

# Th: Jefferson MONTICELLO

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## From the President

Dear Friends,

This summer, we had the opportunity to share Jefferson's mountaintop and mind with a very special group of visitors: 25 Mandela Washington Fellows from the Obama Administration's Young African Leaders Initiative. Selected from an applicant pool of nearly 50,000, these individuals embody the promise of an emerging generation of African entrepreneurs, activists and public officials.

Over the course of a three-day visit, the Fellows were immersed in all things Thomas Jefferson. They participated in discussions with leading scholars on the American Revolutionary Era, toured Jefferson's home and plantation, and witnessed democracy in action during Monticello's 52nd annual Naturalization Ceremony.

**The Presidential Precinct's first cohort of Mandela Washington Fellows explored Monticello and were special guests during the July 4th picnic on Montalto.**



The Fellows' experience at Monticello was part of a six-week seminar hosted by the Presidential Precinct, a consortium of six landmark Virginia institutions (Monticello, Ashlawn-Highland, Montpelier, Morven, The College of William & Mary and the University of Virginia). Each participating site offers a different and valuable perspective on the American experiment, an opportunity to retrace the footsteps of the individuals who founded this country some 238 years ago.

Here at Monticello, the legacy of the



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Declaration of Independence underscores the visitor experience. For the Fellows, Jefferson's struggle to give voice to a new nation—one borne out of ideas, rather than force—offered compelling parallels.

"The United States has been independent for over 200 years...most African countries are still young nations, about 50 years," explained Irene Ikomu, one of the 25 visiting Fellows. "Trying to compare how it was here then to the experiences we are having now, and trying to find solutions to problems as young people, has been very interesting...

it is very exciting to be here together."

Our team also gained valuable insights from our African visitors. Historian and staff member Dr. Christa Dierksheide oversaw the Monticello segment of the Fellows' six-week curriculum. "What impressed



me about the Mandela Washington Fellows—what I learned so much from—was their unambivalent love of country,” Dr. Dierksheide remarked. “Despite wars and dictatorships and corruption, they truly believe in a better future for each of the 53 nations of Africa. This is what drives them; this is what unites them. Theirs is a patriotism to which we should all aspire.”

It was a truly special visit, inspiring a powerful exchange of culture and ideas. We were pleased to learn that scenes from the Fellows’ Monticello experience were included in a video that President Obama screened for visiting African heads of state during the August 2014 United States-African Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C.

Our vision at Monticello is to engage a global audience in a dialogue with Jefferson’s ideas. The time we spent with the Mandela Washington Fellows was the perfect embodiment of that vision, and we look forward to continuing the conversation on our shared histories and futures.

To learn more, and to watch video interviews with the 2014 fellows, visit [www.monticello.org/yali](http://www.monticello.org/yali).

Sincerely,



*Leslie Greene Bowman,*  
*President and CEO*