

4-26-2022

Appendix D: BLSA Letter to Board of Trustees and President Crutcher

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/pilr>



Part of the [Public Law and Legal Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Appendix D: BLSA Letter to Board of Trustees and President Crutcher, 24 RICH. PUB. INT. L. REV. 208 (2022).

Available at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/pilr/vol24/iss3/11>

This Index is brought to you for free and open access by the Law School Journals at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Richmond Public Interest Law Review by an authorized editor of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

APPENDIX D

BLSA LETTER TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND PRESIDENT
CRUTCHER

University of Richmond Board of Trustees and President Crutcher:

On behalf of the Black Law Student Association and the undersigned law students, present and future alumni, faculty, and staff, we support the demands represented in the “Protect Our Web: A Statement on Black Student Welfare” presented to you by the University’s undergraduate students and reject the response of the Board of Trustees. In making the decision to ignore the demands of the students seeking truth and reconciliation, you do not simply fail to act, but commit acts of violence against past, present, and future students of color. We support their commitment to disassociate with the University as a result of this disappointing and underwhelming response to the legitimate concerns about racism within this institution.

A paramount concern reflected in the Protect Our Web statement is the lack of good faith apparent in the University’s efforts. As law students, we engage regularly with institutions steeped in systemic inequality, and we firmly believe that we have a role in dismantling that inequality and the symbols that represent it. We ask that the University join us in that mission. We recognize today that the University’s campaign is dishonest and was designed to maximize recognition for “confronting its racist past” and minimize its impact. We suspect such actions are designed to minimize the economic losses associated with publicly taking an anti-racist stance in the South. We want to emphasize three important points of failure in the University’s response.

(1) The University’s refusal to remove the names of Robert Ryland and Douglas Freeman is disappointing, and the proposed solution is both unacceptable and highly offensive.

This would be a simple step that would have a profound impact in helping students of color feel safe and valued within this institution. We find that naming people who were enslaved by someone in a building bearing their abuser’s name is a deeply disturbing proposal and does nothing to honor them—it suggests that they deserve to be contained by him and that their identities are limited by him and all other slave owners. It diminishes the vibrant lives and culture of African American people and the struggle they had to endure for freedom.

Additionally, using the names of Black people to mitigate the racist legacies of white men eliminates any opportunity to acknowledge the depths of the harms created by white slave owners. It further suggests that the offender and the victim are equal; that their legacies are of equal value; that their remembrance should be honored despite the substance of their actions. The issues we have outlined above with the proposed solution cannot be considered progressive, much less appropriate.

The Board of Trustees has stated that the names of the buildings are “wholly inconsistent with the institution we are today” and yet within the same statement claimed that changing the names is “inconsistent with our educational mission.” Taken together, these statements lend credence to the conclusion that the University refuses to disavow itself of racial injustice under the guise of promoting education and preserving history. We can acknowledge history without honoring the worst parts of it, and we can study it without refusing to make progress. These inconsistent statements exhibit an effort to placate students by making meaningless statements rather than taking concrete steps to address the racism that is central to the University. The time has come for the Board of Trustees to cease making decisions behind closed doors without taking responsibility for the harm it perpetuates or accepting input from the students who maintain this University. We will not continue to accept decisions of those in power while the needs of UR students go unaddressed and willfully ignored.

Institutions in Virginia and across this country have chosen to support the creation of more inclusive and less offensive spaces, for instance:

- “Nationwide, 76 Confederate symbols — 48 of them monuments — were removed from public spaces this year. But the Confederacy is visible in the country 155 years later through monuments, street names and schools, with nearly 1,800 of its symbols still on public land.”¹
- T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, has voted to rename their school and is holding a hearing to select a new name on Thursday, March 18, 2021.² This is a name that law students recognize, the high school is named after the man our law school has repeatedly referred to as “the other T.C. Williams,” or the known segregationist who actively tried to limit the number of Black students in schools.³

¹ Sabrina Moreno, *Richmond has Removed the Most Confederate Symbols in the Country Since the Killing of George Floyd. Here’s How it Happened*, Richmond Times-Dispatch (Sept. 4, 2020) https://richmond.com/news/state-and-regional/richmond-has-removed-the-most-confederate-symbols-in-the-country-since-the-killing-of-george/article_ce8a0cfa-1621-5982-864c-bafcbad9e84b.html#tncms-source=login.

² Hannah Natanson, *Alexandria City Schools will Rename T.C. Williams High, of “Remember the Titans” Fame*, The Washington Post (Nov. 23, 2020) https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/remember-the-titans-school-new-name/2020/11/23/7c2d75e6-2db2-11eb-96c2-aac3f162215d_story.html.

³ Though one wonders why the Board agreed to remove this name from our diplomas this year if they still fail to acknowledge the harmful and racist realities of T.C. William’s legacy.

- Robert E. Lee High School in Fairfax County, Virginia was renamed to John R. Lewis High School after the late Congressman and civil rights icon in 2020.⁴
- In Hanover County, both Lee-Davis High School, home of the Confederates, and Stonewall Jackson Middle School, home of the Rebels, underwent both a school and mascot change in 2020. The schools are now known as Mechanicsville High School and Bell Creek Middle School.⁵
- H.F. Byrd Middle School in Henrico was named after United States Senator and former Virginia Governor, Harry Flood Byrd, who himself called for Massive Resistance by southern states to the integration of schools. Given the appalling history of its namesake, the county renamed the school in 2016.⁶
- Another name that University of Richmond students will likely recognize is that of Douglass Southall Freeman. Located a few miles down the street from one of the entrances to the university is Douglass S. Freeman High School. For more than six decades, Freeman High School retained the mascot known as the “Rebels,” depicted by a charging Confederate soldier. In 2020, this relic of the Civil War was finally replaced, and now the school has a new mascot: the Mavericks.⁷
- In 2020, Princeton University announced that it would rename a residential college in honor of Mellody Hobson, CEO of Ariel Investments and Princeton grad. The college *was* named after former university president, Woodrow Wilson and in a letter from the school’s

⁴ Doha Madani, Robert E. Lee High School in Virginia to be Renamed for Late Rep. John Lewis, NBC News (July 23, 2020) <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/robert-e-lee-high-school-virginia-be-renamed-late-rep-n1234768>

⁵ Hanover School Board Approves Name to Replace Former Lee-Davis, Stonewall Jackson Schools, NBC 12 Newsroom (Oct. 13, 2020) <https://www.nbc12.com/2020/10/13/hanover-school-board-approves-names-replace-former-lee-davis-stonewall-jackson-schools/#:~:text=HANOVER%20Co.%2C%20Va.,and%20Bell%20Creek%20Middle%20School>

⁶ Emily Satchell, Board Votes Unanimously to Rename Byrd Middle School to Quiocasin Middle, NBC 8 News (Apr. 28, 2016)

<https://www.wric.com/news/board-votes-unanimously-to-rename-byrd-middle-school-to-quiocasin-middle/#:~:text=Board%20votes%20unanimously%20to%20rename%20Byrd%20Middle%20School%20to%20Quiocasin%20Middle,-News&text=HENRICO%20COUNTY%2C%20Va.,School%20to%20Quiocasin%20Middle%20School>

⁷ Eric Kolenich, Douglass Freeman High School Changes Mascot from Rebels to Mavericks, Richmond Times-Dispatch (Nov. 12, 2020) https://richmond.com/news/local/education/douglas-freeman-high-school-changes-mascot-from-rebels-to-mavericks/article_fdf5dede-8d91-5a37-bc6c-ae4c390fabbb.html#:~:text=New%20uni-forms%20have%20to%20be,the%20word%20%E2%80%9CRebels%E2%80%9D%20again.&text=The%20school%20has%20been%20working,with%20a%20modified%20winter%20season

Board of Trustees, it was noted that Wilson’s “racist thinking and policies” made him an “inappropriate namesake.”⁸

- Furthermore, Governor Ralph Northam has publicly supported, and in fact encouraged, Virginia school boards to rename Confederacy-inspired schools and mascots.⁹
- Let us not forget that one of the oldest football teams in the National Football League publicly changed its name in an acknowledgement of its racially divisive former mascot. In 2020, the Washington Redskins parted ways with the reference to Native Americans and temporarily labelled itself the Washington Football Team.¹⁰ They understood that the need for the name change was pressing enough—and long enough overdue—that they should not wait to settle on a permanent name before taking action. The team did not stop there; it also removed references to its former owner, George Preston Marshall, who made Washington’s team the last in the NFL to integrate.¹¹

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not address the elephant in the room that everyone, notably the Board of Trustees, has ignored. As a University with one of the highest endowments per student in the country, we recognize that there is likely a significant amount of money attached to the buildings at issue. Transparency in this regard is owed to UR students. This country has a sordid history of putting the pursuit of capital and the acquisition of power above the lives of Black people. If the Board of Trustees has decided to put the endowment before student healing, your students—and the public—deserve to know. This is an opportunity for the University to show its students, alumni, and the surrounding community what its values are. The poor decisions of the board have already alienated current students. A continuation of this spectacle is sure to alienate students in the future.

⁸ Kelly Heyboer, *Princeton will Rename a Residential College after a Black Woman for the First Time*, NJ (Oct. 8, 2020) <https://www.nj.com/education/2020/10/princeton-will-rename-a-residential-college-after-a-black-woman-for-the-first-time.html#:~:text=The%20former%20Wilson%20College%2C%20which,in%202023%2C%20school%20officials%20said>.

⁹ Justin Mattingly, *Northam Urges Education Leaders to Remove Confederate Names from Schools*, Richmond Times-Dispatch (July 7, 2020) https://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/northam-urges-education-leaders-to-remove-confederate-names-from-schools/article_0b44540e-d6c8-524f-a766-2070520eaf12.html.

¹⁰ Stephen Whyno, *Redskins Rename to Washington Football Team for 2020 Season*, Global News (July 23, 2020) <https://globalnews.ca/news/7211748/washington-redskins-rename/#:~:text=Redskins%20rename%20to%20Washington%20Football%20Team%20for%202020%20season,-By%20Stephen%20Whyno&text=The%20NFL%20team%20formerly%20known,new%2C%20full%2Dtime%20name>.

¹¹ John Keim, *Redskins Removing Name of Former Owner George Preston Marshall from Ring of Fame*, ESPN (June 24, 2020) https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/29358399/source-redskins-removing-name-former-owner-george-preston-marshall-ring-fame.

(2) The University’s purported efforts to achieve “Excellence in Inclusivity” are performative and the actual labor of these efforts has been shifted to the students.

The labor of researching and achieving these goals has been shifted to the students without support or access to resources. By encouraging students and community members “to continue to participate in this work to inform and advance our community towards a better and more inclusive future,” the University as a whole is continuing to put the onus on individuals of color by telling them that they need to educate others on how to treat them. This burden is simply unfair to these individuals and continues to go unrecognized by those in power.

Further, the University of Richmond has shown students time and time again that, even when they accept the responsibility thrust upon them and propose ideas to promote inclusivity, the University does not value the work they are putting forth. The Protect Our Web statement is the perfect example of this. Students came together to express their needs and expectations, and the University responded with a perfunctory answer about how it was distressing that the students had a “perception that we do not see, hear, or value them as full members of our community.” Dismissing the validly expressed pain of students as a mere “perception” that they are not being valued means failing to take responsibility for the signals given by the University that they are not being valued nor listened to. UR has refused to make even the simplest changes to help students of color feel more welcome and supported, yet continues efforts to recruit more students of color to exploit their images in an effort to portray a hollow external image of inclusivity. It is not enough to diversify the student body when you fail those same students throughout their tenure.

The University of Richmond has, since the Summer of 2020, released numerous ad campaigns boasting its commitment to addressing and ameliorating its sinister past. Despite a facial commitment to the welfare of Black students, the University of Richmond has either knowingly or recklessly built in mechanisms to ensure those performative efforts fail while continuing to reap the benefit of wokeness. Neither is acceptable. The ways in which inclusivity and truth and reconciliation efforts fail are well known both socially and academically. The University, with its purported commitment to Black students and large endowment available to support that effort, should not be inadvertently falling victim to those well documented failures.

(3) The University failed to adequately address concerns about access to culturally competent mental health counselling.

This is a concern only given brief attention in President Crutcher’s March 17th response. The original statement raised concerns about an insufficient

number of black counselors being available to meet the needs of the black students on this campus. It is not the role of the CAPS staff to assert that they are capable of meeting the needs of the students when the students have clearly expressed that, due to a lack of representation and resources, that is not the case. The University's response made no mention of any effort to prioritize hiring diverse counselors in the future, nor of a plan to subsidize alternative mental health care for BIPOC students who are not currently able to meet with a CAPS counselor who shares their racial identity. Refusing to acknowledge or investigate the problem further is not a solution.

Conclusion

The response by the University to the "Protect Our Web: A Statement on Black Student Welfare" was wholly inadequate and we support the undergraduate students in their commitment to disassociate with the University as of March 25, 2021. We will not allow the University to use efforts by students to create a safe community for themselves and other students as a tool to bolster a false image that the University is listening and making true reparations for its racist history which continues to the present. We will not financially support this institution as alumni unless and until these changes are made. The University has significant work to do, and while we do not expect change to come overnight, we do demand a genuine and ongoing effort, and will not accept excuses or hollow statements unsupported by action.

Signatures:

Courtnei Weaver
Ericka Kopp
Ka'Turah Francis
Jasmine Lewis
Tristan Smith
Julia Ziegler
Eudora Arthur
Zachary Brown
Brianna Donovan
Samantha Galina
Elizabeth Mahoney
Danielle M. Taylor
Claire Stickle
Lily Smith
Samantha Romano
Emily Siron
Elizabeth Richer
Andy O'Connell
Madeline Culbreth

Carly Wright
Sarah Kinzer
Amelia Collins
Gemma Fearn
April Emerson
Jack Preis
Greg Mills
Toviya Nabugero
Alexandria Brown
Michael Wilgus
Matthew Brock
Molly Lentz-Meyer
Olivia Seksinsky
Madison Harrell
Jim Gibson
Camera Elliott
Victoria Pivrotto
Emmeline Reeves
Laurel Via
Kelley Flint
Ren Warden
Peyton Reed
Gordon Willis
Ian McDowell
Allison Tait
Sidney Balman
Taylor Donley
National Lawyers Guild: University of Richmond Chapter
UR Law Sexuality and Gender Alliance
Nicholas J. Cawley
Jennyfer Hernandez Austria
David Epstein
Oliver Ward
Alaina Roberts
Rachel Gropper
Whitney King
Mary Margaret H
Eleanor G. Pittman
Morgan Beaty
Michaela Fuller
Kristen Nina Belber
Abigail Russo
Alex Sklut

Elizabeth Foster
Sarah Nichols
Kiana Gilcrist
Christopher A. Cotropia
Luke Norris
Michael N Baddar
Alyssa Fetterolf
Hannah Laub
Max E. Holland
Karena Eidum
Troy Johnson Jr.
Allie Frasca
Emily M. Gindhart
Doron Samuel-Siegel
Peter Wagner
Emma A. Cleary
Tesia Kempinski
Tara Casey
Janice Craft
Abigail Parsons
Nancy Simpson
Kim Edwards
Jamie Wood
Erin Collins
Aaron Campbell
Samantha Teets
Emma C. Greger
Haley Walter
Sean Barrick
Monica J. Malouf
Christina Alcorta
Austin Obenshain
Dana Rafferty
Hannah Moore
Jack Irvin
Syed Fawad
Dilwyn Piner
Samantha Mier
Tamar R. Schwartz
Patrick Macher
Michaela Morrissey
Dina Khayyat
Emma Phillips

Samantha Callejas
Hwapyeong Lee
Ryan Dunn
Meredith Johnson Harbach
Chloe Hillard
Kaylee Rabatin
Mimi Perka
Anastasia K. Mitchell
Joyce Manna Janto
Maureen Moran
Christopher Corts
Daniel John Lange
Samuel Lee Shaffer
Elizabeth Vanasse
Cole Wyrrough
Nick Corn IV
Madison Blevins
Matthew Allocca
Carolyn Stough
Zijada Krak
Kaitlin Hopingardner
Bryce Pittman
Cassidy Crockett
Mary Catherine Talbott
Patrick Rice
Lincoln Wolfe
Caleb Thompson
Susan D. Dudley
Sarah Merryman
Maya Ravindran
Gregory Packer
Allison Bennett
Abigail Arnett
Jessica Gardner
Kristen Osenga
Bryson Strachan
Salua Kamerow
Noah Sachs
Annalisa Gobin
Ahuna Johnson
Joel B. Eisen
Da Lin
Delaney Perdue

Harry Tisdale
Jessica King
Grant Shea
Albert Gutierrez
William Nash
Autymn Ashley Langford
Bud Dorfman
Melisa Azak
Melissa Kouri
Julie McConnell
Chase Whittaker
Claudia Léonor
Danny Hales
Kathy Salandro
Jessica Cooper
Ashley Thompson
Sophie Studer
Hayes Holderness
Hannah Burton
Erin Gormley
Katherine Greenier
James D. Williams
Andrew Mullen
Lindsey Sweetgall-Brock
Kelly Quinn
Emily Cherry
Rachel Suddarth
Ashley R. Dobbs
Michelle Heck
Brandon Metheny
Rosanne Ibanez
Fiona McCormick
Olivia Tanner
Anne Groves
Zhue Azuaje
Laura A. Webb