

Hello Eoin,

I hope you are keeping well. My name is Cormac Fitzpatrick, a current M.Phil student in Trinity, as well as a previous undergraduate.

This email is very random indeed, but the issue of the (potential) renaming of the Berkeley library has been on the news quite a lot recently, and I thought the best and only thing I could do would be to try and give my 2 cents on the matter, to at least know that I tried in whatever small way I could to create some form of dialogue and push-back on this proposed motion.

Apologies if this is crossing a line, but I would just like to express my opinion to someone related to the project or higher-up in the decision making process. I found your name through an article in The Journal, so please point me in the right direction if this is not the correct line of communication for this.

My opinion on this matter is, in all honesty, that this is a ridiculous motion to even be considering. While I don't wish to diminish the horrors perpetrated by slave owners of Atlantic slave trade, and fully agree that the repercussions of its legacy still affect many people to this day, it must be stated that the Atlantic slave trade was not the first nor indeed the only slave trade that ever existed. Slavery has been a human enterprise almost as long as humans have existed.

It is easy for us to look back on history and apply our current ways of thinking and moral stance to those who went before us, but if we do this we are soon left with almost nothing to celebrate and enjoy from world history; we might as well tear everything down, forget about history, and start again from the 20th century. No pyramids, no Colosseum, no Plato's Theory of Forms, no Ottomans, no Qing dynasty treasures, you get the picture. If we are using slavery as the metric for deciding that a culture is worthy of praise or not, then it appears that the majority of human history fails this test.

If someone's sole profession was slave trading, and that is what they were known for, and our library was dedicated to them, or a statue of them erected, it is completely understandable why it should be renamed. But George Berkeley was a philosopher, a noteworthy one, and Reverend. He is not famous for owning slaves, he is famous for his philosophical rigour. Expecting that everyone should be a saint without the slightest blemish to their character is an impossible task. Even Gandhi, one of the most celebrated figures of the 20th century, was not the saint that he is so often portrayed as. Yes, it poses deep questions about how the human mind can be so insightful in certain regards, i.e. a philosopher and Reverend, yet so wholly overlook the idea that keeping another human as a slave is an abhorrent act, yet these are cultural norms at the time that we cannot understand from our perspective. If the library is renamed, then the entire city of Berkeley in California should also be renamed.

Renaming the library, in all honesty, does absolutely nothing. If anything, it simply further highlights the charges towards the politically liberal of a nitpicking analysis of history. It does nothing to actually further the liberal cause, of which I am an incredibly staunch supporter. What something like this does is actually turn the tide against liberal ideas; reasonable people who might be left-leaning or open to left ideas can see that this is a non-issue, and with this being pushed forward, they become disillusioned with the left. Instead of focusing on things that actually matter in the real world right now, making people's lives actually livably, objectively better for the majority, time and time again the left are up in arms about the most minor of issues, and then wonder why they are losing ground and the far-right are growing.

There is much more that I could go into here, but to be courteous to your time, I will stop here. I don't imagine that this will have any sway in the decision making process, but for my own conscience of attempting to seek the truth, I had to send this email. I sincerely apologise if this may not have been the most appropriate channel to go about this, and would like to stress that if you could point me in the right direction it would be very much appreciated.

Thank you for seeing me through to the end of this political and philosophical rant. I wish you a pleasant day and rest of the week, and hope you can consider some of the arguments I have put forth.

Kind regards,
Cormac