

Dear Professor Tomas O'Sullivan, Senior Dean TCD,

Greetings. Though I'm probably too late, may I add my opinion to the debate about whether or not to remove the name of George Berkeley from the main campus library? Risking your boredom, I'll try first to summarise my view of Berkeley's life.

By inheriting a mansion and plantation at Whitehall in Rhode Island, George Berkeley became a slave owner and later bought some new younger slaves. While he was not an Abolitionist, and while he clearly accepted the existence and use of African and Native American slaves in the US, at no time did he write defending chattel slavery or the Atlantic slave trade, nor did he personally ever engage in any way in that Atlantic trade. There is no record of him mistreating his own African domestic servants and plantation labourers. Indeed he condemned the mistreatment of slaves. He fully acknowledged their humanity and set about educating them with, admittedly, the self-serving goal of making them fit for conversion to Anglicanism and so for future missionary work among the native populations of Bermuda.

Berkeley added considerably to Irish intellectual history and to Ireland's reputation in philosophy by being long accepted as one of the leaders of the Empiricist movement along with the English philosopher John Locke and the Scottish philosopher David Hume. While he never ceased being a privileged member of the "Irish Ascendancy", Berkeley had a genuine desire to help the less privileged. He was one of the original governors of The Foundling Hospital in London. He encouraged the learning of Gaelic, the language of many of those socially and economically at the opposite end of the spectrum from the "Irish Ascendancy". He advocated the admission of Catholics to Protestant Trinity. He wrote about the need for a national bank to regulate Ireland's financial affairs.

However there is no denying that he was a man of his time. The American President, James Madison, while supporting Abolition, was a slave-owner who did not free any of his slaves, not even, as George Washington did, in his will. Yet Madison has his image on the US\$5000 banknote, a university in Virginia named after him and a statue of him on the campus. Indeed only 2, John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams, of the first 12 American Presidents were **not** slave owners and not all supported Abolition even in theory. All have statues or other emblems of honour in the US. Mount Rushmore, for example, includes images of the slave-owners George Washington and Thomas Jefferson who was a notoriously brutal slave-owner.

My suggestion is that an historically aware and balanced and temperate answer to the question "Should we rename the Berkeley Library?", might to leave the name where it is but to add a plaque below it making clear that TCD is aware of Berkeley's slave-owning past and deeply regrets it, and in no way condones slavery in any form.

With my best wishes to you and family for Christmas,

William Lyons.

(Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy 1837 and Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, Member of the Royal Irish Academy, Professional Member of the Irish Writers' Centre)