

Sustainable Leadership, Historical Remembrance, and Transforming Community: Renaming Tillman Hall
as a Substantive Element of 2020*Forward*

I join the Faculty Senate Past President signatories to the accompanying Open Forum in calling for forward movement on considering and effecting a Tillman Hall name change. However, such a call requires care in the identification, acknowledgment, and accommodation of reasonable concerns expressed by others regarding such a name change inasmuch as building a learned community bound together by mutual accountability requires such accommodation in order to flourish and sustainably meet the challenges that lie on the long arc of history. My Past President colleagues address four objections or concerns about renaming. While I agree with their conclusions, I approach and address these numbered arguments via different lines of thought.

1. I join the group of Faculty Senate Past Presidents who authored the accompanying Open Forum in their belief that amending the name of Tillman Hall is a significant act with substantive meaning and benefits beyond symbolism. For example:

The relentless pursuit itself of securing those benefits or not can substantively effect and communicate premier institutional leadership or not.

Among the evocative questions the walkway in our Scroll of Honor Memorial Park asks its observant pedestrians are: What will you commit to? What will you leave? What do you believe? *Who will you respect?* What will you fight for? Who will you protect? These are substantive questions—which is why they are (physically) etched in stone. One hopes their presence in the Scroll of Honor Memorial—a highly symbolic landscape structure—is a strong and sufficient indicator that their answers have substantive meaning, and that their content and fundamental essence extends far beyond symbolism. They are substantive central questions to be explored by a learned community at a comprehensive university engaged in considering and addressing the Tillman Hall issue.

During a public session of the Faculty Senate in the spring 2015 semester, it was alleged by a Senator from the School of Education that the Tillman Hall name had been a primary factor in the failure to attract top candidates in several recent faculty searches. In my own discussions with SoE faculty, several junior faculty members have identified their building's name as a factor deleteriously affecting their morale and attitudes about coming to work every day. Workplace engagement is at crisis low levels in much of corporate America; this is a crisis we cannot afford in higher ed. The ability to attract top faculty, support robust engagement in their work, and ensure they thrive are substantive issues that are part of the extant 2020 Roadmap, and should remain so under 2020*Forward*.

2. I join the other Faculty Senate Past Presidents in their belief that it is past the right time to consider and address the Tillman Hall name.

Two significant demographic shifts—the U.S. population growth of under-represented groups, and the aging of predominantly white baby boomers—have profound implications for our future as a nation and a university. To be sure, the U.S. saw demographic reformation in the 19th century and early 20th century that was of even larger magnitude compared to the then-current population. However, those new Americans assimilated over decades, and into a culture of Anglo-Protestant values (even if significant

numbers of early 20th century immigrants themselves were neither Anglo nor Protestant). However, it is now precisely this population that is in decline, and the timescale of demographic shift is rapid.

The (college age!) population of Americans younger than 20 and younger than 30 will become minority white in 2021 and 2023, respectively, according to Brookings demographer William Frey in his new monograph “Diversity Explosion”. There will be no majority race or ethnicity in the U.S. by 2043. Irrespective of its cause or fundamental nature, the yawning gap in 12th grade reading and mathematics scores between white students and those of under-represented groups (excluding Asian Americans), and the net loss of 15 million individuals from the white working-age U.S. population between 2010-2030 present profound challenges for allocating resources for education and workforce development.

Plans and strategies in higher ed for this ongoing demographic reformation that are largely restricted to admissions and strategic enrollment management would signal a fundamental leadership problem. All stakeholders of higher ed institutions need to be asking and answering how this reformation should be making us all think in new ways about *all aspects* of our campus and how/what we authentically communicate to external audiences. These considerations are far from symbolic; they are substantive and critical to sustainable excellence in the shared destiny that is demographics.

3. While my Past President colleagues note extant Board policy regarding renaming of buildings, such policy can in principle be superseded and made moot by, e.g., State law requiring a legislative process. Their call to “let’s begin the [legislative] process” is not as idealistic or symbolic as it might first appear. The Citadel’s Board of Visitors has voted to remove a Confederate naval jack even though the actual removal would (at this time anyway) require legislative intervention under the Heritage Act or the repeal/amendment of the Act itself (whether amendment/repeal requires a simple majority vote or a 2/3 vote may have the makings for interesting theater).

However, this author questions whether State constraints apply. While I am not a lawyer, the Heritage Act is short and simply worded. Its key passage is: “...any monument, marker, memorial, school, or street erected or named in honor of the Confederacy or the civil rights movement located on any municipal, county, or state property shall not be removed, changed, or renamed without the enactment of a joint resolution by a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house of the General Assembly approving same.” My understanding is that Tillman Hall is named after Mr. Tillman in recognition of his role in the establishment and early stewardship (as life Trustee) of the University. I.e., Tillman Hall was named neither in honor of the Confederacy nor the civil rights movement.

4. My Past President colleagues do well to at least acknowledge the existence of the concerns of campus stakeholders opposed to or uncertain about the wisdom of renaming Tillman Hall due to concerns about the loss of history. In my conversations with such stakeholders, I find to be true what I have commented upon in previous missives: people do not really fear change, they fear loss—in this case the loss of the southern history (described by Vann Woodward as “The Burden” in his seminal analysis) and/or the wholesale denigration of an entire population, its culture, and dynamic views thereof that have evolved over the past 150 years and historically been frequently reinforced with the complicit aid of northerners to (perhaps unconsciously) “dump” national burdens of failed moral, historical, and political leadership onto a region and its people.

It would be wise for renaming proponents to acknowledge these as reasonable and well-intended concerns of people of good will; while often simply expressed and dismissed too quickly, these are intellectually rich and nuanced concerns that should bring us (as a learned community) to the heart of the Falkner's exploration of the relationship between myth and reality, and the ongoing transformation of a southern burden to an American one—a transformation occurring in the limited context of higher education, as explained by MIT's Prof. Craig Wilder in his Tillman Auditorium presentation last year.

Renaming proponents should then seek explicit, tangible means to accommodate these concerns rather than expecting such individuals to simply surrender them. In doing so, one might simply ask whether the best way for the University to ensure we retain and communicate the complex and nuanced history of the university and individuals associated with it in a public, accessible, and educationally robust manner is to retain a name on a building (as a sort of scarlet letter or not).

I support the Past President Open Forum signatories in believing it is not, and calling for a more accessible, deliberate, and complete presentation of the nuanced and complex history—our shared history—of the University. Indeed, initiation of a formal effort to do so ought to be a prominent, crucial element in any renaming action. Building a learned community whose members are mutually accountable to each other should require such accommodation of reasonable concerns.

As my Past President colleagues note, this educational effort can be accomplished with physical markers, online resources, recrafted university tours, GPS-guided apps that allow individuals to build their own university tours (physical or virtual) and learn about the complex (and sometimes paradoxical) individuals, stories, and historical context associated with the university and its surroundings from the era of the Cherokee to today. Indeed, the beginnings of similar efforts are [already underway at other universities](#) such as UVa via the work of presidential-level commissions.

Several possible on-campus sites exist which could physically house public-facing educational remembrance centers and support staff. The full report of the 2020Forward Academic Facilities workgroup alludes to Trustee House (and its twin, Kinard Annex) and/or Holtzendorff as possibilities—or perhaps Tillman Hall itself, which the Honors College will soon vacate.

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