

Report of the Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming

July 2021

I. The Task of the Committee

Last October, President Bacow created a [Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming](#), charged with determining the circumstances under which individuals' names or representations might be removed from Harvard buildings, spaces, programs, or professorships "in view of their past advocacy or support of activities that many members of our community would today find abhorrent." As we undertook our work in response to President Bacow's charge, we quickly came to recognize that our task required us to look not just at the kind of denaming President Bacow specified, but to explore the meaning of naming at Harvard more generally, to ask how and why Harvard has chosen and used names in both the past and present, and why naming matters. Our report thus includes not only our recommendations and a description of Committee process, but a section on Considerations on Naming, Renaming, and Denaming, which is intended to provide a broader context for our conclusions.¹

II. Considerations on Naming, Renaming, and Denaming

For nearly 400 years, Harvard has been dedicated to improving human lives and societies through higher education. Harvard's traditions, resources, reputation, and institutional influence derive in no small part from that longevity. We who inhabit Harvard today are the heirs and the stewards of that legacy and benefit from that storied history. At the same time, we inherit aspects of the past that are at odds with values and commitments of the present. Harvard benefited from the colonization of Native lands, resources, and remains; Harvard co-existed with—and profited from—slavery for more

¹ We have used the term "denaming" to designate the category of name change President Bacow charged us to consider: a possible change related to the perception that a namesake's actions or beliefs were "abhorrent" in the context of current values. Denaming should be distinguished from, but understood in the context of, other instances of naming or renaming.

than two centuries; Harvard reflected and often vigorously embraced widely accepted hierarchies and injustices of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and sexuality. Yet the University has constantly examined and adapted its own principles and practices, opening its doors, although far too slowly, to those it so long excluded. But, as we have come to recognize, an end to exclusion is not equivalent to genuine inclusion. History lingers and must be directly confronted if we are to create a more just, equitable, and fully welcoming community in which every member can thrive and contribute to the University's mission of research, teaching, and service. The names Harvard uses cannot be separated from the values the University seeks to model and embrace: the belief in the pursuit of truth as our shared purpose; the belief in the power of learning to develop human capacity that can serve the world; the belief in the worth and potential of every member of the University community; the belief that diversity offers the strongest possible foundation for our strength because it encourages excellence and enables us to educate and challenge one another; the belief that each of us bears obligations toward one another and toward something greater than ourselves.

We are reminded of Harvard's past by its venerable buildings and spaces, by its rituals, and, in no small measure, by the names attached to structures, academic units, scholarships, prizes, and professorships. Sometimes we may use a historic name with little or no knowledge of its origin or namesake; sometimes members of the community may be deeply attached to a name as representative of meaningful experiences which are entirely dissociated from the namesake; sometimes we may use a name with pride, as, for example, when we invoke Radcliffe as a marker of a longstanding commitment to the education of women; sometimes members of the community may take the task of naming into their own hands, identifying spaces with what we might call vernacular names like Belinda Hall—a designation first adopted by students to represent a previously all but erased memory of an enslaved worker who helped build the fortune of the Law School's first significant donor. Often we change names.

Of 37 buildings at Harvard Business School, 12 have had their names changed, and HBS is barely a century old.

And naming is far from just a historical practice invoking figures from a distant Harvard past. New and changed names appear regularly: the Harvard Chan School; the Harvard Paulson School; the Smith Campus Center, formerly Holyoke Center; Stone Hall, formerly Old Quincy. As the University has become increasingly dependent on philanthropy to realize its aspirations to excellence and affordability, it has extended recognition and gratitude to many generous donors by associating their names with the purposes of their gifts. In some cases, legal restrictions related to gifts may limit the possibilities for renaming.

Processes and legacies of naming are complex. Over the course of its history Harvard has bestowed names, retired names, and removed names. A landscape of names that we often take to have been unchanging has in reality reflected a degree of dynamism we should acknowledge as an integral part of Harvard's evolution. Harvard's names represent an archaeology that has accreted and shifted over time and an ecology in which each name serves as just one constituent part of a larger totality of memory, honor, and gratitude, a landscape where some categories of names are abundant and others scarce, and where the opportunity for introducing new names is not infinite.

The names we have been given from Harvard's first three-and-three-quarter centuries overwhelmingly represent one dimension of the University's past: men of elite status, power, and importance from eras quite different from our own. The names we have inherited omit—and even erase—the experiences of a wide variety of individuals who were part of Harvard from its earliest beginnings: Native Americans, whose education was a fundamental motivation for the original founding of Harvard College; enslaved workers like those who lived and toiled during the eighteenth century in the presidential dwelling at Wadsworth House; women, whose presence and labor, the distinguished

historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reminds us, were always an essential part of the University centuries before they were ever candidates for degrees. As Harvard has become more open over the last century and a half, other once-excluded groups have become essential members of our community in a way that is not well reflected in Harvard's landscape of names. The past we have preserved through naming is partial and incomplete.

As the creation of this Committee and the language of its charge make clear, some of the names we have preserved are deeply troubling. They cannot be viewed apart from beliefs and practices that we today deplore, and the University faces demands for *denaming*—for their removal. Yet neither hagiography nor raw condemnation is likely to encompass and explain the full complexity of a life a name may represent. As an institution committed to the rigorous pursuit of fact and truth—to *Veritas*—we must ground our efforts in historical inquiry as we endeavor to more fully understand and weigh the choices these namesakes made in the context of lives shaped by different forces and imperatives than our own. As we consider removing names, we should examine these lives with humility, recognizing that our own ideas and behavior may one day be looked upon with dismay by generations to come. At the same time, we should seek to introduce other names from the past that we have not recognized, names that can serve as beacons to the future to which we aspire—a historic throughline for our values.

As we act in more self-conscious ways about the names that help to define our community, we must also recognize that such consideration represents just one dimension of a necessarily broader institutional commitment to confronting inequity and exclusion. Our attention to names must not become so consuming of time and resources as to detract or distract from the important other substantive work that remains to be done.

We need a more complete and clear-eyed view of our past that acknowledges bases for both pride and regret. We should approach our history through reckoning, not forgetting. As we contemplate

the names we use and the names we choose, we should embrace the ways names can play a significant role in creating a future built on an understanding of a past that belongs to all of us, a history that we at once acknowledge, appreciate, and transcend.

III. The Work of the Committee

The Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming is composed of faculty, students, alumni, and senior administrators from across the University. Our Committee members represent a range of disciplines, experiences, and backgrounds, including some individuals who have been closely involved with past and ongoing renaming discussions at Harvard, and others whose fields of study and areas of responsibility provide them with a unique perspective on renaming issues. The group convened for the first time in November, 2020, and met approximately every two weeks over the following seven months.

The first task our Committee undertook was to understand how others have approached conversations about renaming, particularly in the university setting. To this end, we sought to identify and review reports on renaming from both within and outside of Harvard. We found relevant reports and statements from nearly two dozen universities around the country and reviewed them carefully to learn about the processes that groups like ours have undertaken, and to identify any common threads within their findings.

Within Harvard, we examined the reports related to retiring the use of the Royall Shield at Harvard Law School, renaming the Oliver Wendell Holmes academic society at Harvard Medical School, and assessing the impact of Harvard College's spaces and symbols on the experiences of students on campus. Given that the names of two undergraduate Houses come up frequently in the context of renaming discussions, we also wanted to better understand how the Houses had originally been named. The staff at the Harvard University Archives explored their physical collections and online resources and provided us with a documented report that shed some light on this question.

Looking externally, we reviewed reports from a wide range of institutions, some attempting to proactively establish principles that would govern the removal of names on their campuses, as this Committee was charged with doing, and others responding more directly to ongoing debates within their communities about specific named entities.² The 2016 Report of the Yale University Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming had undertaken work in both categories, weighing in on the specific question of renaming Calhoun College while also articulating principles that might be applied to future renaming questions at Yale. Our Committee hoped to learn from the experiences of the Yale committee, and invited its chair, Professor John Witt, to join us for a meeting to speak about their process, debates, and dilemmas.

Finally, in an effort to broaden our perspective beyond the campus context, we read works dealing with issues of history and memory, including Susan Neiman's book *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* and Mayor Mitch Landrieu's 2017 speech on the removal of four Confederate monuments in the City of New Orleans.

Our Committee also met with several individuals within Harvard to better understand the context for our charge and our eventual report. President Bacow took the time to meet with us early in the process in order to answer our questions about the Committee's charge. Provost Alan Garber and Vice President for Alumni Affairs and Development Brian Lee spoke with us about the University's existing gift policies and the role that naming opportunities play in the philanthropy upon which our University relies. Robin Kelsey, dean of arts and humanities in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) and Chair of the [FAS Task Force on Visual Culture and Signage](#), a group whose work has touched upon similar themes as our own, joined us for a meeting to share insights into the themes that the Task Force had begun to identify. The Chair of our Committee also exchanged updates with Tomiko Brown-Nagin, dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and Chair of the [Presidential Initiative on Harvard and the](#)

² See Appendix B for a list of selected reports from other institutions.

[Legacy of Slavery](#). In order to gain insight into the impact of named entities on the student experience at Harvard, we also spoke with the president and vice president of the Undergraduate Council, and the president and vice president of the Harvard Graduate Council.

In addition to meeting with the selected individuals above, our Committee agreed that a critical part of our work would involve reaching out broadly to the Harvard community. We wanted to hear from as many people as possible so that we might better understand how different parts of the community regard the impact of names on their experiences of the University and its culture. In order to make our process as open and welcoming as possible, we offered numerous opportunities to speak directly with members of the Committee, as well as a way for community members to share written comments with us. Members of our Committee attended faculty meetings at nine Harvard Schools, offered several small group Zoom meetings for students, hosted open town hall meetings for staff and postdoctoral fellows, and, together with the FAS Task Force on Visual Culture and Signage, met with groups of campus services staff. We also worked with the Harvard Alumni Association to organize a listening session with alumni representing multiple schools, geographies, ages, and other demographics. These alumni were encouraged to solicit viewpoints from their communities ahead of time so that they might convey these perspectives during our meeting. Our online portal received nearly 200 submissions, which we read and discussed in detail.

Finally, we must give credit to the one-on-one conversations that many of us have had over the past several months with friends, colleagues, and others with an interest in the subject of our work. We are grateful that so many members of our community took the time to share their thoughtful reflections on the issues before our Committee.

IV. Committee Recommendations

A. Principles for Denaming

There are instances when the beliefs and actions of an individual after whom an entity is named may be seen to be profoundly antithetical to Harvard's present-day values and commitments. In such cases, after careful investigation and deliberation, it may be appropriate to remove a name. Like the lives of those whose names are under scrutiny, such denaming decisions are likely to be complex, with members of the Harvard community divided about the proper outcome.

1. A case for removal will be strongest when a committee acting in accordance with the principles and processes described below concludes that the name creates a harmful environment that undermines the ability of current students, faculty, or staff to participate fully in the work of the University.
2. Harvard is an institution devoted to research and to rigorous intellectual inquiry. These are commitments that should guide the evaluation of any name being considered for removal. These values will—and should—mean that the process of considering removal of a name will be careful, painstaking, and laborious and should not be undertaken lightly. A decision to dename should be based on the strength and clarity of the historical evidence, including an understanding of why our forebears originally selected the name.
3. The case for removing an individual's name will be strongest when the behaviors now seen as morally repugnant are a significant component of that individual's legacy when viewed in the full context of the namesake's life.
4. The case for denaming is stronger if the namesake's actions or beliefs we now regard as abhorrent would have been regarded as objectionable in the namesake's own time.
5. A case for denaming is stronger when the entity in question is central to University life and community and to the identity and experience of students, staff, or faculty.

6. The possibility of retaining a name and contextualizing it as a symbol of the complexity of Harvard's past should always be part of a consideration of denaming. A proposal for denaming, whether successful or not, will likely result in an enhancement of historical understanding of the named individual's life and the original reasons for the selection of the particular name. This record should be made a part of institutional memory regarding the entity in question whether or not it is renamed. Plaques, performances, and portraiture could all be considered means of achieving and disseminating this expanded view of the past. See: [FAS Task Force on Visual Culture and Signage](#)

B. Decision Processes

Considerations of denaming should involve extensive consultation and engagement with members of the Harvard community—students, faculty, staff, and alumni—as well as other stakeholders connected to the entity in question. Some buildings or other entities may be of limited significance beyond the school or unit in which they are located. Others will have high visibility, institutional meaning, and reputational implications. But because any single Harvard name is ultimately part of a totality of memory, honor, and recognition, central oversight of and attention to the University's landscape of names is imperative, and the President should always be alerted to possible changes. Attention to the broader ecology of names at Harvard is work that, although beyond the charge of our Committee, should be addressed by the University in the months and years to come.

A request for denaming should be submitted to the Dean of the relevant school, who will assess whether, in the context of the principles articulated above, the request should be advanced for further consideration. If so, the Dean will consult with the President, who will decide at what level the request should be considered. If the President decides the review should be undertaken within the School, the Dean will ordinarily appoint a committee including students, faculty, staff, and alumni to consider the

question and make a recommendation to the Dean, who will decide whether the name should be changed. If the President decides the review should be undertaken at the University level, the President will ordinarily appoint a committee to consider the question and make a recommendation to the President, who will bring the recommendation to the full Corporation for decision.

V. Concluding Reflections

Much of the consideration of naming and renaming practices is necessarily occupied with history—with names from the past and the decisions that led to their selection. Yet the true focus of current controversies about naming and of our Committee's own discussions is the future; it is about how Harvard can become the more just and more equitable institution we strive to build. The past helps to tell us how we got here, but it is up to us to determine how we use that past to propel us toward where we hope to go. Names represent one important part of that commitment. There is much to be done to create the future to which we aspire, and we are grateful to have been given the opportunity to participate in this work.

Appendix A: Committee Membership

Committee to Articulate Principles on Renaming

Drew Gilpin Faust (chair)

President Emeritus and the Arthur Kingsley Porter University Professor, Harvard University

Vincent Brown

Charles Warren Professor of American History, Professor of African and African American Studies, Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Sherri Charleston

Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Harvard University

Suzannah “Suzie” Clark

Morton B. Knafel Professor of Music, Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Andrew Crespo

Professor of Law, Harvard Law School

Philip Deloria

Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History, Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Elijah DeVaughn

Harvard College Class of 2021

Archon Fung

Winthrop Laflin McCormack Professor of Citizenship and Self-Government, Harvard Kennedy School

Annette Gordon-Reed

Carl M. Loeb University Professor, Harvard University

David Laibson

Robert I. Goldman Professor of Economics, Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Erika Naginski

Robert P. Hubbard Professor of Architectural History, Harvard Graduate School of Design

David Oxtoby

President, American Academy of Arts and Sciences; Former Member (2008-14) and President (2013-14), Harvard University Board of Overseers

Jin Park

Harvard-MIT Program in Health Sciences and Technology MD-PhD Candidate, Harvard Medical School

Scott Podolsky

Professor of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School

Diana Sorensen

James F. Rothenberg Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures and of Comparative Literature,
Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Meredith Weenick

Vice President for Campus Services, Harvard University

Appendix B: List of reports from other institutions

Bowling Green State University

[Report from the Task Force on the Gish Film Theater](#) (April 2019)

Brown University

[Naming or Renaming University Buildings, Spaces, Programs and Positions](#) (October 2019)

Caltech

[Final Report of the Committee on Naming and Recognition](#) (December 17, 2020)

Columbia University

[Announcement Regarding Bard Hall](#) (August 28, 2020)

Cornell University

[University Fundraising Policy Statement](#) (June 2019)

Duke University

[Procedures for Reconsideration of Namings and Memorialization at Duke University](#) (November 2017)

[Duke University Commission on Memory and History, Final Report](#) (November 2017)

Indiana University

[The Committee to Review Namings in Honor of Indiana University's Seventh President David Starr Jordan: Report and Recommendations](#) (September 2020)

Georgetown University

[Report of the Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation](#) (Summer 2016)

[Georgetown to Rename Building for Isaac Hawkins, One of 272 Enslaved in 1838 Sale](#) (April 2017)

George Washington University

[Naming Task Force Renaming Framework](#) (June 2020)

University of Maine

[C.C. Little Hall Name Task Force, Final Report for Committee Review](#) (June 2020)

University of Michigan

[President's Advisory Committee on University History](#) (standing committee)

[Committee Views on Possible Review of University Space Names](#) (2017)

[Report and Recommendations on Possible Relationship between Burt Lake "Burnout" and the University of Michigan Biological Station](#) (2018)

University of Minnesota

[Report of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History](#) (February 2019)

[Final Report of the President's and Provost's Advisory Committee on University History](#)
(May 2018)

University of North Carolina

[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Board of Trustees' Policy for the Consideration of the Removal of Names on University Buildings and Public Spaces \(July 2020\)](#)

University of Pennsylvania

[Campus Iconography Group Report](#) (April 2021)

Princeton University

[Report of the Trustee Committee on Woodrow Wilson's Legacy at Princeton](#) (2016)

[President Eisgruber's message to community on removal of Woodrow Wilson name from public policy school and Wilson College](#) (June 27, 2020)

Stanford University

[Principles and Procedures for Renaming Buildings and Other Features at Stanford University](#) (2018)

[Reports of the Advisory Committee on Renaming Jordan Hall and Removing the Statue of Louis Agassiz](#) (September 2020)

University of Virginia

[Report from the Advisory Committee on the Future of the Historic Landscape at the University of Virginia](#) (April 2018)

[Memorialization and Mission at UVA](#) (March 2020)

Yale University

[Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming](#) (November 21, 2016)