
President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions

Town Hall

March 6, 2018

Turnbull Conference Center, Room 103, 555 West Pensacola Street

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Panel Attendees:

Members

Renisha Gibbs- Chair
Janet Stoner
Miguel Hernandez
Maxine Montgomery
Norman Anderson
Lane Forsman

Support Staff

Elizabeth Hirst
Danni Staats

The meeting began at 2:01 p.m.

- Welcome

Renisha Gibbs announced that it was time to begin and welcomed everyone to the fifth of five town hall meetings being hosted by the President's Advisory Panel on University Namings and Recognitions. She thanked everyone for coming out and indicated that all of the feedback received during the town halls would be summarized and provided to the panel for consideration as they continued with their work. Ms. Gibbs went on to 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 is typically limited to 5 minutes, however, considering t, we will let speakers go over if needed. 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: Allison Rayburn

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I am a doctoral student in the Marriage and Faculty Therapy department here at FSU. I also work as a Teaching Assistant and, as a therapist in the community. Nervous to speak about this as a white woman and wanted to acknowledge that. Approximately 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18, and approximately 1.8 million adolescents in the United States have been the victims of sexual assault. We all recognize that these statistics are terrible, because we are aware of the traumas associated with these incidents, as well as the emotional and physical responses the victims will experience for the rest of their lives. However, you may not realize that someone can have similar emotional and physical responses to a trauma that they haven't directly experienced, which are triggered by symbols and representations of said trauma. For example, the Eppes statue, can conjure feelings of shame and embarrassment associated with the degradations of slavery. The trauma response is real and we know they are similar to those experience by victims of sexual assault and war veterans. Who am I to tell someone the statue shouldn't bother them or mean that to them. Perceptions of history must grow as we grow and adapt. Our chance to choose, what if this statue represented your oppressor or abuser? I believe the University should help advocate for those who are negatively impacted. Racism is like cockroaches, you see one but there are thousands of actions there. As a white woman, I'll never know. The compromise is removing statue, anything less is contributing to a message that we are siding with a racist culture.

[Comment #2]

Name: Danni Vogt

Affiliation: Alumni

Statement: I'm here to speak about renaming of Roberts hall. Roberts was a FL Supreme Court Justice in the 1950s, who in this role, wrote a few opinions keeping Virgil Hawkins from going to UF law school solely because he was black. His segregationist opinions are one reason Roberts's name on law school is not appropriate. In addition, the opinions were in direct defiance of the US Supreme Court. Even after the higher court directed Roberts to reverse the decision, he kept writing opinions with different reasons to continue delay. Ethical problem, violates oath in office as Supreme Court Justice. For those reasons I advocate his name be removed. I have a website, which summarizes the situation. There is also a petition, and I provided the first 14 responses to the committee already, but have received several more since, and will provide the new ones later this week. Overwhelming majority say this negatively impacts their desire or ability to give money to law school. Affects me by bothering me, and prevents law school from getting all possible fundraising it could. Don't mean to gloss over Roberts's contributions to the law school or the community. He started the law school in the 1960s, but in retrospect given today's current times, I believe it's improper for his name to be on the building. I appreciate the committee having these hearings. I've found them illuminating. One speaker at the law school said that before going to law school, she made a list of possibilities, reviewed choices and crossed the others off because of links to past racism. She came here because she thought FSU didn't have those links and it wasn't until after coming and getting halfway through she discovered Roberts links to these incidents. May affect recruitment and how people feel when they find out after they come here. Not an image I think FSU wants to project to the nation or community. Roberts deserves some kind of honor, like a plaque or something but his name on the building is too much.

[Comment #3]

Name: Harry Lee Anstead

Affiliation: Other- Retired FL Supreme Court Justice

Statement: I served as a Judge on Florida's Fourth District Court of Appeals from 1977-94, and in 1994, I was appointed by Governor Chiles to serve as a Justice of the FL Supreme Court. I was later appointed as Chief Justice in 2002, where I served until 2004, and I later retired in 2009. I'm here to provide information that might be helpful. I recognize the limitations you are facing, since the naming was part of legislature action when law school created. Roberts was instrumental in creating the law school on the heels of closing the law school at FAMU. I want to comment that this panel is a great thing. FSU is already a great university, recognized around the country for innovative programs. There was a landmark here few years ago, recognizing the growth of the University, when medical school was created. Had exceptional leadership here, both at the level of President and the deans at the law school. Shining star is the culture created there. Culture of inclusion and diversity. For the many years that I sat on the FL Supreme Court, the dean would bring a large group of undergraduate students to observe. They recruited from predominant black Universities, identified as perspective law school students, affirmative action to make sure best and brightest would enroll at FSU. There was a formal program every summer, and part of the program was to visit the Supreme Court and have an opportunity to exchange with justices. Commend leadership at FSU at every level. Stood out in public Universities in the

south and throughout the US. When I became a lawyer, judge, and justice, gave rise to me reading thousands of opinions from the FL Supreme Court. Unfortunately, amongst those, one issued in the late 1950s, early 60s was shocking. Never read in judicial opinion, language used in these opinions, many of which were authored by B. K. Roberts. They became the only opinions issued by the Supreme Court that I and my colleagues were truly ashamed of. As such, we did something historic. After discussion, they decided the opinions were so offensive, that they recited a public apology from the FL Supreme Court. Indeed, they had a public ceremony and publicly apologized. No other incident where this has happened. Important you all know that, in terms of considering your recommendation.

[Comment #4]

Name: Kimberly Miller

Affiliation: Alumni

Statement: I'm originally from Jacksonville and I graduated in 2000 from FSU law school and undergrad in '97. I'm here to support the removal of Roberts's name. As an undergraduate, I was a part of the program the previous speaker discussed before. I was recruited and attended what is now known as the [Donald J.] Weidner program. They provided funding that enabled me to complete my undergrad degree in 3 years and funding for LSAT prep courses. I had a number of friends in undergrad and wide community, but in Roberts Hall as an L1, I was one of 25 African-Americans in a program of 300. In that situation, one experiences random acts of racism in the classroom, and when seeing Roberts's name I prepared for battle every day. When you are 1 of 5 African-Americans in a classroom, interesting things happen. Not sure what they are experiencing now when there are 5 total in their entire class. Scholarship support allowed more African-American students and minorities in general to attend law school at FSU, however, I know it's not possible now, as there is no longer funding. I want to express that we appreciate you have taken up this charge. For me it's about evolution, when I started I couldn't find any sports paraphernalia without a Seminole face on it. A friend of mine was Native American and I made a promise not to wear it. I recently found stuff without a face, so if we can evolve with that, we can evolve with the name.

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.

[No additional comments.]

Ms. Gibbs proposed that the panel members wait a little bit longer, since this was the last forum and noting that the option to submit feedback on the website would remain open, suggested waiting until 3:00pm.

[Panel agreed.]

Ms. Gibbs asked in the panel had any thought on what additional information they would like or need to receive at their next meeting, recalling that they had talked about having a historian come back to provide a more in-depth overview of the relevant individuals.

Janet Stoner referenced one of the other universities that the panel had been following, and noted that they had a very in depth history as they were considering a specific name. She stated that she hoped the presentation we receive would be much more than an overview and that she would also be interested in having the statistics on FSU's current population.

Ms. Gibbs confirmed that she would work on obtaining those numbers for the last five years. She added that in regards to the history piece, she thought the in-depth history would be very informative and would be needed before the panel went on to the next phase. Ms. Gibbs indicated that based on the feedback from President Thrasher, her thought was to focus on specific recommendations for these three landmarks, and then go back and look at policy piece.

Ms. Stoner asserted that she originally thought the panel could draft a policy, then test it against Eppes and Roberts Hall, but with the direction received from President Thrasher, she now thought their recommendations for those landmarks will drive their work on a policy. She added that as long as the panel had reasons behind what drives their decision, they will lead into a policy, but this wouldn't necessarily be the order she would pick.

Ms. Gibbs responded that while she understood why President Thrasher asked the panel to focus on these landmarks as a first priority, she understood Ms. Stoner's perspective as well.

Norman Anderson stated that in order to get to specific recommendations as requested by President Thrasher, the panel would need to base their decisions on logic and rationale, or a draft policy.

Maxine Montgomery commented that she wasn't sure if the Eppes Professorships on campus will fall into the purview of the policy or the recommendations the panel would make.

Renisha confirmed that they were outside the scope.

Lane Forsman recalled that the panel had heard a presentation about the financial side of the university's current naming policy, with regards to donors and asked if there had been any follow-up presentations about how recognitions were researched.

Ms. Gibbs noted that there was another committee, the Campus Beautification Committee, that the panel would need to bring in as well, but that she wasn't sure if that should be done before the panel worked on their specific recommendations for Eppes and Roberts. She added that there was a whole body of work the committee looks into, which includes statues, benches, etc. and that hearing from them would be key before moving to the actual development of policy, which would be based on the logic the panel use for their recommendations on Eppes and Roberts.

Ms. Gibbs once again confirmed that there were no additional comments.

Suspended meeting for short break at 2:36pm

Ms. Gibbs reconvened the meeting at 2:59pm, and confirmed one last time that there were no other speakers that wanted to address the panel.

- Adjourn

Ms. Gibbs reminded the panel members of their next meeting on March 19th, then adjourned meeting.

The meeting ended at 3:00 p.m.

[Comment #5]

Name: *Submitted in writing anonymously, after the meeting was concluded*

Affiliation: Student

Statement: I think outcries over Francis Eppes related landmarks on campus are driven by a vocal minority that's ideologically driven. I do think that the majority of people at FSU are not bothered by these landmarks or are even that focused on them. Rather, they are simply going about their days and living their lives. The lack of apparent massive turnout at town hall meetings also lends evidence to this opinion and may highlight how much of a non-issue this all is. The fact that a motion in SGA to remove the Eppes statue failed is another testament to the lack of widespread concern for these landmarks.

The landmarks are not celebrating practices associated with a named individual, such as slavery, but rather taking note of and remembering the genuine historical toll that such individuals had the story of Florida State University. If being associated with unethical practices that were unfortunately commonplace in their respective time periods was criteria for being erased from history, then many figures would be glossed over and perhaps even blacked out from historical record, including the founding fathers of the United States, and even more recent figures, such as President Franklin Roosevelt for his policy of Japanese Internment during WWII. Where does it end?

It's not about celebrating or even giving regard to everything associated with a historical figure, but about recording and remembering objective history.