

## Princeton to keep Woodrow Wilson name despite protests

BY MAX KUTNER

4<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Woodrow Wilson will remain the namesake of Princeton University's school of public and international affairs and his name will continue to appear in other places on campus, the university said on Monday. The decision comes after students protested and issued demands calling for its removal because of what they said was the former president's "racist legacy."

In a statement, the university outlined recommendations by a 10-member committee on diversity and inclusion that the school's Board of Trustees formed in response to the protests. The university said it would implement the committee's recommendations.

"The trustees accepted the committee's recommendation that the school of public and international affairs and the undergraduate residential college that bear Wilson's name should continue to do so," the university said. However, the university also acknowledged that the committee said it must be "honest and forthcoming about its history" and transparent "in recognizing Wilson's failings and shortcomings."

Brent Henry, vice chairman of the Board of Trustees, said in the statement: "This has been a learning experience for us and for the University community, and it has reminded us how much we can learn when we listen to one another, as we have throughout this process and as we need to continue to do."

Wilson, who served as Princeton's president from 1902 to 1910 and as the 28th president of the United States from 1913 to 1921, has been criticized for segregating federal offices and implementing other policies considered racist. He died in 1924.

In November, the Black Justice League, a student coalition, held a 32-hour sit-in at the president's office and in an accompanying petition demanded that the university "publicly acknowledge the racist legacy of Woodrow Wilson and how he impacted campus policy and culture." It called for the university to rename its Wilson College and the school of public and international affairs and remove a mural of Wilson in a dining hall.

"We need help in dismantling the legacy of white supremacy and anti-Blackness on campus," the petition said.

The petition gained more than 1,000 supporters, including Cornel West, a Princeton alumnus and former professor there. "I stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters of all colors—so disproportionately chocolate in their struggle against the vicious white supremacy at Princeton," he posted to the petition and Facebook.

Following the November sit-in, the university said in a statement that President Christopher Eisgruber and other administrators had "signed an agreement" with student protesters and promised to address their concerns.

Wilson scholars praised the committee's decision on Monday.

"I thought it would be an absolute travesty to take his name off the Wilson School or the Wilson College," says John Milton Cooper, a Princeton alumnus and professor emeritus of the University of Madison-Wisconsin, and the author of several books and articles on Wilson. "You have to look at the context of white America at the time, and in that context, Wilson is pretty much along the norm." He says it was Wilson's Cabinet that pushed for segregation, not him, and adds that the president denounced lynching.

Cooper also says Wilson transformed Princeton: "Princeton is what it is today not only because of him, but he really pushed it forward. The fact that it's as good as it is and that it's a place where they can question him and criticize him I think is a tribute to the kind of place he started to build."

“I thought it was the right decision,” says William Keylor, a professor at Boston University and an expert on Wilson. He says though he has previously criticized Wilson’s “racist policies...we have to acknowledge the important roles he played domestically in the U.S. and also in terms of his foreign policy.”

“We need to look at his legacy as a whole, both the good and the bad,” says Robin von Seldeneck, chief executive officer of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and Museum. “I think that the committee has done an excellent job in talking about focusing on what can be done to be a more inclusive university without having to take away from the good that Woodrow Wilson has done.”

The university said on Monday that the committee also recommended it establish a “pipeline program” for students in underrepresented groups to pursue doctoral degrees, and be transparent about “aspects of Princeton’s history that have been forgotten, overlooked, subordinated or suppressed.” It also recommended the school “diversify campus art and iconography” and alter the school’s informal motto. The report did not specifically mention the Wilson mural.

“Princeton must openly and candidly recognize that Wilson, like other historical figures, leaves behind a complex legacy of both positive and negative repercussions, and that the use of his name implies no endorsement of views and actions that conflict with the values and aspirations of our times,” the committee said.

“The process that the Princeton Trustees undertook to understand Woodrow Wilson and how we name institutions and buildings across campus was fair and robust,” Cecilia Rouse, dean of the school of public and international affairs, said in a statement. “I wholly support this attention to diversity and inclusion, because Princeton—like all universities—flourishes when many voices and opinions are embraced.”

Beginning today and running through October, the school of public and international affairs is hosting an exhibition on the “contested legacy of Woodrow Wilson.”

In a statement released Monday afternoon, the Black Justice League called the university's decision unsurprising and disappointing. "Princeton remains unable to even reckon and wrestle with its white supremacist foundations and its ongoing role in perpetuating racism, instead delivering shallow words and hollow promises," the coalition said. (The group was unavailable to speak with *Newsweek*.)

"Students were on many different sides of this issue," says Aleksandra Czulak, president of the undergraduate student government at Princeton, speaking individually and not on behalf of the student government. "I'm glad that there's now recommendations that are set forth. Those recommendations don't satisfy all students obviously, but I think as a community now we can move forward."

The Princeton students' demands came amid a wave of protests over racial issues at American colleges and universities. A website called The Demands says student protesters have issued 77 lists of demands as of early December, when the website last updated its list.