
President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions
Town Hall

March 5, 2018

Askew Student Life Center, Room 101, 942 Learning Way

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Panel Attendees:

Members

Renisha Gibbs- Chair
Janet Stoner
Robyn Jackson
Walter Moore
Norman Anderson

Support Staff

Elizabeth Hirst
Danni Staats

The meeting began at 9:04 a.m.

- Welcome

Renisha Gibbs brought the meeting to order, thanked the present panel members for coming out, and welcomed the audience to the fourth of five town hall meetings being hosted by the President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions. She introduced herself as the Associate Vice President for Human Resources at Florida State University [FSU] and explained that her role was to serve as Chair of the panel, which was made up of a diverse group of students, staff, faculty and alumni. Ms. Gibbs then proceeded to make the additional statements as follows:

The charge before the panel is to listen, learn and, finally, make recommendations on policies concerning campus names, including buildings and statues. In order to get there, we are conscientiously and continually gathering facts and opinions to help us shape thoughtful ideas on how to best memorialize the university's historical and cultural past in a way that reflects our core values today.

Since the panel's first meeting in October, we've been educated on how other campuses are dealing with this same challenge. We've heard from archivists and legal experts to become better informed about relevant historical and legal facts. In addition, we've listened to passionate students and alumni who have shared their own research and sentiments about specific campus recognitions. As a result of the public input we've received so far, President Thrasher has asked us to initially focus on B.K. Roberts Hall, Francis Eppes Hall, and the Eppes statue.

The panel has been immersed in learning the details about these specific landmarks, and as such, we urge speakers today to help us broaden the conversation. More specifically, we'd like to hear your perspective in three significant areas:

- What impact have these landmarks had on you and/or others? What message do you and/or others think these landmarks are communicating?
- What role should university history play in our current day campus environment?
- What do you think should be done and why (i.e., suggestions for solutions)? Are there additional options besides removing and/or renaming?

In the interest of time, each speaker will be limited to 5 minutes. If you don't have the opportunity to speak today we encourage you to provide your input online. You can find a link to the President's Advisory Panel website on FSU's homepage, where you can offer feedback and review other information. We are committed to ensuring the work we do is transparent, inclusive and respectful. We ask that all views expressed today be respected, consistent with our values as a university. Behavior contrary to those values will not be tolerated and we will not allow these proceedings today to be disrupted.

Ms. Gibbs concluded by thanking the attendees for being there and welcoming the first speaker to come forward.

- Public Comments

[Comment #1]

Name: John Alvarez

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am a freshman at FSU and serve as a member of the student senate in our Student Government Association (SGA). I'm aware that the Eppes issue was brought up before, I believe in 2016, and that the proposal to remove the statue was voted down, but I wanted to speak from the prospective of the those who have come to the university since then, those who didn't have a voice in that vote. Following the incidents that occurred in Charlottesville, I recall speaking with other students about 'how it was a good things we don't have that problem', but after going through orientation, we realized that we do. I have a friend attending West Point and he told me that Robert E. Lee isn't recognized anywhere on campus. Everyone knows who he is and they learn about him through history courses, but he isn't honored with a recognition. Knowing many undergrads especially the incoming freshman class, I know that they agree they should be honored, but that we need to be careful to ensure that people we are recognizing represent our core values. Eppes was large discussion two years ago. He is recognized as a slave holder and catcher, and was gifted slaves from Thomas Jefferson. Not a history we should be emboldening and honoring. I appreciate the panel and the work you've done, taking into consideration the facts surrounding this issue, but I would like you to understand where the younger class is coming from, since they didn't have a say in 2016 referendum.

[Comment #2]

Name: Cea Moline

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am a senior in the Political Science program here at FSU and I am also with SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. I'd like to share statements from others who couldn't be here today. Donna Cotterell is a community member who teaches history at Catholic school in town, and returned to Tallahassee as a descendent of slaves who had been brought to the area years before. Ms. Cotterell shares her family's history in a play that she wrote, including how her great-great grandfather had been sold at auction when he was 8 years old, and how her Native American great-great grandmother had been saved by enslaved women who had taken her in and then begged the master to keep her when he found out and wanted to kill her. Her great-great grandfather's name was Prince Griffin, and there are many landmarks in town today named after him. In speaking with Ms. Cotterell, I had told her that there is a slave master statue on top of Westcott, and her response was that she wasn't surprised. She stated that none of the racist things in this town surprised her, that it was just the way the town is, which was a depressing moment for me. A lot of people have given up on this town because they realize there are a lot of problems, including [a statue] on Capitol Hill. [Speaking on her behalf] Angela Davis referenced a quote from the book *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* by Craig Steven Wilder, which asserts that the Higher Education System in this country is grounded in slavery. She added that she is so glad we are recognizing the ghosts of history, which are very much alive. The statues represent a contention in the here and now, because white supremacy exists in this town. We were once a segregated college and we always will be if that statue remains. The statue creates a wide distance between us and the community. I think it should be torn down.

[Comment #3]

Name: Kitt Comellas

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am an Art Major here at FSU and serve as Historian for SDS. Coming into FSU this past August, I didn't know any of our history, expect that we have a Native American mascot, which I don't think is a great look, since I found out it represents a severed head, but not what we're here to discuss. After coming here, I found out that we have a statue and a building named for a slave holder and catcher, who is also a reported descendent of Thomas Jefferson, for whatever that's worth. Also a Law Building named for a [FL] Supreme Court Justice who tried to keep a black student out of law school even after segregation was abolished. I really don't believe we should be honoring Eppes, or Roberts, or any other men who are a mark on this institution. How can we be integrated if we honor those who worked to achieve the exact opposite? I don't think we should be honoring these people, the names and statues, including all confederate statues, should be torn down. Do whatever you want with them, but tear them down. The issue reminds me that this is what Florida is like, it's the south, and we are grounded in the genocide of native people. We continue to oppress people, it's disgusting, and frankly makes me ashamed to be here. I hope the committee recognizes the impact these honors have on the institution and what it says about us.

[Comment #4]

Name: Maddie Hendrick

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am a rising senior in the Spanish program here at FSU, as well as an officer and organizer for SDS. Through that role, I've organized two major anti-racist protests, one this past

August in conjunction with the Charlottesville target, and one last October related to national awareness against police brutality. While being involved with activism these past few years, I've had a lot of conversations with people in the community, one just two weeks ago, regarding how the Eppes campaign was doing. There is a misconception that we are trying to erase history, but in fact, we are trying to make it known. Currently there is no marker that indicates Eppes was a slave holder, and FSU doesn't mention it on their website either, which does erase history, by trying to gloss over the unfortunate parts of the man's past. No one knew these things until we did the research, and now there are conversations happening all over the university. Please keep in mind that this is what we are trying to do, keep history known. Eppes was a slave holder, and there have been a lot of struggles to keep rights for black people here, including bus riots in the 1950s, which people seem to have forgotten about. Black enrollment is dropping, funding to African-American studies and Latina studies is not where it should be. Not arguing about the past, but about the present, because if this is what we are honoring, what does it say about our university.

[Comment #5]

Name: Zachary Schultz

Affiliation: Alumni

Statement: I was a Sociology major here at FSU and recently graduated and am now working. I'm very interested in the university, because it matters a lot to me, and I'm here speaking in regards to Eppes, how we understand and engage with University history. Those of us who believe [the statue] should be removed, have made it our project to uncover the history of the university and Tallahassee, which has been forgot, deliberately whitewashed, or retold to cover horrors and brutality, that occurred under the tyranny of men like Eppes. Eppes is considered to be the founder of FSU, and he also owned 91 slaves, who worked on his large cotton plantation. Slaves outnumbered white people 4 to 1 at the time. Noted by Larry E. Rivers in his journal article, *Slavery in Microcosm: Leon County, Florida, 1824 to 1860*, Eppes contributed to the confederate cause by selling his plantation to fund the cause. Early on in the war they had issued securities and collected taxes, which failed. Eppes selling his plantation to fund the confederacy's fight in the war showed major support. He was a firm believer in the confederate cause to the end of his days. Another issue was Eppes's role in TPD [Tallahassee Police Department], and the system of policing he established. Leon country divided into beats for nightly patrols, to catch escaped slaves, or those plotting a slave insurrection. What he did as mayor was organize a new night watch, which eventually became what is now the TPD. Prohibition of pamphlets and signs against their cause, all mail was searched for abolitionist movement documents. This was the reality of the political government at the time.

[Comment #6]

Name: Katherine Draken

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am a senior majoring in Sociology her at FSU. Speaking to the impact these landmarks have, they are an insult to black students at this school and to the history of FSU and Tallahassee. Honoring a man who owned slaves, and worked against the abolitionist movement, is communicating that FSU doesn't care about their black students. Enrollment of black student is declining and FSU doesn't seem to care, because they continue to honor this man that makes their black students uncomfortable and it's messed up. FSU should be upholding people who

fought against people like this, who fought against the institution of slavery. People who fought for equality and justice, the values we should be upholding. FSU needs to do more to show that it cares about these issues, black issues.

[Comment #7]

Name: Robert Gmeiner

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am graduate student and PhD candidate in Economics. In regards to proposed solutions and the ramifications of potentially removing the Eppes statue, I want to make sure the panel is aware of presentism, which is something viewed as immoral today, but not at the time. [*Uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts.*] There is no way to know what will be considered immoral 30 years from today. I'm skeptical that the statues removal will heal wounds, and make black people feel more welcome here or raise enrollment. Actions like this in Charlottesville are what prompted violence. I do not in any way condone his actions or the actions of other slave owners at the time. Many space on camps that we could represent the horrors. Eppes was civil leader in the community and founded the University we benefit from today. Present both side to his story and let people make their own decisions. Political climate of society today people will see his actions in positive light. We can all say we've done things we aren't proud of. Please be aware of presentism, because we have no idea what people 30 years from now will think about what we do today,

Ms. Gibbs indicated that she had no more comment cards from audience members requesting to speak, and proceed to open the floor to anyone else who wanted to address the panel.

[Comment #8]

Name: Dr. Willie Wright,

Affiliation: Faculty

Statement: I am an Assistant Professor for African American studies, and I recently graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where similar discussions were taking place regarding the "Silent Sam" statue and a building named for William Saunders. The university's argument had been that Saunders was being recognized for contributing a large number of historical documents to the university, students did research, and found he was given recognition for his leadership of the KKK in North Carolina. Students argued that having these memorials on campus exacted a silent violence, and that removing them wasn't erasing history, but correcting it. Students in my class just read a Frederick Douglass narrative, and we saw that some of those who saw themselves as the best Christians, were actually the worst slave holders. We can't judge Eppes on what we know today, but from the beginning there have always been people against slavery. I support these students [*referring to the representatives from SDS*] and recognize them as more than activists, but as preservers of history.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed that there were no additional comments at that time and then indicated that the panel would wait a little longer, until 10:00, before adjourning.

[Comment #9]

(Submitted to panel in written form)

Name: Katie Dean Moore

Affiliation: Staff

Statement: As a staff member working in Eppes Hall, I am in favor of the name change and the removal of the Eppes statue. I would love if the College of Criminology would have a re-naming opportunity. Most of all, I am heartened by the student led movement that has led us to this point. I agree that the message from leaving Eppes is not inclusive to its potential.

[No additional comments]

- Adjourn

Ms. Gibbs thanked all of the speakers for their feedback and stated that the panel looked forward to continuing discussion tomorrow at Turnbull, before adjourning the meeting.

The meeting ended at 10:00 a.m.