic * Request to Rename Matthew Maury Elementary School

Full Name * Jol Silversmith

What is your relationship to ACPS? * Community Member

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I understand that at its September 17 meeting (agenda item no. 20), the Board will be discussing the petition that has been submitted which advocates the renaming of Matthew Maury Elementary School.

It appears that Maury often has been perceived to be an academic who supported the Confederacy out of misguided patriotism. But an initial review of literature about Maury indicates that in fact he was an active advocate of slavery.

For example, the article "Geography as Power: The Political Economy of Matthew Fontaine Maury," by John Majewski and Todd W. Wahlstrom, published in 2012 in the Virginia Magazine, recounts from Maury's own writings such statements as: "The Bible does not condemn slavery ... [a]nd neither shall I." Likewise, he argued that slavery should be allowed in the West, implying that slaves were no more than animals: "We have the same right to go and settle upon these lands with our servants as you have with your 'helps' and apprentices, or with your oxen and asses."

Additionally, in 1871, Maury himself published an essay entitled "A Vindication of Virginia and the South" – a revisionist screed, which incredibly attempted to blame the north for the continued existence of slavery while simultaneously faulting the north for attempting to abolish slavery – i.e., complaining that in the 1850s "Southern citizens, in pursuing and attempting to apprehend runaway negroes in the North, were thrown into jail, maltreated and insulted despite of their rights."

Even articles which endeavor to defend Maury ultimately must concede that he was no friend of African-Americans. Peter C. Thomas, in the article "Matthew Fontaine Maury and the Problem of Virginia's Identity, 1865-1863, published in the Virginia Magazine in 1982, insists that Maury did not engage in "'fire-eating' racism" but acknowledges that in his plan to rebuild Virginia, "Maury relegated the black man to the bottom of the heap merely by recommending a program of opportunity and material prosperity designed almost exclusively for whites."

No doubt, a formal review of Maury's writings and actions would find numerous other statements and conduct which confirm that he is an entirely inappropriate namesake for a school. I take no position on what the school's name should be, but urge the Board to expedite a process for selecting another name.