

## It's time Melbourne Uni stopped honouring eugenicist Richard Berry

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*There's a worldwide movement to remove the old symbols of racism and supremacy from university campuses and it's reached the door of Melbourne University.*



*Action: Odette Kelada, right, and Tyson Holloway-Clarke have been active in a campaign to rename the Richard Berry building. Photo: Josh Robenstone*

It's time the Richard Berry Building at The University of Melbourne was renamed.

The old anatomy building, now the mathematics and statistics building, is named after Richard Berry, an anatomy professor at the university from 1906 to 1929.

He was a vocal member of the eugenicist movement in Melbourne. Berry writes in his memoirs that his work on eugenics was his most important.



*Relic: the Richard Berry Building at the University of Melbourne commemorates a man famed for racist and outdated ideas.*

Eugenics, based on theories to improve the genetic characteristics of humans, underpinned the Nazi philosophy that led to the Holocaust.

Berry said he favoured the establishment of a "lethal chamber" to euthanise what he called "the grosser types of our mental defectives" in a letter he wrote in 1930 to the British journal, *Eugenics Review*.

"There would be many who would agree with me that such an act of extinction would be the kindest, wisest, and best thing we could do for all concerned," he wrote.

Up until a few years ago, an annex to the Richard Berry building housed the disability liaison unit.

Berry was also vocal about sterilising and segregating members of the public to prevent them from having babies.

One of Berry's main research activities was to measure skulls because he was preoccupied with finding a correlation between head and brain size, and intelligence to prove the superiority of individuals, particularly white people.

Anatomists, according to Berry, had the highest IQs. Criminals and Aboriginal people had lower intelligence. Berry claimed Ned Kelly was a "mental defective" because his brain size was that of a 14-year-old.

Other scientists at the time also shared Berry's interest in his racial science, which has since been discredited as a scientific theory.

As part of his research, Berry also collected Aboriginal ancestral remains, which became known as the Berry collection.

In 2003, Melbourne University apologised for the "hurt and understandable indignation felt by Indigenous Australians" after the collection – which included the bones and skulls of about 400 people, mostly Aborigines – was found locked in an anatomy department storeroom.

Berry died in 1962 at the age of 95, and never recanted his ideas.

Richard Berry campaigned for an anatomy building to be constructed on the Swanston Street side of the university. At the time it would have appeared logical to name it after him. Now it's not appropriate.

Most people would view Berry's attitudes and practices unpalatable. Therefore it is unpalatable that a university, which prides itself on doing first-class research, would still have a building named after a eugenicist.

There are other buildings and lecture theatres at the university named after other members of Victoria's eugenicist society, too. One is Baldwin Spencer, foundation professor in biology at the university.

This is not about rewriting and burying history. Berry's works and articles about him are housed at Melbourne University for anyone to read. Third Degree has read them. We need to acknowledge Berry's ideas so they can be seen for what they are: racist.

But Berry shouldn't be remembered by still naming a building after him. Having buildings named after people celebrates them and their work.

Some students and staff agree. The #RhodesMustFall group at the University of Cape Town were successful in their campaign last year to have the statue of Cecil Rhodes removed from the campus.

The group says on their website that the statue is a symbol of racism and colonialism.

Students also point to Rhodes' role in preparing South Africa for apartheid when he was prime minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896.

Rhodes founded the De Beers diamond company. From his estate, Rhodes scholarships were set up for students to study at Oxford University.

Australians such as Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, and former prime ministers Tony Abbott and Bob Hawke have won Rhodes scholarships.

The #RhodesMustFall campaign has prompted students and staff at other universities to agitate for removal of symbols considered racist.

At Oxford University's Oriel College students have also called for the removal of a statue of Rhodes. They have been successful in getting the college to remove a plaque commemorating Rhodes' work.

A recent article in The US publication *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on a campaign at Yale University to rename one of the residential colleges, which is named after a South Carolina senator who supported slavery.

At the Harvard Law School there is a campaign protesting about the school's crest, which is adapted from the coat of arms of the slave-owning Royall family, which also traded slaves.

Christopher Phelps, an associate professor of American studies at England's University of Nottingham, wrote the Chronicle article. He praises students for their protests.

"The students who call upon universities to adopt new symbols reflective of democratic values are not erasing history," he writes. "They want us to grasp it."