

Attached are three submissions to the Legacies Committee:

**1. Initial Petition:**

<https://www.change.org/p/provost-linda-doyle-rename-the-berkeley-library-at-trinity-college-dublin>

**2. Voter Mandate**

This mandate was carried by council - <https://universitytimes.ie/2022/02/tcdsu-votes-to-lobby-for-renaming-the-berkeley-library/>

Motion specifically:

Council notes:

That the findings of much research conclude that the philosopher and bishop, George Berkeley had a problematic and controversial relationship with enslavement during his time in the United States. Between the years 1728 and 1731, Berkeley purchased a number of enslaved people to work on his plantation in Rhode Island and gave sermons, and thus moral countenance, to defending the general practice of enslavement.

Council further notes:

That the number of buildings/rooms named after women or people of colour is particularly low.

Council praises:

Trinity College Dublin's acknowledgment of its historical links to colonialism and the benefits accruing to College of said links. This can be seen in the Colonial Legacies Project, a research project aiming to unveil the ways in which Trinity and its alumni contributed to colonialist practices throughout history.

Council regrets:

That the Colonial Legacies Project is a research project and is not responsible for acting on its findings. Consequently, despite being aware of the problematic elements associated with Berkeley, Trinity College Dublin is yet to act on the issue of Berkeley's continued glorification and amplification as a worthy symbol of a 21st century University.

Council believes:

That Berkeley is an inappropriate namesake for the library due to his pro-enslavement beliefs and actions, and that the library ought to be renamed.

Council therefore mandates:

The TCDSU President to lobby the College for the renaming of the library in the interests of creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment and that great importance be given to potential female or people of colour replacement candidates for the new name of the library which will present a more inclusive vision of College going forth.

Council further mandates:

That the TCDSU support the current petition seeking to rename the Berkeley Library established by Louie Lyons.

Proposed by Louie Lyone, Class Rep Seconded by Leah Keogh, President.

This committee must therefore find the position of the students of Trinity College, as mandated at TCDSU Council - to be that of removing Berkeley's name from the library which currently

**3. Personal letter from myself as TCDSU President - attached**

I would like to begin by making one thing very clear, contrary to what particular individuals may argue, it is not us who will deal any damage to the works of Berkeley. It is Berkeley himself who is responsible.

That being said, let's consider arguments in favour of Berkeley:

### **1. Berkeley should be considered as a product of his time.**

In response to this, I would like to quote the initial petition launched:

“Not only do Berkeley's opinions not represent current day values but neither should we pretend that he was merely a man of his times. In his own time, we have a multitude of voices propounding the injustice of the slave trade, from the Quakers to the Irish philosopher and Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, Francis Hutcheson. This anti-slavery opinion was widespread and familiar to intellectual circles and gives to lie to any historical justification of Berkeley's problematic endorsement of the enslavement of human beings”

I'd also like to note that Berkeley was not just a slave owner but a vocal proponent of the Yorke-Talbot opinion. He argued that enslavement was justified as it enabled the conversion of enslaved Africans to Christianity, but denied the possibility of a route to freedom through religious conversion. This opinion was heavily applied in supplying a legal basis for the continued enslavement of men, women and children in the US”.

In light of these two facts, it is abundantly clear that to imply Berkeley was simply a 'product of his time' and exercised no agency over his opinions, or actions is ludicrous. As he 1) was in contact with anti-slavery arguments and 2) actively propagated arguments that would secure slavery's existence into the future.

I have studied Berkeley, and graduated with a first class honours degree in Philosophy and Sociology, so the topic of Berkeley is something I am close to both personally and academically. It is on this very basis that I find this to be philosophically unsound in many ways. Why is it, when prominent intellectuals of the past, such as Berkeley, write on immaterialism, this is attributed entirely to his own independent thought, and therefore glorified. However, conveniently, his pro-slavery views and actual practical enslavement of human beings, can be attributed entirely to external forces. There is a problem with this argument in that it irreversibly reduces the agency of the individual by claiming their achievements as honorable and defects as products of external factors in a manner that was inconsistent. Nobody has stood up, and argued to us that because much of Berkeley's philosophical contributions can be seen to be clearly influenced by Locke and Descartes, that they should be diminished in their own right. Though it is consistent with the logic that because other people around Berkeley probably supported slavery, and owned slaves, it does not diminish the fact that Berkeley himself, as an active and free agent sought out to partake in slavery, purchased slaves, viewed them as his possession and forced them to work, he actively devised, supported and propagated the continuation of the . I think this is something the committee must consider carefully - we are

talking about a deep and consistent harm. Berkeley must be considered as an agent with choice in the matter - nobody forced him to do this, he wanted to, and the evidence overwhelmingly shows us that he did.

## **2. To Remove Berkeley's Name would Undermine his Intellectual Legacy**

This argument proposes that to remove Berkeley's name would remove the impact of his intellectual legacy. This is frankly, ridiculous - we have never proposed that Berkeley should be removed from curricula or his books burned. His intellectual legacy should be able to stand in its own right without the necessity of a library being named after him. What exactly, pray tell, is the correlation between having an intellectual legacy and also having things named after you? I would argue that the direction of causality is that people have an intellectual legacy or significant contribution to a field of work, and then sometimes monuments or structures may bear your name. It is not necessary that every person who has ever contributed something significant to a field bears the name of an entire library - if that were the case, I believe I would get significantly less emails about lack of library space. This is to say that the intellectual contribution of Berkeley, if it is indeed as great as his proponents make out to be, should be able to stand on its own right. Are proponents of this argument to argue that they only know about Samuel Beckett because of the theater which bears his name? The library is named after Berkeley because of the praise of his philosophical contributions. It is not the philosophical contributions of Berkeley that are praised because of the Library.

Libraries themselves, are something that is owned and operated by the community, I completed my degree there, and I submitted my dissertation in the very library we are talking about. It stands large and totemic in the middle of criteria - surely then, the community deserves some level of ownership and insight into the name of such a library - it should be called something that celebrates and uplifts the community, rather than one of which the students are so ashamed of they do not even utter its name. This argument is to imply that the intellectual contribution of an entire community should be honoured above that of the community it exists to serve every single day. It is to imply that the single act of contribution to a field is enough to warrant the naming of an entire building after you-

## **3. White washing history.**

Many may argue that, accepting that enslavement of people was a horrific crime, it would be a disservice to the horrors of the past to pretend they did not occur, and instead it would be better to retain the libraries name and explain that he was a slave-owner, and that Trinity itself was aware of this and still chose to name a library after him. I will explain in a moment why I think this is not a preferable solution, but please also note that were this to be pursued, the depth of explanation to wrongdoing would need to be incredibly deep, and may also harm the communities that have to interact with this fact, or find it to be upsetting.

Retain and explain approaches are insufficient because it is likely that there are better and more fruitful ways of engaging with the past and uplifting communities in the present than to retain the monuments erected to colonial enterprises. It is not mutually exclusive - we can rename and rename the library and we can focus on topics such as diversifying the curriculum, upskilling the community, and employ methods of rectifying current harms to communities affected.

I would further like to urge the committee : listen to your students, to the people that are asking, to the communities harmed. We are here today because of a grassroots movement. We should not decide we know better than those affected.

When we talk about slavery, or that of human remains, we are ultimately talking about colonialism of the body. Please take a moment to think of how significant it is to strip anyone of their dignity and human rights in this cruel way.

Personally, I believe the suggestion of naming it after a year in history which proved significant, such as 1904, the year women were permitted into Trinity, or reverting back to the name 'The New Library' are preferable solutions. But honestly - call it whatever you want. Just stop glorifying a slave owner.

In my personal capacity, as a student of this college, I urge you to rename the Berkeley Library,

Yours in Power,  
Gabi Fullam