

**STATEMENT BY MICHAEL MCCONNELL
TO STANFORD LAW SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

MAY 29, 2020:

On Wednesday, in connection with the debates over ratification of the Constitution in Virginia, I quoted an ugly racial epithet used by Patrick Henry. I make it a priority in my class to emphasize issues of racism and slavery in the formation of the Constitution, and directly quote many statements by supporters and opponents of slavery. This was a particularly ugly incident, where the speaker sought to build opposition to the Constitution by stoking the racism of his Virginia audience. I presented the quotation in its historical context, emphasized that they were not my words, and condemned their use. It is vitally important to teach the history of the American Foundingwarts and all, and not to bowdlerize or sugar-coat it.

I spent time in class on Thursday to give students the opportunity to discuss the incident and have issued an open invitation to them to discuss it with me further.

While some have expressed support, I recognize that many people, both students and colleagues, disagree with my decision. They stress that this particular word is so charged in the current environment that any use of the word is painful and distracting for many students, especially students of color, and that the despicable character of these aspects of our history can be taught in other ways, without uttering the word. I hear these views and concede that they have great force.

I conclude with two points. First, I hope everyone can understand that I made the pedagogical choice with good will – with the intention of teaching the history of our founding honestly. Second, in light of the pain and upset that this has caused many students, whom I care deeply about, I will not use the word again in the future.

Michael W. McConnell