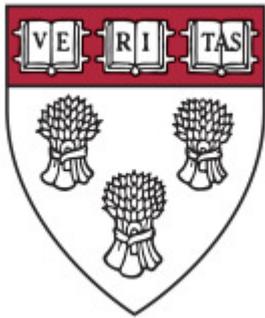


HARVARD LAW **Today**

Law School committee recommends retiring current shield

March 4, 2016



A committee of Harvard Law School faculty, students, alumni, and staff established in November by Dean Martha Minow has recommended to the Harvard Corporation that the HLS shield — which is modeled on the family crest of an 18th century slaveholder — no longer be the official symbol of Harvard Law School. In transmitting the report to the Corporation, Dean Minow endorsed its recommendation.

In a letter to the Corporation, Dean Minow wrote: “There are complex issues involved in preserving the histories of places and institutions with ties to past injustices, but several elements make retiring the shield less controverted than some other issues about names, symbols, and the past. First, the shield is a symbol whose primary purpose is to identify and express who we mean to be. Second, it is not an anchoring part of our history.”

In its report to the Corporation, the committee stated: “We believe that if the Law School is to have an official symbol, it must more closely represent the values of the Law School, which the current shield does not.”

The recommendation of the 12-member committee was not unanimous. Two members of the group —Professor Annette Gordon-Reed and law student Annie Rittgers —submitted “A Different View,” arguing that the law school should maintain the current shield, “tying it to a historically sound interpretative narrative about it.”

The shield is modeled on the coat of arms of the family of Isaac Royall, whose bequest endowed the first professorship of law at Harvard. Royall was the son of an Antiguan slaveholder. In 1936, the Harvard Corporation and Radcliffe Trustees adopted seals for 27 Harvard academic units, naming the Royall crest, with its three sheaths of wheat, as the Law School shield.

Because of its ties to slave labor, the shield came under fire in October, when a group of law school students formed an organization called “Royall Must Fall” to demand that HLS discontinue using the Royall family crest as its symbol.

Bruce Mann, Carl F. Schipper, Jr. Professor of Law, chaired the shield committee, which also included legal historians Tomiko Brown-Nagin, Annette Gordon-Reed and Samuel Moyn, as well as Janet Halley, who holds the Royall Professorship of Law at HLS and has written about the legacy of the Royall family and the slaves of the Royall household. Alumnus Jim Bowers ’70, senior counsel at Day Pitney and a member of the Senior Advisory Council of the Harvard Law School Association, also served on the committee, along with Robert Katz, former general counsel of Goldman Sachs. Also on the committee were three students appointed by the student

government, Mawuse H. Vormawor LL.M. '16, Rena Karefa-Johnson '16 and Annie Rittgers '17. The staff representatives were S. Darrick Northington and Yih-hsien Shen '95.

In a message to the on-campus community and also to alumni on March 4, Dean Minow wrote: “I endorse the recommendation to retire the shield because its association with slavery does not represent the values and aspirations of the Harvard Law School and because it has become a source of division rather than commonality in our community. Whatever the Corporation decides about the shield, at HLS we will be committed to addressing our history, and ongoing questions of injustice within our community and beyond.”