



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 17, 2018

Dear Members of the Florida State University Community:

We are so fortunate to have in common an abiding love for this institution of higher learning that has been transforming lives for more than 167 years. As we look around our beautiful campus, there is evidence of our rich heritage all around us. We can see it in the names of our buildings and the statues of our forebears.

But our history is not without its flaws, nor were some of the people who contributed to the growth of this preeminent institution. How we choose to acknowledge that truth is important.

Across the country, universities, municipalities and other entities are grappling with how they acknowledge their own unique histories, whom they venerate and in what way. Monuments and building names have become the focal point of this discussion for good reason.

When the actions of historical figures are no longer in line with contemporary thinking and values — or new information about these people comes to light — what should become of the monuments erected in their honor? Do they remain in place out of respect for tradition, or are they removed, relocated or contextualized to educate and inform the next generation about the past?

As Florida State seeks to become a more inclusive campus for all, the time is right to address these questions.

That's why last fall I convened an **Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions**. The panel was charged with researching the issues surrounding namings and recognitions and seeking input from university constituencies, focusing particularly on areas of most interest to our community at this point in time — **B.K. Roberts Hall**, the **Francis Eppes statue** and **Eppes Hall**.

The 15-member panel was made up of university students, faculty, staff and alumni, and I want to thank them for making valuable recommendations based on their research. I also want to thank the students, community members and others who attended the meetings and open forums or provided input through our website or reached out to me or the panel in other ways. Clearly, many people care about this institution very deeply.

On July 13, 2018, I received the panel's excellent report. I have given very careful consideration to each of its recommendations. My decisions are outlined below:

- Accept the panel's recommendations regarding principles to be used for future honorific opportunities and ask the General Counsel to modify the university's naming policy with these principles in mind.**

- Accept the recommendation to add a member of the panel to the university's existing Committee on Campus Names.**

- Accept the recommendation to seek legislative action to legally remove B.K. Roberts' name from the College of Law building and provide contextualized recognition of B.K. Roberts within the law school.**

- Accept the recommendation to remove the Francis Eppes statue from the Westcott Plaza. In addition, the statue should be relocated to a more appropriate place, to be accompanied by a marker that provides biographical detail about Eppes' life and an accurate description of his role in founding FSU's institutional predecessor.**

- Retain the name on Eppes Hall but provide a plaque or marker that accurately explains that Eppes was one of many people who had a role in the establishment of FSU's institutional predecessor and include additional context.**

RATIONALE

B.K. Roberts Hall

The panel unanimously recommended Florida State University **seek legislative action to remove B.K. Roberts' name from the College of Law building**. After a great deal of thought, **I accept this recommendation**.

Because the Florida Legislature designated B.K. Roberts Hall in 1973, I will ask the Legislature to formally remove his name from the building by repealing Chapter 73-370, Laws of Florida.

B.K. Roberts has left a complicated legacy. On one hand, he can and should be recognized for his instrumental role in creating the FSU College of Law. He is credited with restructuring Florida's courts and creating a simplified system that is still used today. He was also the primary architect of Florida's public defender system.

His significant contributions stand in stark comparison to a more troublesome legacy. As a Florida Supreme Court justice, B.K. Roberts wrote pro-segregation opinions in the 1950s, including, in particular, a majority opinion that refused to obey a U.S. Supreme Court ruling to allow a black man to enroll in the University of Florida College of Law.

As FSU President Emeritus Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte told the Advisory Panel during its April 2, 2018, meeting, "He got it wrong at a time when he should have been able to get it right." While many Florida leaders in our state, such as Gov. LeRoy Collins, were moving the state forward, B.K. Roberts came down on the wrong side of history and justice.

The Florida Supreme Court recognized this, and in 1999 issued a formal apology for Roberts' opinions — the only time in the Court's history it has ever issued an apology.

To keep the name of B.K. Roberts on the law school building would continue to honor someone whose decisions and actions do not reflect Florida State University's values or the rule of law. This honor is a painful reminder of this state's segregationist history, and it is highly offensive to many in our community, including many current FSU law students who attended a forum to formally express their objections. Moreover, the building name celebrates a man who defied the highest court of the land and does so at the very place on this campus where we teach the rule of law.

However, we should not forget our past. The fact is B.K. Roberts did help found the law school, and that fact should be remembered. His contribution to other judicial changes in our state, such as the aforementioned development of the public defender system, should not be forgotten.

I, therefore, support the panel's recommendation that B.K. Roberts' role in establishing the law school be recognized in an appropriate space and manner within the law school.

Eppes Hall and Eppes Statue

Francis Eppes VII was the grandson of Thomas Jefferson and a prominent 19th century civic, religious and educational leader. He served several terms as mayor of Tallahassee and played a vital role in convincing the Florida Legislature to locate the West Florida Seminary, FSU's institutional predecessor, in the capital city. Eppes also served as a member of the Seminary's Board of Trustees, including eight years as president.

It's worth noting that recognition of Eppes on the Florida State University campus has happened only relatively recently. The former psychology building located just north of Westcott was named Eppes Hall in 2000 after a proposal to name the building for Eppes was recommended by a committee and approved by then-President D'Alemberte and the Board of Regents. After the psychology department moved to a new location on campus, Eppes Hall became the current home of the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

In 2001, President D'Alemberte spearheaded a celebration in recognition of the 150th anniversary of the year in which the Florida Legislature passed a bill to establish two seminaries of higher education. As part of the celebration, he commissioned a statue of Eppes. The statue was unveiled in 2002, and a marker next to it identifies Eppes as "Grandson of Thomas Jefferson, Founder of Florida State University."

In 2016, a group of students initiated a referendum to remove the statue and the Eppes name from the building because of Eppes' history as a slave owner. The proposal was defeated, but the vote brought to light the concerns some people have about honoring Eppes. The Advisory Panel's report noted that many students attended the panel meetings and town hall forums to voice these concerns.

The panel uncovered sufficient new evidence to dispute the claim that Eppes was the sole founder of FSU. It's clear that Eppes had an important part to play in the early days of this institution's history but declaring him "the founder" is overstating his role.

Therefore, **I accept the panel's recommendation that the statue be removed from the Westcott Plaza.** To keep the statue located at the front gates of campus is to give Eppes a level of prominence that is simply not appropriate.

The statue should be relocated and accompanied by a marker that accurately depicts Eppes' role in establishing Florida State University's institutional predecessor and keeping the school going in its early years. The marker should also acknowledge that Eppes was, in fact, a slave owner, and as a justice of the peace, he oversaw the capture of escaped slaves.

Because of Eppes' significant contributions to FSU, I have decided to retain the name of Eppes Hall. A marker will be located in or near the building to provide biographical information about Eppes, including his slave ownership and role as justice of the peace, and to place his contribution to the founding of this institution in proper context.

CONCLUSION

The great value of history is understanding and learning from it so we can move forward. Examining the names of these two campus buildings and the placement of this statue has afforded Florida State University that opportunity.

I appreciate those students and others who passionately raised issues about campus names and monuments and urged us to consider them, just as I understand and respect the views of those who think the best way to honor our significant historical figures — flawed as they may be — is to keep the building names and the statue in place.

I am also deeply indebted to the panel members who worked so diligently and thoughtfully to research FSU's past and make well-reasoned recommendations for our future. With all of this valuable input, I have based my decisions not on the opinions of just a few but on what I truly believe is best for our entire university community.

FSU is a special place. We celebrate our multicultural, diverse campus and the richness of ideas it affords. We do not shy away from difficult discussions; rather we approach them openly and deliberately. I am proud that our students, faculty, staff, alumni and supporters are engaged in the important work of defining what kind of institution we want to have.

I hope we will continue this dialogue in a way that reflects our shared values of respect and civility, and that together we will face any challenges as a caring community of good will.

Sincerely,



John Thrasher