

A Chara,

My name is Tess Purser. As a student of Trinity College Dublin, I believe that it is unacceptable for our main library to bear the name of an individual complicit in the ideology and practice of racial discrimination and enslavement.

It is well-documented that George Berkeley bought and sold human beings in the early 18th century. As a bishop and philosopher, he was a vocal advocate for slavery as a social and economic institution. The "Working Paper on Berkeley's Legacies at Trinity" published by the Trinity Colonial Legacies Project in November 2022 details that:

1. Between 1728 and 1731, he purchased 3-5 enslaved people to work at his personal residence, Whitehall, a plantation in Rhode Island.
2. He drew up plans for what he called the "Bermuda Scheme", a school for Native Americans, which he proposed to fill with kidnapped Native Americans that would have seen further enslavement on his part.
3. He was 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.
4. Berkeley's opinions on the benefits of enslavement applied to the enslaved African, Native Americans, and to the native Irish Catholic population as well.

Berkeley's views were not a product of his time. It is false to argue that Berkeley had no agency in his actions or words. 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. George Berkeley chose to support the enslavement of human beings.

The act of de-naming the X Library cannot and will not bury him or his work in Trinity's history. Scholars will still be able to study George Berkeley. Removing his name from the wall of our main library will not destroy his writings. Rather, it will represent our choice not to glorify an individual who dedicated his life to oppressing the lives of others.

An appropriate decolonisation of Trinity College would recognise that the Berkeley Library, the eponymous Gold Medals, and memorial window are no longer appropriate to the 21st century university that Trinity projects to the world. Their continued existence reflects poorly on Trinity College Dublin's ability to meet its goals of inclusivity and the fostering of a positive environment in which students can learn. Berkeley's continued lionisation is a failure on the part of Trinity College Dublin to engage with this problematic legacy.

For these reasons, I call on Provost. Linda Doyle, and Trinity College Dublin to:

1. Immediately remove the sign which bears Berkeley's name outside the X Library, de-name the X Library and Gold Medals in all College communications, and re-dedicate the memorial window;
2. Launch a public consultation on a new long-term name for the X Library.

As a University that claims to inspire the next generation of global citizens and leaders, we have a duty to engage critically with our past and change when necessary. The decision to name Trinity's main library after George Berkeley in 1978 was a mistake — retaining it would be another one.

Furthermore, I would like to add that there are so many other names the library could be given. Trinity is an old university and there are countless people who are more worthy to claim the library's name. For example one could name it after one of the first female students in Trinity, Marion Weir Johnston, Averina Shegog or Ellen Tuckey, or after the first female scholar, Olive Purser. All four of these women began their studies in 1904, when women were finally allowed to attend Trinity. Honouring the legacy of women in Trinity seems important, especially given that so few buildings and lecture halls are named after women. Seeing as Weir Johnston and Purser studied Law and Classics respectively, naming the Berkeley after either of them would be appropriate, as books from these disciplines can be found there. Alternatively, the library could be named after a person of colour who fought against slavery, such as Frederick Douglas, an American abolitionist who toured Ireland and even met with Daniel O'Connell.

While I know that this is not the main issue of this letter, I feel that it should be pointed out that the library could be named after so many other people who were not involved in slavery or other atrocities.

Yours sincerely,

Tess Purser

Joint Honours History and Sociology