



Report of the Building Naming Task Force

February 5, 2021

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By Justin Wolfe, William Arceneaux Associate Professor of Latin American History

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“In recent years, there has been a national conversation across the country and at Tulane about the criteria we should use for naming and renaming. In light of the importance of this issue, I decided it is imperative for us as a community to step back and examine our approach to the process. Obviously, any standard we adopt must be able to be applied in different situations with respect to a wide variety of individuals.”

“In your deliberations, I ask each member to play an active role in developing principles to inform our decisions in naming or renaming our buildings.”

“Once developed, I also ask the task force to rely on those guiding principles to provide a recommendation to the Board of Tulane, consistent with legal requirements, regarding Hebert Hall . . .”

Mike Fitts, June 25, 2020

1. The Example of Peer Institutions

Tulane University joins nationwide discussions about decisions to rename, remove, recontextualize, or keep names on campus buildings at a point when it can build upon a series of pioneering efforts by other institutions. We examined processes conducted at fifteen universities in different regions of the country, each of which faced distinctive historical legacies of discrimination, as well as efforts undertaken by other institutions such as Darren Walker’s and Tom Finkelpearl’s “Report to the City of New York” by the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers (January 2018).

The experiences of four universities was of particular relevance to us. Yale University’s Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming was seminal and established the most-widely imitated model of principles and criteria employed in decision making (November 2016). On the basis of a thorough and thoughtful review and assessment of its history, values and mission, Yale made the decision to remove the name of the antebellum white supremacist John C. Calhoun from one of its residential colleges, renaming it to honor one of its distinguished alumnae. Yale’s intellectual framework for its work remains a gold standard for institutions that face similar challenges, but the university’s redress was limited to renaming and did not map out a blueprint for institution-wide contextualization and recontextualization.

Princeton University undertook a series of studies that included the “Report of the Trustee Committee on Woodrow Wilson’s Legacy” at Princeton (April 2016), the adoption of a new “Policy on the Renaming of Programs, Positions, and Spaces” (September 2016), and the report of the Campus Iconography Committee charged with enlivening the campus “in ways that reflect and connect with the campus community’s diversity” (May 2018). The efforts generated by these reports illustrate the challenges of initial efforts of transforming campus life and values; neither offers an example of a successful and sustainable program of recontextualization.

The report of the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on History and Contextualization at the University of Mississippi (June 2017) recommended a combination of clarifying and changing the names of some buildings and the placement of several markers to contextualize both the

names of buildings that were not changed and to recognize the importance of previously ignored contributions to the University by non-white members of its community.

The University of Virginia's report "Memorialization and Mission at UVA," issued by the President's Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation (March 2020), represented the culmination of its seminal leadership in defining the importance of historical research in recontextualization efforts and the need for institutions to adopt and implement far-reaching and concrete institutional policies to confront the fact that "the University's Grounds are in fact marked with disturbing memorials and building names honoring various Confederates, slaveholders, eugenicists, and segregationists who not only shared the racism common among whites in their eras but actively promoted white supremacist ideologies."

2. Tulane University's Building Naming Task Force

Tulane's Task Force met ten times approximately every two weeks between August 14, 2020 and February 5, 2021. At its first meeting, it adopted as a starting point some basic procedures followed by Yale University's Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming. The Task Force then established three subcommittees that were charged with developing positions on Principles, on Hébert's Legacy, and on Recontextualization.

The Subcommittee on Values researched and defined the principles that represent those held by the university and its constituents today. The Subcommittee on Hébert's Legacy undertook the task of preparing a historically grounded biography of Hébert. Finally, the Subcommittee on Recontextualization explored a broad range of approaches taken by other universities and institutions in considering naming or renaming buildings and other honorific or philanthropic appellations/designations because the very need to initiate such an inquiry should be considered the beginning, but not the end, of a broader process to recontextualize the history of an institution. This essential process, which was not in the scope of the charge to the Task Force, is submitted as a separate report.

The Task Force framed and responded to the questions first set forth in the inquiry about the renaming of Calhoun College at Yale University. The Task Force's conclusions and recommendations to the President and the Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund are included here. Whatever decision the President and Administrators reach as to whether Hébert's name should remain on the building that houses the Department of History and the Africana Studies program, the next stage in the process is the longer and more challenging one of how the university will face the task of recontextualization not only of this building, but of the campus as a whole.

3. Report of the Subcommittee on Values: Principles for Renaming

The Values and Principles subcommittee was charged with examining Tulane's approach to process around naming and renaming of campus spaces and developing principles to inform Tulane's decisions related to the same, with a specific focus on F. Edward Hébert Hall. The subcommittee reviewed reports and letters from universities that previously undertook this task and recommends that the Board of Administrators adopt a revised version of the Yale principles, which are outlined below:

- A. Presumptions: Renaming on account of values should be an exceptional event.
 - 1. There is a strong presumption against renaming a building on the basis of the values associated with its namesake. Such a renaming should be considered only in exceptional circumstances.

- B. Principles to be considered: Sometimes renaming on the basis of values is warranted after consideration of these guiding questions:
 - 1. Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?
 - 2. Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?
 - 3. Did the University, at the time of a naming, honor a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?
 - 4. Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University?

- C. Decisions to retain a name or to rename come with requirements of contextualization and process.
 - 1. When a name is altered, the University has an obligation to ensure that the alteration is coupled with a description of the history of the original act of naming and the reason for the name change.
 - 2. When a name is retained, the University has an obligation to ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history.
 - 3. The University will adopt a formal process for considering whether to alter a building name on account of the values associated with its namesake; such a process will incorporate broad community input and scholarly expertise.

Much of the subcommittee's discussions centered on Tulane University's values, and specifically, how naming and renaming relates to those values. In their letter to the Yale President, the Yale Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming noted that, "commemoration expresses values," and "a change in the way a community memorializes its past offers a way to recognize important alterations in the community's values." (Section I, p. 3) Analyzing commemoration and memorialization in a similar way requires identifying the values of our own university.

Though Tulane has a robust mission statement, it does not publish a list of core values. Thus, the subcommittee set out to identify and articulate a set of common core values that could be used to consider cases for renaming. To do this, the group gathered and reviewed statements from multiple sources, including school and unit mission statements, diversity statements and reports, public messages from the President, accreditation submissions, and admissions materials, among others. The subcommittee then identified common themes among these statements and summarized them in the following series of affirmative statements, which we recommend the Board of Administrators adopt as Tulane's institution-wide statement of values and principles:

Inclusivity: We will have a diverse learning environment in which all can thrive. We are committed to monitoring, identifying and correcting inequities that serve as a barrier to the advancement of our community.

Learning: We will cultivate our environment through engaged teaching, research, academic excellence and integrity.

Discovery: We will intentionally foster the generation of knowledge through our commitment to science, research, and inquiry as a pre-eminent global research university.

Community: We will strengthen our communities within New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, the lower Mississippi Delta and across the globe. We are committed to the well-being and betterment of New Orleans and the region in which we live.

Service: We are committed to service in the city of New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, the lower Mississippi Delta, and across the globe. We are committed to creating authentic relationships and engagement with other members within our community, which we call home.

Excellence: We will be distinguished in all that we do.

4. Report of the Subcommittee on Hébert and his Legacy

In order to assess the degree to which naming a Tulane building in honor of F. Edward Hébert is in alignment with recommendations of the Subcommittee on Values outlined above, historian Justin Wolfe and University Archivist Ann Case conducted extensive historical research in university archives, contemporary publications, and secondary sources to represent an account of Hébert's beliefs, values, and actions during his lifetime that would make it possible to reflect on them in relationship to the core values of the university community today.

A. Hébert and Civil Rights

Hébert described himself throughout his life as a patriot, an anti-communist, and an advocate for states' rights. Over his career, this resulted in attacks on those he viewed as Communists or Communist sympathizers and on efforts to legislate civil rights protections, things which he argued were fundamentally intertwined.

He opposed national civil rights efforts, including the inclusion of a civil rights plank in the 1948 Democratic Party platform, all congressional civil rights legislation—from voting rights to anti-lynching laws—and Supreme Court decisions like *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Hébert usually framed this as a defense of “states’ rights,” but with desegregation looming in the 1960s, Hébert publicly declared, "I am definitely, emphatically and positively in favor of segregation, and opposed to integration, period."¹

B. The Hébert Foundation Donation

The Hébert Foundation seemed primarily interested in memorializing Hébert and came to Tulane when other options for realizing that goal failed. It had hoped for a standalone facility of some

kind but agreed to a wing added to the History building.ⁱⁱ

In 1978, History faculty criticized the idea of memorializing the building after a segregationist, but their concerns were not directly addressed. In October 1979, the university held a public dedication ceremony for the renamed Hébert Building. In response, a group of Tulane students organized a petition with over 500 signatures protesting honoring Hébert because of his lifelong opposition to civil rights.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tulane's President Sheldon Hackney argued against "political criteria" in determining acceptance of memorialization and gifts.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, Students Organizing Against Racism (SOAR) began building a coalition of activists on campus that would work to recognize and respond to the history of racism at Tulane.

These efforts, intensified in the wake of Michael Brown's murder and the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the national campaign to remove Confederate monuments, led a group of undergraduates in 2017-2018 to organize the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) and subsequently the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA) to formally vote for the removal of the Hébert name.

5. Task Force Assessments

Upon consideration of the recommendations and findings of the Subcommittee on Values and the Subcommittee on Hébert and his Legacy, the Building Naming Task Force came to the assessments presented in this section.

- A. Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?

We have considered this issue both with respect to the mission and values of Tulane at the time of the naming of the Hébert Building and at the present time. While those issues were not as clearly articulated then as they are now, they are generally the same. Then, Tulane University was particularly struggling with the challenges of integration and academic freedom. Now, an essential part of its mission is the education of students through a commitment to academic breadth and depth, interdisciplinary exploration, engagement in scholarship and research, and opportunities for service. An essential value is the embracing of diversity and inclusivity with the knowledge that both are key components of fostering the highest level of learning.

Hébert took and maintained a strong stand against integration and actively supported a return to segregation. He opposed integration at Tulane University and in the United States Military. He vilified those who disagreed with him. His beliefs and actions were, at the time and currently, fundamentally at odds with the philosophy and mission of Tulane University. At a time when Tulane was seeking to rid itself of the vestiges of segregation and racial injustice, he continued staunchly to promote those views in his political campaigns and as a congressional representative from the community where Tulane was located.

Hébert described himself throughout his life as a patriot, an anti-communist, and an advocate for states' rights. Over his career, this resulted in attacks by him on those he viewed as Communists or Communist sympathizers and on efforts to legislate civil rights protections, things which he argued were fundamentally intertwined.

He opposed national civil rights efforts, including the inclusion of a civil rights plank in the 1948 Democratic Party platform, all congressional civil rights legislation—from voting rights to anti-lynching laws—and Supreme Court decisions like *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Hébert usually framed this as a defense of “states’ rights.” And with desegregation at the forefront in the 1960s, Hébert publicly declared, “I am definitely, emphatically and positively in favor of segregation, and opposed to integration, period.”^{iv}

Hebert did not disavow or moderate his strong stand in favor of segregation or in favor of “states’ rights.” He adhered to those views at a time when Tulane University was moving forward with integration. His views were directly and markedly opposed to the mission and principles of Tulane University.

B. Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived?

Hébert’s views on segregation, states’ rights and civil rights may have reflected a majority view of his constituents - obviously enough to get him reelected to successive terms in the House of Representatives. But those views were contested locally. We found no evidence of significant protest at the time of naming the property in Belle Chasse, Louisiana as the Hébert Riverside Research Center. Significant concern was expressed by faculty and students at the time of the Hebert Foundation gift and the resulting naming of Hébert Hall. In 1978, as the gift and building naming were being considered, History faculty criticized the idea of memorializing the building after a segregationist. Their concerns were not directly addressed. In October 1979, the university announced a public dedication ceremony for the renamed Hébert Building. In response, a group of Tulane students organized a petition with over 500 signatures protesting honoring Hébert because of his lifelong opposition to civil rights.^v

C. Did the University, at the time of a naming, honor a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University?

Proper consideration of this issue requires some disaggregation. Given Congressman Hébert’s minimal relationship to Tulane University, we assume that the principal consideration for the naming must have been the financial gift made to Tulane University by the Hébert Foundation. In circumstances where the name of an individual is to be memorialized by Tulane University in consideration of the gift, it is important that the principal legacy of the individual be consistent with its principles and values. Proposal and consideration of the name should be careful and transparent. Establishment and publication of appropriate procedures are recommended by this Task Force for action by the Board. Specifically, with regard to Hébert, the gift was made to facilitate the naming and construction of a memorial to the Congressional service of Hébert. At the time of the naming, his Congressional record was clear, and was fundamentally at odds with the principles and values of Tulane University.

- D. Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University?

The answer must be a resounding "yes"! And it is particularly so in this case. The building currently bearing Hebert's name is a prominent building on the academic quad. The building is physically and academically central to the lives of many of the students at Tulane University. It is difficult to explain to students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors how a name so directly contrary to the principles and values of Tulane University can be allowed to remain on that building.

It is particularly ironic that his name is affixed to the building that is the home of the History Department, the Africana Studies program, and centers supporting BIPOC students.

After detailed consideration of the Reports of the Subcommittee on Values and the Subcommittee on Hebert and His Legacy, above, and the Report of the Subcommittee on Recontextualization, attached separately, the Task Force reached the following conclusions and makes these recommendations.

6. Task Force Recommendations on Hébert Hall

The Task Force recommends that the name of F. Edward Hébert be removed from Hebert Hall.

While not specifically within its charge, the Task Force also recommends that Hébert's name be removed from the Hébert Research Center.

The Task Force has been made aware that there are legal issues to be considered on the removal of the name on Hebert Hall. It is not its charge to consider those issues. The Task Force hopes that those issues can be resolved to permit renaming of the building.

If not, the Task Force suggests that other efforts are needed to recontextualize the name. At a minimum, a full and scholarly description of the issues and the reasons for the result should be prominently displayed in the building. It would have to recognize the fundamental inconsistency between the values and mission of Tulane University and the things for which Hébert stood and maintained even in the face of legal and social changes. Staying true to Tulane's values and respecting and reflecting them would be a minimum requirement for respecting the philosophy and mission of Tulane University and the concerns of students, faculty, alumni and visitors who see the name on the building and have grave concerns about its message.

What Hébert said and did and believed about segregation and preserving a system that fostered racial injustice are completely at odds with the philosophy and mission of Tulane University. The very things he fought to maintain are directly contrary to the principles and values which Tulane teaches and advances. His name on the building and the research lab presents a constant challenge to the students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors who strive to support that mission and those values. The Task Force recommends prompt and considerate adherence to that mission and those values.
