

EDUCATION

Historical Figures, Campus Controversies

By SEWELL CHAN JAN. 29, 2016

A new wave of international student activism has targeted names, mascots, statues and other symbols of historical figures at colleges and universities. Activists argue that the symbols should be removed as offensive reminders of hatred and violence. Many school officials acknowledge the historical complexities, but they argue that a better approach would be to teach students about the morally questionable acts of the past. Still others defend the symbols as harmless traditions.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Jefferson Davis's Statue, Removed

In August, the University of Texas at Austin took down a larger-than-life bronze statue of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, that had stood on campus since 1933, and relocated a statue of Woodrow Wilson. The decision came after an unsuccessful challenge to keep the statue, by the Sons of Confederate Veterans. The university was responding in part to the massacre of black churchgoers in South Carolina in June by a white gunman.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

An Ivy League School's Ties to the Slave Trade

In 2003, Ruth Simmons, the first black woman to lead an Ivy League university, commissioned a study of Brown University's historical links to the slave trade. Slaves accounted for 10 percent of Rhode Island's population in 1764, when Brown was founded, and the state was a northern hub of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The study, completed in 2006, did not urge renaming the school, but it undertook a number of initiatives to promote social justice and instill a deeper understanding of its troubled origins. The initiative led to similar inquiries at Harvard, William & Mary, Princeton and Columbia.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Harvard Law's Commitment to 'Veritas'

In November 2015, Martha L. Minow, dean of Harvard Law School, convened a committee to reconsider the school's controversial seal — the crest of the slaveholding Royall family, which endowed the law school's first professorship, in the 19th century. The school's seal, according to *The Harvard Crimson*, shows three sheaves of wheat under an emblem of "Veritas." Students at the school had already expressed alarm after pieces of black tape were placed across contemporary portraits of black law professors at Harvard, an act that was widely interpreted as one of vandalism.

AMHERST COLLEGE

A New England College Banishes Its Mascot

On Jan. 26, Amherst College, a prestigious liberal-arts school in New England, announced that Lord Jeffery Amherst, the 18th-century colonial governor after whom the town of Amherst, Mass., where the college is based, is named, would no longer be the unofficial campus mascot.

A commander who led crucial British victories in the French and Indian War, Lord Jeffery advocated that Native Americans be given smallpox-infected blankets to hasten their demise.

The college's trustees said it would no longer use any references to Lord Jeffery in official communications or symbolism, and that it would find a new name for the Lord Jeffery Inn, a campus hotel owned by the college. The trustees also said that a group made up mostly of alumni and students would consider whether Amherst should adopt a new, and official, mascot.

YALE UNIVERSITY

John C. Calhoun, Champion of Slavery

Last summer, Yale Law School students began a petition to rename Calhoun College, one of Yale University's 12 undergraduate residential colleges. A senator from South Carolina who died in 1850, John C. Calhoun was one of the most ardent white segregationists of antebellum America, providing much of the intellectual and political support for the nullification of antislavery legislation and the ultimate secession of Southern states, which began the Civil War, the deadliest in the history of the United States. Amid an uproar last fall about mistreatment of black students at Yale, the university's president, Peter Salovey, pledged that the university's governing body would examine the Calhoun issue. Jonathan Holloway, the dean of Yale College, who is also a black historian and the former master of Calhoun College, said he was torn about the issue.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

Ku Klux Klan Leader's Name Stripped From Building

In August, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, removed the name of William L. Saunders — a historian, lawyer, newspaper editor, Ku Klux Klan leader and North Carolina secretary of state — from a building that had bore his name since 1922. The building was renamed Carolina Hall.

On the same campus, a statue of “Silent Sam,” an anonymous Confederate soldier, was erected in 1913 to honor 321 alumni who died in the American Civil War. It has been vandalized several times.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Cecil Rhodes, an Architect of Apartheid

In March 2015, a student movement emerged to remove a bronze 1934 statue of Cecil Rhodes, the British imperialist and an architect of the apartheid system in South Africa. The statue was taken down the next month. But the activist movement turned into a nationwide campaign to “decolonize” education in South Africa, where racial inequalities persist two decades after the end of apartheid.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY

Rhodes Scholar Urges Removal of Rhodes Statue

In November, inspired by the success of the movement at the University of Cape Town, Ntokozo Qwabe, a black South African Rhodes scholar at the University of Oxford, and other students began a petition to remove a statue of Rhodes from Oriel College, Rhodes’s alma mater and one of the university’s 38 largely self-governing colleges. Oriel agreed to remove a plaque under the statue. In January 2016, the college announced that the statue would remain, but that it would “seek to provide a clear historical context to explain why it is there.”

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Woodrow Wilson's Racist Views

President Woodrow Wilson, who led the United States during World War I, won the 1919 Nobel Peace Prize for his work setting up the League of Nations and supporting multilateral approaches to prevent conflict. A Southern Democrat, he was also an ardent racist who intensified the segregation of the federal work force. Student activists have demanded that Princeton rename the Woodrow Wilson

School of Public and International Affairs, which was founded in 1930 and renamed for the former president in 1948. The university's president, Christopher L. Eisgruber, has agreed to start consultations on the issue.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY AND UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson, 'Racist Rapist'?

Activists at the University of Missouri and the College of William & Mary have protested statues of Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president, who was a leading slaveholder and fathered several children with his mixed-race slave Sally Hemings (who was also a half-sister of Jefferson's wife, Martha). They have called him a "racist rapist."

The University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, which Jefferson founded and which opened in 1819, was troubled in recent years by controversies over sexual assaults of students. There has not been a prominent effort to strip the school of its many associations with Jefferson.
