

## **Letter of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming**

November 21, 2016

To President Salovey,

On August 1, you asked our Committee to articulate principles to guide the University in deciding whether to remove “a historical name from a building or other prominent structure or space on campus.” To do this, you requested that we review renaming debates at Yale and elsewhere. In the report accompanying this letter, we describe the history we reviewed and present a set of principles. In this letter, we say a few words about how we went about our work.

The first task we set ourselves was to develop a process that would guide our thinking on the question before us. The Committee read scholarship on the history and theory of naming and renaming. We studied renaming debates in other times and places. We researched the experience at Yale, and we tried to use the scholarly expertise in history represented on our Committee.

We were aware that our Committee was constituted after more than a year of controversy on campus over the name of Calhoun College. We were aware, too, that our Committee was constituted after two years of conversation about the names of two new colleges. As a result, we faced a certain exhaustion in the University community with the question of building names. To accommodate this, we obtained many of the communications arising out of last year’s debate over the name of Calhoun College. We also sought new input and new ideas.

The Committee received many different opinions on the question before it. For now, it suffices to say that the views we received arrayed themselves across a wide range. Such a diversity of views, many of them deeply and powerfully felt, might have stymied us had we understood our mandate to be a report dictated by majority opinion or by the intensity with which opinions were held. We conceived of our task, however, as developing a reasoned answer, not necessarily the most popular answer. In this respect, every suggestion made us better students of the issues involved.\*

In all our work, we have tried to model the sort of process that might be employed in any future application of the principles we articulate in this report.

Two limits in our charge shaped our work. Our mandate did not include the power to recommend that any particular building name be changed. Nor were we charged with developing a new name for any such building. We viewed these limits on our authority as

---

\* We are publishing an Appendix on our Committee webpage documenting much of the input we received, as well as many of the other materials we relied on in developing our report. For more, see <http://president.yale.edu/advisory-groups/presidents-committees/committee-establish-principles-renaming-0>.

felicitous rather than constraining. They gave us the freedom to deliberate on the problem of renaming in a light informed by the University's recent controversies, but not unduly influenced by them.

We adopt the report and its principles unanimously.

John Fabian Witt (chair)  
*Yale College '94, '99 J.D., '00 Ph.D., Allen H. Duffy Class of 1960 Professor of Law and Professor of History*

G. Leonard (Len) Baker, Jr.  
*Yale College '64*

Tom A. Bernstein, Esq.  
*Yale College '74, '77 J.D.*

David Blight (advisor)  
*Class of 1954 Professor of History*

Beverly Gage  
*Yale College '94, Professor of History*

Jonathan Holloway  
*'95 Ph.D., Dean of Yale College; Edmund S. Morgan Professor of African American Studies, History, and American Studies*

Lalani Perry  
*Director of Communications, Human Resources*

Dasia Moore  
*Yale Undergraduate, '18*

Sharon Oster  
*Frederic D. Wolfe Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship; Dean, Yale School of Management (2008-11)*

Stephen Pitti  
*Yale College '91, Professor of History and of American Studies; Director, Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity and Transnational Migration; Head of Ezra Stiles College*

Wilhelmina M. (Mimi) Wright  
*Yale College '86*

Wendy Xiao  
*Yale M.D./Ph.D. candidate (Neuroscience)*

## **Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming**

### **I. Values and Priorities**

### **II. Trials and Errors**

*A. The Calhoun naming question*

*B. The Committee's work*

### **III. Names and Renaming**

*A. Renaming around the country and around the world*

*B. A renaming question at Yale*

1. Calhoun at Yale and beyond
2. Calhoun on race and slavery
3. Naming Calhoun College
4. The Calhoun name and its discontents

### **IV. History and Mission**

*A. Change in buildings and names on the University campus is not new*

*B. The mission of the University*

### **V. Principles**

*A. Presumptions: Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event*

*B. Principles to be considered: Sometimes renaming on the basis of values is warranted*

*C. Decisions to retain a name or to rename come with obligations of nonerasure, contextualization, and process*

## **I. Values and Priorities**

The central mission of a university is to discover and disseminate knowledge. So concluded a Yale committee chaired by C. Vann Woodward more than forty years ago. Its conclusions ring as true today as they did then.

History is one of the forms of knowledge at the core of the enterprise. To erase a university's history is antithetical to the spirit of the institution. Erasing names is a matter of special concern, because those names are, in part, a catalog of the people whom the university has thought worthy of honor. Removing such names may obscure important information about our past.

To change, however, is not always to erase. Indeed, change is indispensable in a University that has evolved over more than three hundred years. When Yale rebuilt its campus in the tradition of the medieval English colleges in the 1920s and 1930s, it did so as part of a forward-looking plan to train the leaders of the twentieth century. Five decades ago, the University began to increase the numbers of women and people of color as students, faculty, and alumni. This demographic transformation has been, and will continue to be, crucial in allowing Yale to advance the frontier of excellence in research and to train the leaders of the century to come.

A university's ongoing obligation is to navigate change without effacing the past. The imperative in addressing renaming questions is that the University align any building name change with the mission of the University, with its deep history, and with its promising future.

A posture of humility points the inquiry in the right direction. At a university as old as this one, those who occupy the campus today are stewards of an intergenerational project. Hubris in undoing past decisions encourages future generations to disrespect the choices of the current generation.

Ill-fated renaming has often reflected excessive confidence in moral orthodoxies. One need only consider twentieth-century regimes that sought to erase their own past in the service of totalitarian propaganda. The Soviet Union conducted aggressive renaming campaigns of a kind captured by George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, in which a so-called "Ministry of Truth" wrote and rewrote history.

Renamings, however, are not inevitably Orwellian. In 1784, the change in the name of Kings College to Columbia College, now Columbia University, did not improperly efface its history. (The crown remains an iconic symbol of the institution.) Nor did name changes in West Germany after the Second World War, or in Russia after the fall of communism, or in South Africa after Apartheid. In each of these settings, and in many more, name changes have combined renaming with preservation of the historical record.

Nearly twenty-five years ago, the late Robin Winks identified a critical distinction between liberal and illiberal alterations of historical monuments. Winks, the former master of Berkeley College, who served on the Yale faculty from 1957 to 1999, wrote that there are "two different concepts of history." In one conception, history is a record of things from the past that should

not be forgotten. In this view, removing an item from the historical record is like lying; as Winks put it, such removals are akin to the work of the infamous “Great Soviet Encyclopedia,” in which history became whatever the Party leaders wanted it to be at any given moment in time.

In a second conception, however, history is the commemoration and memorialization of the past. Commemoration, Winks noted, often confers honor and asserts pride. It can also convey mourning and loss. Either way, commemoration expresses values. In this second conception of history, a change in the way a community memorializes its past offers a way to recognize important alterations in the community’s values.

Winks’s distinction lies at the foundation of our thinking about naming and renaming. Both conceptions of history matter. A university ought not erase the historical record. But a great university will rightly decide what to commemorate and what to honor, subject always to the obligation not to efface the history that informs the world in which we live.

This last point directs us to one further observation at the outset. The University is rightly a guardian of academic freedom. This is so even when, and indeed especially when, academic freedom leads scholars and students, as Woodward put it, to “think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, and challenge the unchallengeable.” The names on the University’s buildings, however, perform a different function. They do not mark the boundaries of permissible speech on campus. The decision to change a building name is emphatically not a decision to remove a book from a library, change the contents of a syllabus, strike an idea from a course discussion, or rule out a dining hall conversation. In its building names and its campus symbols, the University communicates values, confers honor, and expresses gratitude to those who have contributed to its mission. In other words, the University itself speaks through its building names. In its role as speaker, the University need not, and ordinarily will not, express the unthinkable ideas that it is obligated to protect and foster in its capacity as guarantor of the academic freedom of its faculty and students. To the contrary, when the University speaks, it chooses its message in light of its mission, just as it has chosen its messages for more than three centuries. One of the values the University rightly communicates is the importance of genuine inclusiveness for all those who will make it a leading center for research and teaching in the years to come.

## **II. Trials and Errors**

### ***A. The Calhoun naming question***

The events precipitating our Committee commenced in August, 2015, when President Peter Salovey’s Freshman Address took as its central topic the horrific, hate-filled killing of nine African Americans at a prayer service earlier that summer at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The murders, which were committed by a young white man who surrounded himself with symbols of white supremacy, launched a national conversation on the meaning of such symbols. The State of South Carolina removed the Confederate battle flag from its capitol grounds, where it had flown since 1962, when it was raised in the midst of controversy over racial desegregation.

In his address, President Salovey asked the assembled freshmen to consider what the Charleston shooting had to do with Yale. One in twelve freshmen in the audience, he observed, had been assigned to a college named for John C. Calhoun, a principal architect of Southern secession and a crafter of what the President called “the most powerful and influential defense of his day for slavery.” Indeed, although the President did not mention it, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston is on Calhoun Street, and the killings there took place a block from the city’s 80-foot high monument to Calhoun and his legacy. Calhoun, President Salovey explained, connected the Yale campus to “white supremacy and slavery.” The President raised the prospect of renaming the college. But he explained that renaming was not so simple. It would be dangerous, President Salovey warned, to judge the past by present day standards, or “to efface or distance ourselves from our own history.” The campus, he reasoned, would need to “give careful consideration” to the criteria it should use in reviewing a name associated with such a historical figure. Like South Carolina, he concluded, Yale would need to have its own “difficult conversation” about history.

With President Salovey’s address, Yale opened a webpage titled “An open conversation,” which gave community members the opportunity to share their views on whether to change the name of Calhoun College. A series of campus events on the topic followed, a number of them held in Calhoun College itself. In November, during a period of student protest, a coalition of student groups listed the renaming of Calhoun College among its aims and called for the University to rename the college (and the two new residential colleges now under construction) for people of color. In January, Senior Fellow Margaret Marshall of the Yale Corporation held two open forums, as well as a session for Calhoun College students in particular. That same month, Calhoun College took three portraits of its namesake down from its walls, including one that had hung prominently in the dining hall. The college also replaced its ceremonial mace, which had been John C. Calhoun’s cane, with one made from a tree that once stood in the college courtyard.

In late April, President Salovey announced that Calhoun College’s name would be retained. The president reasoned that Yale has obligations of teaching and learning, and concluded that renaming would “obscure[] the legacy of slavery rather than address[] it.” “Erasing Calhoun’s name from a much-beloved residential college,” he explained, risked hiding the University’s past, “downplaying the lasting effects of slavery, and substituting a false and misleading narrative” that “might allow us to feel complacent or, even, self-congratulatory.”

Reactions to the Calhoun decision were swift and varied. Off the campus, many applauded it as a courageous refusal to give in to the fashion of “political correctness.” Two thirds of the 350 Yale alumni responding to an unscientific *Yale Alumni Magazine* poll supported the decision.

On campus, opposition to the decision was pronounced. A faculty member’s *New York Times* opinion essay two days after the announcement called the decision “a grievous mistake.” Another faculty member wrote the president to ask how he would feel about a college named for Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propagandist. The *Yale Daily News* called it “our missed opportunity.” Hundreds of students staged a renaming ceremony on the Cross Campus Green for what they described as “the college formerly known as Calhoun.” At a May 5 meeting of more than 200 members of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, faculty expressed grave disappointment.

National press associated Yale with racism; “Yale Will Keep Name of a White Supremacist on a College,” read the *New York Times* headline.

By the end of May, an open letter calling on President Salovey to reverse his decision on Calhoun had garnered 396 faculty signatures in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), including 335 of the roughly 650 FAS tenured or tenure-track faculty from an array of departments and disciplines. The letter endorsed the president’s goal of addressing the complexity of the University’s history. But it asserted that the name of a residential college also confers honor on the namesake. The letter noted, too, that residential college names at Yale shape the student community in a distinctive and lasting manner. Around the same time, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Senate voted 18 to 1 to submit a letter to President Salovey “strongly request[ing]” that he reconsider his decision.

Two months later, President Salovey sent a letter to the Yale community. “[I]t is now clear to me,” he wrote, “that the community-wide conversation about these issues could have drawn more effectively on campus expertise.” The University, he said, “would have benefited from a set of well-articulated guiding principles according to which a historical name might be removed or changed.” Accordingly, President Salovey appointed our Committee and asked us to return once more to the renaming question.

### ***B. The Committee’s work***

Our Committee’s charge asked us to review the experience at Yale and at other institutions and to develop principles for how renaming questions should be resolved.

In order to gain perspective, we read and discussed material from the literature on the history and theory of naming and renaming. We made careful examination of renaming controversies at other institutions and in other places. We spoke with decision-makers at a number of the universities that have taken up questions about naming and campus symbolism over the past several years. At the end of September, we held meetings and a public forum with leaders at Georgetown University, Harvard Law School, Princeton University, the University of Richmond, and the University of Texas at Austin. Each of these universities has grappled with its own distinctive questions of naming and memorialization, but such questions have had some similarities to the naming issue here at Yale.

We studied Yale’s own renaming controversy, too. Working with the University’s Chief Research Archivist and the Head of the University Archives, and with the help of graduate student research assistants versed in working with manuscripts, we combed the University’s archival collections to learn about the processes by which the University has selected names for its buildings, and about the meanings those names have taken on in subsequent years. Our aim was to ensure that the Committee made every effort to understand the many facets of the question before us.

We also gave members of the Yale community an opportunity to share their views about the principles that ought to apply to renaming questions.

The committee hosted a webpage on the Yale University website that gave interested parties the chance to submit comments. As of the date of this writing, more than 300 comments have come to the Committee through the website, including comments from alumni, faculty, staff, and students, and from some with no formal Yale affiliation at all. The Association of Yale Alumni graciously agreed to reach out to its membership and invite comment. The chair of the Committee also met with several groups of alumni during the course of the fall semester.

On campus, we held meetings with undergraduates as well as with students in the graduate and professional schools. We made presentations to, and solicited input from, groups from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and reached out to the staff of the Yale College Dean's Office, including the directors of the campus cultural centers. We contacted the deans of each of the graduate and professional schools at the University and held meetings or listening sessions in conjunction with those deans at several of the schools. We also created outreach efforts specifically designed for Yale employees.

We received a wide array of ideas through each of these channels. At one extreme, some members of the community insisted that the best principle would be a rule of no renamings at all, under any circumstances. At the other pole, some interlocutors suggested that building names ought to change according to a regular schedule, perhaps every fifty years. One commenter suggested that the University should alter the name of one building on campus each year. The idea behind such suggestions was that the campus might constantly update to reflect its current values.

No part of the University community spoke with a single voice. Alumni expressed a wide diversity of views. Many alumni of Calhoun College, for example, told us of the feelings of camaraderie they had experienced around the name of their college. Calhoun alumni who reported these sentiments expressed differing views on the future of the name. Some noted that as students they had barely known who John Calhoun was, let alone associated the college name with a theorist of white supremacy; for them, the name designated their residential college and little more. Others, including some African-American alumni, recounted being critical of the Calhoun legacy, but nonetheless said that they had not advocated a change in the name; they reported that the name had served as a useful reminder to them of the history of slavery and discrimination. Still other Calhoun alumni, especially but not exclusively from recent years, reported that even though they had been Calhoun College students, they believed strongly that the name of their college should change. It was embarrassing and offensive, they said, to continue to honor Calhoun; moreover, they contended, the name Calhoun ought not serve as a symbol around which Yale asks its students to form community.

It is fair to say that, on balance, alumni were more skeptical than other parts of the University community about the prospect of renaming. Many voiced a deep reluctance to evaluate people in the past by contemporary standards. A persistent thread in comments from alumni was the concern that renaming was tantamount to rewriting history, and that the push to rename buildings on the basis of objections to their namesakes was a dangerous form of "political correctness." Renaming, many alumni insisted, is part of a broader trend in which exaggerated claims of emotional harm are used to create taboos that stifle normal campus discourse. Some such alumni



viewed our Committee with derision and scorn. They contended that if the University were to change the name of Calhoun, it would create a “slippery slope” down which many other building and residential college names would slide. Even the name of the University might have to change, they warned. After all, Elihu Yale served as the governor of an East India Company colony that engaged in the slave trade at the end of the seventeenth century.

We heard a diversity of views from students, as well, undergraduate and graduate students alike. Some expressed the kinds of concerns that alumni articulated; renaming, such students worried, might lead to ongoing controversy over symbols when the University’s energies were better spent elsewhere. Of the students who communicated with us, however, the balance tipped toward principles that favored renaming. Many students focused attention on the relationship between a namesake’s beliefs and the University’s professed values of community and inclusiveness. Some students urged a broad principle of renaming whenever a namesake was found to have engaged in conduct that is immoral by contemporary standards. Many more students called for renaming when a building’s namesake pioneered a practice or idea that is deplorable by current standards, or took a leading role in preserving such a practice or idea.

Some students said that the Calhoun name was emblematic of a more general phenomenon of racial oppression and injustice at Yale. Such students stated that they see a pervasive white supremacy around the campus, in everything from the portraits that hang on walls, to the racial composition of the faculty, to the courses offered in the classrooms.

Faculty and staff expressed strong views as well. Faculty members touched upon many of the themes that appeared in the reactions of alumni and students. Several faculty members raised concerns about the effects of Calhoun College’s name on the reputation of the University and on the ability of the University to recruit excellent scholars. Some faculty raised concerns about the erasure of history. Others noted that this risk could be ameliorated by substituting different ways of remembering the past; they also offered skepticism about the idea that the residential college names have helped students learn about history. At least one asserted that to keep a name on the theory that it will serve as a teaching tool is condescending toward those students who know the history, as well as to the faculty who already teach about the history in their classrooms.

Some of the most valuable faculty ideas drew on areas of scholarly expertise. Scholars of cultures around the world wrote to share with us different ways in which renamings, for good and for ill, have symbolized change. Psychologists shared with us the findings of a literature on the effects of salient stereotypes on academic performance. Linguists brought to our attention the ways in which names can function as signals of affiliation and exclusion. Philosophers drew careful distinctions among ways of remembering.

Members of the University staff conveyed a number of different views, too. Some Yale staff expressed deep skepticism about any effort to rename buildings. Other staff members, including those who sought us out from Yale Hospitality and the dining halls, urged us to take into account the meaning for them of working in and being identified with a building that honors someone whose life was so closely connected to the institution of slavery. They asked us to consider what it said about the institution’s values and reputation to retain such a name. Some of them

expressed solidarity with a dining hall worker in Calhoun College who in June used a broom to break a stained glass window depicting two slaves carrying cotton.

Three themes were touched upon by voices from a number of different parts of the Yale community. First, many alumni, faculty, staff, and students distinguished between different kinds of spaces on the campus. Residential or community spaces, such commenters argued, ought to be considered with particular care. Relatedly, many observed that residential college names were distinctive because the University assigns students to colleges and encourages them to identify with the college names in everything from the shirts they wear to the songs they sing and the intramural athletic teams on which they play.

A second theme voiced by many was that a special problem arises when the offense given by a particular name is not evenly distributed across the demographic diversity of the campus. A building named after someone whose legacy is connected to white supremacy or misogyny, commenters reported, places burdens on some groups more than others. Accordingly, a number of interlocutors urged us to take into account unequal effects on different campus groups.

Third, voices from virtually every part of the community urged the University to establish a clear process for applying the principles on renaming a building.

As we worked, protests against the Calhoun name took place on a weekly basis. Each Friday during the fall term, community members organized protests outside Calhoun College, demonstrating outside the college gate on Elm Street and offering their own proposed new names for the college. At the end of October, a group of community organizations identifying themselves as the Change the Name Coalition sponsored a rally on the New Haven Green, which ended with approximately 200 people in Beinecke Plaza.

We would be remiss if we did not observe that some of the input from members of the University community produced challenging and difficult conversations. One theme, however, emerged as a source of inspiration for our Committee. Running through many comments we received was widespread agreement that the University can and should aim to be diverse and inclusive in a way that emphasizes its traditions of excellence and does not efface the institution's history. With these values in mind we took up the study of renaming issues at other universities and on our own campus.

### **III. Names and Renaming**

#### ***A. Renaming around the country and around the world***

The current round of controversies over university building names and symbols in the United States arguably began at the University of Texas in 2010. Research by a faculty member concluded that the Simkins Residence Hall had been named after an active Ku Klux Klan member. Moreover, it had been named in the weeks immediately following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The Texas Board of Regents changed

the building's name. Since then, buildings associated with white supremacists and Klan members have been renamed at institutions such as Duke University (2014), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2015), and the University of Oregon (2016).

In late 2015, Georgetown University changed the names of two buildings that had been named for university leaders who sold 272 slaves in 1838 and used the proceeds to finance the modern Georgetown University. Around the same time, Princeton students challenged the name of the university's Woodrow Wilson School on the basis of Wilson's views on race and his support for racial segregation in his roles as president of Princeton and president of the United States. In the spring of 2016, after several months of study, a committee of Princeton trustees decided to retain the name, but also made commitments to tell the unvarnished story of Wilson's history and to diversify the names of campus buildings. Shortly thereafter, Stanford University initiated a study of its own relating to its campus's use of the name Junipero Serra. Serra, a Catholic missionary, was canonized by the Catholic Church in September 2015. But his history among Native Americans of the Pacific coast is complex and controversial.

Symbols and monuments on campuses have also come under challenge. This past spring, the fellows of the Harvard Corporation adopted the recommendation of a Law School committee that the Harvard Law School's shield be dropped because its image of three sheaves of wheat was designed after the crest of Isaac Royall, Jr., a slaveholder in Antigua and Massachusetts. A vigorous dissent advocated seizing the open-ended meaning of the shield's wheat sheaves and imbuing them with a different significance; the shield, urged the dissent, might recognize the slaves who worked on the Royall plantations, as well as the many civil rights lawyers from Harvard Law School who in more recent years have worked to eradicate the legacy of slavery. The University of Texas at Austin relocated, but did not remove, a statue of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy. Amherst College kept its college name, but dropped its "Lord Jeff" mascot, named after Lord Jeffrey Amherst, whose association with smallpox-infected blankets in warfare against Native Americans made the mascot a divisive symbol.

In recent years, similar controversies have developed on campuses around the world. In early 2015, students at the University of Cape Town protested a statue of Cecil Rhodes, the British imperialist at the turn of the twentieth century. The university removed the statue, and later renamed a hall named for a second British colonial figure. Under the name "Rhodes Must Fall," the protests moved to Oxford University, where they challenged a statue of Rhodes on the façade of Oriel College. After inviting views from the College community and wider public on the topic of the statue, Oriel College ultimately decided to retain it and is now looking to provide a clear historical context to explain why it is there.

These campus controversies have features in common. Yet each episode has had its own distinctive dimensions. At Texas, Simkins Hall was named just as the university launched a massive effort to evade the legal mandate of desegregation. Duke's hall played little role on campus and was scheduled for demolition soon anyway. At UNC, a committee of trustees discovered that their early twentieth-century predecessors had named the hall specifically to honor its namesake's participation in the Klan. Princeton's Woodrow Wilson controversy featured the name of the man who had built the modern Princeton. In some cases, statues or

commemorations may be protected by historical preservation laws. Oriel College's statue of Rhodes, for example, is listed under such laws (as is the building on which it stands).

## ***B. A renaming question at Yale***

Yale's ongoing naming question offers its own distinctive pattern. We learned a great deal from our study of the recent (and not so recent) case of John C. Calhoun at Yale. This recent and prominent case on our own campus, together with renaming questions elsewhere, informed our thinking about the principles that should apply to renaming decisions. We therefore devote some space to describing what we learned.

### **1. Calhoun at Yale and beyond**

At Yale, renaming debates have focused on Calhoun College. John C. Calhoun (1782-1850) came to Yale from his home in South Carolina in 1802 as a twenty-year-old student. He finished his course of studies in a short two years. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. In 1804, he was chosen as a commencement speaker, but sickness prevented him from delivering his speech. In 1822, Yale awarded him an honorary degree.

After graduating, Calhoun trained as a lawyer. He practiced law and ran his family plantation before going into public service in the South Carolina state legislature. A year later he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1817 President James Monroe appointed him secretary of war. Thereafter, he served as vice president under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, as a U.S. senator, and as secretary of state.

Calhoun served in these positions with skill. His contemporary Daniel Webster, a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, described him as "the ablest man I ever knew." A century later, a Senate committee chaired by then-Senator John F. Kennedy selected him as one of five outstanding members of the Senate in American history. ("Calhoun's name led all the rest," Kennedy later reported.)

The South Carolinian was a political theorist as well as politician. In particular, Calhoun became one of the leading architects of a theory of the United States Constitution that attributed extraordinary powers to the states. When Congress enacted a new tariff on imported manufacturing goods in 1828, Calhoun drafted protests against the legislation, arguing that it promoted Northern industrial interests at the expense of the agricultural South. Calhoun contended that, properly understood, the U.S. Constitution afforded states the authority to deem federal legislation "unconstitutional, and therefore null and void." In 1830 Calhoun drafted an address to the people of the United States on the occasion of South Carolina's "Nullification Convention," in which the state purported to nullify Congress's latest tariff law.

Over the next two decades, Calhoun developed his thinking into a carefully articulated theory of constitutional design. Rooting his thinking in first principles about mankind's essential characteristics, Calhoun's approach aimed to accommodate contending economic and sectional interests through a system of "concurrent voice" that would "give each interest or portion of the

community a negative on the others.” Calhoun’s theories were hotly controversial in their time. But they attracted widespread attention and respect as the work of a man with unusual analytic talents and singular gifts as a writer and speaker. In 1861, eleven years after Calhoun’s death, the prominent English philosopher John Stuart Mill described Calhoun as the best “speculative thinker” in American politics since the Founding era.

In recent years, Calhoun’s ideas about constitutional design have become more prominent. A school of thought known as “consociationalism” in political science takes up ideas such as mutual veto authority, executive power sharing, and decentralized autonomy. Each serves as a mechanism for managing constitutionalism in deeply divided societies. In particular, and ironically, devices designed by Calhoun to protect the interests of white slaveholders are now deployed as institutional defenses of minority interests against majoritarian tyranny.

## 2. Calhoun on race and slavery

John Calhoun was also a leading constitutional theorist in the defense of slavery. Many scholars contend that Calhoun’s constitutional ideas emerged because of, not merely in spite of, his views on slavery. In 1830, Calhoun suggested as much. He identified the tariff as “the occasion, rather than the real cause” of the controversy over state authority. The “real cause,” he wrote, was the danger that an active federal government’s support for Northern interests posed to the South’s “peculiar domestick institution.” Unsurprisingly, in his posthumously published *Disquisition on Government*, Calhoun used the constitutional controversy over slavery as a central example of his general theory of contending sectional and economic interests.

Calhoun led his generation in developing a new and more extreme justification of slavery, too. Going back to the Founding, many American statesmen had seen slavery as a necessary evil. Calhoun pioneered a different argument. Defending slavery on the floor of the Congress in 1837, Calhoun famously announced that

where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color, and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slave-holding States between the two, is, instead of an evil, a good – a positive good.

Slavery, Calhoun continued, “forms the most solid and durable foundation on which to rear free and stable political institutions.”

In his later years, Calhoun openly rejected the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence; it was “a great and dangerous error,” he said, “to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty.” While serving as secretary of state he wrote to Sir Richard Pakenham, British minister to the United States, that the character of Africans was well suited to slavery. Nowhere outside the American South, he asserted, “has the negro race ever attained so high an elevation in morals, intelligence, or civilization.” Freedom, by contrast, reduced people of African descent to “extremes of vice and wretchedness.”

For abolitionists, such views made Calhoun the embodiment of proslavery ideas. Frederick Douglass said that Calhoun saw slavery as “the veritable New Jerusalem that was to come down out of Heaven.” It was Calhoun, Douglass charged, “who first boldly declared the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence” to be “self-evident falsehoods.”

Calhoun also played a key role in establishing policy toward Native peoples in the early nineteenth century. In 1818, as secretary of war, Calhoun helped redesign the system of trading with Indians to suit the interaction between a “civilized” people, on the one hand, and a “savage people,” on the other. Early in his term as secretary, Calhoun was drawn into efforts to remove the Cherokee and the Creek from Georgia. In 1824, he established the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And in 1825, he drafted a blueprint for removing virtually all tribes remaining in the East to lands across the Mississippi River.

Calhoun warned against the “incessant pressure” of U.S. population on Native tribes and opposed the most aggressive conduct of Anglo-Americans toward those he called “the wretched aborigines of our country.” Nonetheless, Calhoun was intractably committed to moving Native peoples westward. He insisted on the view that the “Indians themselves are not the proper judges of their own interests.” He believed that until the “savage customs and character” of the Indian were extinguished and brought “within the pales of law and civilization,” the U.S. would have to rely on what he called “a proper combination of force and persuasion, of punishments and rewards” in its treatment of Native tribes.

### **3. Naming Calhoun College**

In 1850, when Calhoun died, leaders at Yale, including his former teachers, deliberately separated themselves from the controversial South Carolinian’s views, and especially from his views on slavery, even as they marked his passing. The University’s president, Theodore Dwight Woolsey noted warily that the South Carolinian had possessed “unlimited sway over the minds of such as embraced his views of the Constitution.” Calhoun’s old mentor, Professor Benjamin Silliman, lamented that his student had been “in a great measure” responsible for bolstering support for slavery in the South. Thanks to Calhoun’s efforts, Silliman wrote with regret, the United States had “come to present to the world the mortifying and disgraceful spectacle of a great republic – and the only real republic in the world – standing forth in vindication of slavery.”

Yale named no building after Calhoun when he died. The University did little to imprint the record of his legacy on the campus for seventy years. It seems likely that his pro-slavery views were too controversial and too badly out of step with the views of Americans in the North.

By the early twentieth century, however, the sensibilities of Yale’s leaders had changed. Few of Woolsey’s and Silliman’s successors at Yale shared the earlier generation’s critical assessment of Calhoun’s vigorous defense of slavery. Accordingly, the University took part in the process by which many early-twentieth-century American institutions set aside the struggles of the Civil War generation for freedom and equality. The University remembered the Confederate States of America by inscribing Confederate soldiers’ names alongside those of Union soldiers on the marble tablets lining the corridor between Beinecke Plaza and Memorial Hall. Soon thereafter,

the construction of Memorial Quadrangle on the site of present-day Saybrook and Branford Colleges featured John Calhoun not once but twice, in a statue on the Harkness Tower and again as the name over an entryway in the Quadrangle.

In 1930, as the University began thinking about the names for the new residential colleges it was about to build, Calhoun's name rose to the top of the list. By the early 1930s Calhoun seemed to many in Yale's leadership to be an ideal choice. His statesmanship among Yale graduates seemed unrivaled.

Ironically, the Calhoun name was attractive for some precisely because in the 1930s he seemed unlikely to engender controversy among the University's students, faculty, and alumni. To the extent the name would be able to help draw students from the South, it seemed to hold out the prospect of a certain kind of diversification of the student body. Moreover, the committee charged with developing nomenclature for the new colleges aimed for names that would serve as unifying symbols for the student communities. Speaking to the alumni in 1931, University president James Angell said that contemporary names would "inevitably" produce an "acute controversial atmosphere." President Angell therefore decided to "avoid all personal names belonging to the last century." Angell seems to have meant that he would not consider names whose association with Yale fell within the previous 100 years. The decision excluded men such as president and chief justice William Howard Taft (B.A. 1878), who had died the year before.

Calhoun also seemed a useful symbol to Yale's leaders because he embodied their ambitions to produce statesmen of national stature. In the era of Jim Crow, when African Americans had been excluded from national politics, Calhoun came to figure in American political life first and foremost as a statesman of distinction. And so, in May 1931, the University committee charged with naming decisions approved the selection of Calhoun as "Yale's most eminent graduate in the field of Civil State."<sup>\*</sup> A day later, the Yale Corporation voted that the quadrangle at the corner of Elm and College streets would be named "Calhoun College" in order "to honor John C. Calhoun, B.A. 1804, LL.D. 1822, statesman."

#### **4. The Calhoun name and its discontents**

A handful of critics registered quiet objections to the Calhoun name at the time of its selection. Anson Phelps Stokes, former secretary of the University, was a philanthropist who sponsored efforts to improve the education of African Americans and Native Americans. In 1914, Stokes had listed Calhoun as the most significant Yale man in the history of American politics, though he noted that Calhoun had "unfortunately" been "on the side of the past rather than of the future." Fifteen years later, Stokes issued a private objection to the Calhoun name. The lot on which the college was to be built, Stokes observed, was the site of the old Divinity School. And so Stokes recommended that a college on that site be named after a theologian. Choosing his words carefully, Stokes acknowledged the propriety of "some adequate memorial to Calhoun at Yale." But he urged "a more fitting name" for the old Divinity quadrangle.

---

<sup>\*</sup>"Civil State" was a reference to the Yale's Charter, dating to 1701, which authorized the founding of a school "fitted for Publick employment both in Church and Civil State."

Another objection to the name Calhoun appears to have come from the trustees of the estate of John W. Sterling, class of 1864, whose gift financed the construction of the college to be built immediately to the south of the Sterling Library. In 1931, the University offered the Sterling trustees a short menu of names to choose from. The list included Calhoun. But the Sterling trustees apparently decided, as the *Yale Daily News* reported in 1941, that it would be “tactless to name his college in honor of a secessionist.” Sterling had been a loyal Connecticut Yankee, a man who attended a memorial service for Lincoln after his assassination. Accordingly, the Sterling trustees chose Jonathan Trumbull as the namesake of the college financed by the Sterling estate. The Calhoun name was attached (over Stokes’s objection) to the new college at Elm and College streets instead.

These two cautions about the Calhoun name did nothing to alter the University’s belief that the pro-slavery statesman would serve as a unifying namesake for the new college. Yale’s leadership proceeded to develop an interior design for the college with an array of stained glass windows that depicted an idyllic antebellum life of paternalistic slaveowners and submissive, happy slaves.

One last cautionary note emerged beneath those very windows when the college opened in the fall of 1933. At the college’s dedication banquet, the noted writer Leonard Bacon read a long poem to mark the occasion, with President Angell, the college’s new master, and all the students and fellows in attendance. Bacon’s great-grandfather of the same name (B.A. 1820) had been an antislavery preacher and later a Yale professor. The elder Bacon had written in 1846 that if the laws “by virtue of which slavery exists . . . are not wrong,” then “nothing is wrong.” Eighteen years later, Abraham Lincoln famously improved upon the formulation. (“If slavery is not wrong,” Lincoln said, “nothing is wrong.”) But the sentiment was the same. In 1933, the younger Bacon (who seven years later would win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry) led off his dedication with a reference to the peculiarity of Calhoun’s return to the North:

I suppose that I ought  
To have bayed at the moon  
Singing the praises  
of *John C. Calhoun*.  
But I cannot, although  
He was virtuous and brave,  
And besides my great-grandfather  
Would turn in his grave,  
If he dreamed of a monument  
Raised to renown  
*Calhoun* in this rank  
Abolitionist town.

It was hardly Pulitzer-worthy stuff, to be sure. But its message was clear. Bacon refused to build a monument in words for the proslavery Calhoun.

After Bacon’s poem, there is little or no surviving evidence of early misgivings about the Calhoun name at Yale for several decades.



Outside Yale, however, the memory of Calhoun remained a vivid reminder of the history of slavery and racism in the United States. In his famous dissent in the *Slaughter-House Cases*, decided in 1873, Supreme Court Justice Stephen Field singled out Calhoun and cited his doctrines as the epitome of the proslavery view of the Constitution that the Civil War and the subsequent amendments to the Constitution had decisively rejected. The African-American editor T. Thomas Fortune spoke bitterly of the continuing and pernicious racial effects of “John C. Calhoun’s States’ Rights theories.”

Even as Yale was building Calhoun College, the country’s leading black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, excoriated Calhoun as the founder of the view that “slavery is a positive good.” Four years later, the editors of the *Pittsburgh Courier* cited Calhoun as “the Negro’s arch enemy and the premier defender of human slavery.” In the 1940s, the black writer and public intellectual W. E. B. DuBois listed Calhoun as one of those men “whose names must ever be besmirched by the fact that they fought against freedom and democracy in a land which was founded upon Democracy and Freedom.”

Such criticisms did not begin to gain traction at Yale until the 1960s, when the University’s racial demographics began to change. In 1931, when the first 10 residential college names were selected, there was only one self-identified African-American student enrolled in Yale College. Vanishingly few black students graduated from any of the residential colleges in the first decade of the colleges’ existence. The Class of 1960 had perhaps as many as five black members out of 901 graduates. Ten self-identified black students matriculated in the Class of 1964. For the next decade, the number of black students enrolled in Yale College doubled every two or three years. Nearly one hundred self-identified black students enrolled in the Class of 1973 (the first class to include women as freshmen). In 2016, black students make up about ten percent of the Yale College student body. Students of color now constitute approximately forty percent of the College.

As the demographics of the University changed, new conversations emerged about the legacy of Calhoun College’s namesake. At their 25th reunion, two African-American members of the class of 1968 recalled the “shock, anger, and then outrage” of encountering symbols of the Confederacy in Calhoun College. By the early 1970s, some black Calhoun students referred to the college as “Calhoun Plantation.” In 1973, the first African-American master of a Yale residential college accepted President Kingman Brewster’s appointment to the post in Calhoun College as a rebuke to Calhoun’s ideas about race and slavery. Professor Charles Davis, one of the intellectual founders of African-American Studies as a scholarly field, turned down the master position at Trumbull College and insisted that he would only serve as master of Calhoun. Davis served in that position for nearly a decade. From 2005 to 2014, Dean Jonathan Holloway, who sits on this Committee, served as the second African-American master of the college, holding the post in much the same spirit as Master Davis before him.

For the past quarter century, conversation has returned to the Calhoun name on an increasingly regular basis. In the late 1980s, pressure led the college to remove the image of a kneeling slave from a stained glass window depicting John Calhoun in the college common room. A campaign of leaflets in the residential college dining halls in 1991 culminated in an unscheduled 1992

commencement speech about Calhoun's racial legacy in the Calhoun courtyard by Chris Rabb, an African-American member of the graduating class descended from enslaved people and from slaveholders. Some critics of Calhoun, like Rabb, supported keeping the name to educate the University community on the ways in which Yale had benefited from slavery; changing the name, he asserted, would be like "book-burning." Others suggested that the college name should be altered to remove the honor that a Yale college name confers.

Concerns about the legacy of Calhoun became more widespread beginning in 2001, when a report produced by three Yale graduate students drew attention to the fact that eight of the residential college namesakes owned slaves. Some readers of the report called on the University to change the names of all eight colleges. (The number is now nine with the addition of Benjamin Franklin College, which opens next fall. Franklin owned slaves, but became an opponent of slavery later in his life.) The next year, a conference sponsored by the University took up questions of slavery and reparations and focused at least in part on Calhoun's legacy. And in 2006, a report by Brown University on its ties to the slave trade helped produce another round of discussions at Yale, including publication of a study by another graduate student on the history of Calhoun College's naming and a renewed discussion of the Calhoun College stained glass dining hall windows.

When news broke in 2007 of the possibility of two new residential colleges, questions about the Calhoun name gained additional momentum. Two years later, a group called the Undergraduate Organizing Committee used a campaign of chalk on walkways to challenge the eight college names then associated with slaveowners. Conversations continued as the naming of the two new colleges became an increasingly salient topic of discussion on campus. In the fall of 2014, a *Yale Daily News* story reflected the widespread expectation that the new colleges would give the University an opportunity to diversify the names of its residential colleges. The story called for the renaming of one or more of the existing colleges to ensure that the only college or colleges named for women or people of color were not "ghettoized" up Prospect Street.

In the summer of 2015, soon after the Charleston shooting, a student petition drive calling for the renaming of Calhoun garnered more than 1400 signatures, mostly from students and recent alumni. "Like the official display of the Confederate flag in South Carolina," the petition stated, "Calhoun College represents an indifference to centuries of pain and suffering," "conveys disrespect toward black perspectives," and represents "a barrier toward racial inclusiveness."

#### **IV. History and Mission**

The debates of the past half-century over the Calhoun name have been a part of a broader process of change. The University campus has long evolved to advance its mission in new conditions.

##### ***A. Change in buildings and names on the University campus is not new***

Over the years, the campus has witnessed many changes in nomenclature and symbolism. As president in the 1960s, Kingman Brewster removed a series of racist caricatures of African Americans from the walls of Payne Whitney Gymnasium. A part of Pierson College was known as “The Slave Quarters” until 1980, when it was renamed the Lower Court. In 2004 it was renamed again and it is now Rosenkranz Court.

Other historical structures and building names at Yale have undergone processes of change over time as well. The old University Quadrangle at the center of the campus, for example, became the Hewitt Quadrangle in 1927 after a bequest from Frederick Hewitt. Since 1963, the space is more commonly known as Beinecke Plaza.

The building of the residential colleges themselves entailed substantial renaming. Memorial Quadrangle, named in memory of Charles Harkness (B.A. 1883), was completed in 1921. A decade later it was converted into Branford College and Saybrook College. The old Kent Hall was absorbed by Jonathan Edwards College, as was the Sloane Physical Laboratory. Berkeley College was built over Gibbs Hall, the former residence of one of Yale’s greatest scientific figures, Josiah Willard Gibbs (B.A. 1858, Ph.D. 1863). The old Vanderbilt Square, which was the residential campus for the Sheffield Scientific School, was renamed Silliman College when the Sheffield School was formally merged into the University. The same site had once boasted the home of Noah Webster, whose history there is recalled by a marker along Temple Street.

The creative destruction of buildings and names did not stop with the construction of the colleges in the 1930s. A listing of campus name changes appears in the Appendix on the Committee’s webpage. They suggest that for three hundred years, when the occasion has warranted, and when good enough reasons have appeared, the campus has moved forward to advance its mission, even at the cost of altering existing names.

### ***B. The mission of the University***

Ultimately, the answer to a question about renaming must arise out of the mission of the University. There was no formal statement until 1992. Since then, the mission statement of the University has shifted slightly. But statements of the University’s purpose stretching back at least a century, formal and informal alike, share a central connecting thread with the formal mission statements that have been articulated in recent years.

In the current formulation, adopted in the spring of 2016, the mission is set forth as follows:

Yale is committed to improving the world today and for future generations through outstanding research and scholarship, education, preservation, and practice. Yale educates aspiring leaders worldwide who serve all sectors of society. We carry out this mission through the free exchange of ideas in an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community of faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

This mission statement elaborates on and implements the values of discovering and disseminating knowledge that are at the center of the University.

## V. Principles

The University aims to create an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community of excellence in research, teaching, and learning for today and for tomorrow. Such a community, organized around academic freedom, supports the discovery and dissemination of knowledge. A community that genuinely includes people of excellence from a wide array of backgrounds thus represents the promise of the University's future. The principles for deciding a renaming question are rooted in the values reflected in the mission.

Our inquiry has led us to conclude that in considering a name change for a building, structure, or significant space, the factors listed below ought to guide the University's decision-making.

### *A. Presumptions: Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event*

**There is a strong presumption against renaming a building on the basis of the values associated with its namesake. Such a renaming should be considered only in exceptional circumstances.**

There are many reasons to honor tradition at a university. Historical names are a source of knowledge. Tradition often carries wisdom that is not immediately apparent to the current generation; no generation stands alone at the end of history with perfect moral hindsight. Moreover, names produce continuity in the symbols around which students and alumni develop bonds with the university and bonds with one another. Those bonds often help to establish lifelong connections of great value to members of the University community and to the University.

A presumption of continuity in campus names helps ensure that the University does not elide the moral complexity often associated with the lives of those who make outsized impressions on the world. Controversy has attached to countless numbers of the most important figures in modern history. For example, Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian independence leader who inspired a worldwide movement of nonviolent protest, held starkly racist views about black Africans.

The presumption against renaming would not in itself decide any such case. But it embodies the good reasons for giving continuity substantial weight. Holding all else equal, it is a virtue to appreciate the complexity of those lives that have given shape to the world in which we live. A presumption also helps to avoid the risk of undue debate over names, when time and energy may be better directed elsewhere.

**The presumption against renaming is at its strongest when a building has been named for someone who made major contributions to the University.**

When buildings are named for people who have made major contributions to the life and mission of the University, either through their work or by contributing resources that help the University pursue its mission, renaming will be appropriate only in the most exceptional circumstances. Altering a name in such instances is distinctively problematic because it threatens to efface an important contributing factor in the making of the University.

This consideration means that to change a name in one institution or place, where the namesake played a relatively modest role, is not necessarily to say that the name ought to change in another, where the namesake played a larger role.

***B. Principles to be considered: Sometimes renaming on the basis of values is warranted***

Tradition and history are not the only factors when considering renaming a building because of the values associated with the name. There is wide agreement, for example, that certain kinds of hypothetical names would be unacceptable. The problem is to determine when a clash between a name and the University's mission makes renaming appropriate. This is a hard question. But its difficulty does not imply that there are no stopping points or no principles to distinguish a name that ought to be altered from one that ought to remain.

We begin by distinguishing three distinct time frames to which our study repeatedly led us: the present; the era of a namesake's life and work; and the time of a naming decision. Each of these offers a relevant principle for consideration. We then turn to a factor relating to the nature of the building, structure, or space at issue.

No single factor is sufficient, and no single factor is determinative. We expect that renaming will typically prove warranted only when more than one principle listed here points toward renaming; even when more than one principle supports renaming, renaming may not be required if other principles weigh heavily in the balance. We do not list the principles in order of significance because their importance may vary depending on the circumstances of the relevant name.

**Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?**

We ask about a namesake's *principal legacies* because human lives, as Walt Whitman wrote, are large; they contain multitudes. Whitman, as it happens, contained virtues and vices himself. He excoriated the Lincoln administration for insisting on equal treatment for black soldiers held as prisoners of war in the South. But his principal legacies are as a path-breaking poet and writer. Frederick Douglass contrasted African Americans with Indians, who he said were easily

“contented” with small things such as blankets, and who would “die out” in any event. But his principal legacies are as an abolitionist and an advocate for civil rights.

Of course, interpretations of a namesake’s principal legacies are subject to change over time. They may vary in the eye of the beholder as well.

Three factors constrain such changes or limit their significance in the analysis. First, asking about principal legacies directs us to consider not only the memory of a namesake, but also the enduring consequences of the namesake in the world. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, a legacy is “a long-lasting effect.” Principal legacies, as we understand them, are typically the lasting effects that cause a namesake to be remembered. Even significant parts of a namesake’s life or career may not constitute a principal legacy. Scholarly consensus about principal legacies is a powerful measure.

Second, even if interpretations of legacies change, they do not change on any single person’s or group’s whim; altering the interpretation of a historical figure is not something that can be done easily. Third, the principal legacies of a namesake are not the only consideration. They should be considered in combination with the other principles set forth above and below in this report.

Determining the principal legacies of a namesake obliges the University to study and make a scholarly judgment on how the namesake’s legacies should be understood. Prevailing historical memories may be misleading or incorrect, and prevailing scholarly views may be incomplete.

A principal legacy would be fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University if, for example, it contradicted the University’s avowed goal of making the world a better place through, among other things, the education of future leaders in an “ethical, interdependent, and diverse community.” A principal legacy of racism and bigotry would contradict this goal.

### **Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?**

Evaluating a namesake by the standards of the namesake’s time and place offers a powerful measure of the legacy today. Such an evaluation does not commit the University to a relativist view of history and ethics. An important reason to attend to the standards of a namesake’s time and place is that doing so recognizes the moral fallibility of those who aim to evaluate the past. Paying attention to the standards of the time also usefully distinguishes those who actively promoted some morally odious practice, or dedicated much of their lives to upholding that practice, on the one hand, from those whose relationship to such a practice was unexceptional, on the other.

The idea that people can have unexceptional relationships to moral horrors is one of the most disturbing features in human history. Examining the standards of a namesake’s time and place therefore does more than confront us with the limits of our own capacities. It helps us see people as embedded in particular times and particular places – and it helps us identify those whose legacies are properly thought of as singularly and distinctively unworthy of honor.

Renaming is more likely to be warranted (a) when insistent and searching critiques of the relevant legacy were available at the time and place in which the namesake lived, than (b) when the conduct of the namesake was unexceptional and therefore not subject to such insistent and searching critique.

**Did the University, at the time of a naming, honor a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?**

Renaming is more likely to be appropriate when an institution, at the time of a naming, honored a namesake for reasons that conflict with the University's mission.

This principle inquires into a naming decision by asking about the reasons for the decision. It does not ask about the legacy of the namesake today. Nor does it look into the namesake's life itself. Instead, it asserts that where the University honored a person for reasons that were then, or are now, at odds with the mission of the University, the University has added reason to reconsider its naming decision. This principle may be most weighty when the University honored a person for reasons that contradicted the mission it professed at the time of the naming itself. The principle also points in favor of renaming when the naming decision rested on reasons that contradict the mission the University professes today.

An illustrative example of this principle is the change in the name of Saunders Hall at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Historians at UNC were unsure whether or not the namesake William Saunders had been a leader of the Ku Klux Klan. The university trustees nonetheless changed the name of the building when they discovered that university leaders had believed Saunders was a Klan leader and viewed this belief as reason to name the building in his honor. Another useful illustration arises out of the residential college here at Yale named for Samuel Morse. If University leaders had named the college after Morse not in honor of his invention of the telegraph, but to honor his nativist and anti-Catholic views and his support for slavery, that would be a consideration pointing in favor of renaming the college.

Sometimes a naming decision will have been made when key facts about the namesake were concealed or otherwise unavailable. This, too, may be a factor weighing in favor of renaming if those facts subsequently disclose a legacy fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University.

**Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University?**

The physical environment of a university is made up of many different kinds of spaces. Some are strictly utilitarian. Others house classrooms, laboratories, lecture halls, and museums. At Yale, a subset of the University's buildings is designed to shape the campus community of the students and to connect them to the University and to one another. The residential colleges for the undergraduate students are the paradigm example.

In at least one respect, the community-forming character of certain building names militates against renaming. When a building with a long-standing name has helped form bonds and connections among generations of community members, the fact of those bonds and connections offers a reason to keep the name.

In two important ways, however, the community-forming character of a building name points in favor of renaming. It is difficult to encourage the formation of community around a namesake with a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University. Such names may fail to do the work of fostering community. Moreover, assigning students without their choice to a particular building or residential college whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University essentially requires students to form their University communities around such a name. These considerations offer strong reasons to alter a name.

***C. Decisions to retain a name or to rename come with obligations of nonerasure, contextualization, and process***

**When a name is altered, there are obligations on the University to ensure that the removal does not have the effect of erasing history.**

Names communicate historical information, but they often confer honor as well. These two features of a name can be disentangled if renaming is accompanied by creative and substantial efforts to mitigate the possible erasure of history. Changing a name is thus not synonymous with erasing history.

When removing a name leaves other existing markers of the namesake on the campus, a name's removal from any one building, structure, or significant space poses a smaller risk of erasing history because the namesake has not been removed from the campus. Such markers may themselves require contextualization. But renaming one site does not require removal of a namesake from elsewhere on the campus. To the contrary, changing a name in one place may impose obligations of preservation in others.

In many instances, renaming a building will make it incumbent on a university to take affirmative steps to avoid the problem of erasure. Such steps may include conspicuous museum-like exhibits; architecturally thoughtful installations, plaques, and signs; public art; or other such steps. Selecting a new name that is thematically connected to the old one may be one further way to prevent renaming from becoming tantamount to erasing.



The decision to change the stained glass window in Calhoun College in the late 1980s probably ran afoul of this principle of nonerasure. The University altered the window depicting John Calhoun and a kneeling slave by removing the image of the slave but leaving Calhoun intact. The result was a regrettable erasure of the history and meaning of the window. It might have been wise to remove the window from its position of honor and place it in a museum-like exhibit. Under some circumstances, it might have been an option to add contextualizing information explaining the window's origins and its significance, but to leave the window otherwise in place. The University did neither of these things, and instead sanitized it for viewing, leaving Calhoun in a position of honor and removing the slave whose indispensable presence complicated that honor and indeed cast it into doubt. The student who pressed hardest for a change in the stained glass says that he soon came to regret the removal of the enslaved person. As he sees it, editing out the ugly history of the stained glass did not adhere to the educational mission of the University. We agree.

**When a name is retained, there may be obligations on the University to ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history.**

When the University determines that a contested name should remain rather than change, it may have obligations of contextualization similar to those that accompany a name change. Examples already appear on the campus. A plaque recently installed in Ezra Stiles College memorializes the lives of Stiles's slave and two indentured servants.

**The University ought to adopt a formal process for considering whether to alter a building name on account of the values associated with its namesake; such a process should incorporate community input and scholarly expertise.**

A decision about whether to change a building's name is one that ought to be guided by a formal process that incorporates wide input and draws on scholarly expertise to ensure that the relevant history has been explored and that the relevant principles have been considered and applied. This is especially true for building names because they are meant to be enduring and to offer continuity to the intergenerational life of the University. In our study of other universities' naming controversies, we found that well-considered processes for evaluating the relevant considerations often produced constructive dialogue and debate, regardless of the particular outcome.

In our judgment, it is not within the authority of this committee to set out specific procedures to be followed. But a process would serve the University well. It has been our aim to gather information and conduct a scholarly inquiry in a way that models what such a process might look like.

\*

\*

\*

It bears observing that none of the principles we articulate here can override legal obligations arising out of any naming agreement into which the University may have entered. It is beyond the power of the University to undo such obligations unilaterally; it is perforce beyond the authority of this Committee to do so.

We close with a final observation. In our many conversations this fall, members of the Yale community on all sides of the issue warned us against symbolic politics. Move on, some urged, to the traditional work of the University. Move on, others said, to more tangible questions of justice and injustice. Despite such injunctions, we persisted. Symbols matter. The persistent history of controversy over the Calhoun name is evidence of that. Indeed, many of the most important markers of civil rights in recent decades have been heavily symbolic. The flaw in separate but equal was not exclusively that separate was so often unequal. Segregation alone sent a powerful symbolic message of racial hierarchy. Similarly, civil unions for same-sex couples may have had all the legal incidents of marriage. But without the name, they sent a powerful symbolic message of exclusion. Symbols matter.

Yet if Yale, as its mission urges, is to take up the work of “improving the world today and for future generations” by helping to educate the leaders of tomorrow, it will need to do more than reconsider symbols. It will need to continually dedicate and rededicate itself to carrying out its mission of excellence in teaching, research, and learning. Therein lies the vital task of the University.