

We Have the Appetite to Rename Tillman Hall. Do You?

Clemson is currently undergoing a massive (and growing) facilities construction initiative that we are told will be the foundation for the future of University. However, something at least as pressing and significant as the raising and razing of buildings should become a priority for securing a sustainable shared destiny: the removal of the seven letters from the building currently known as Tillman Hall. We believe we could do more to build the foundation for Clemson's future by that action than by all the building projects currently blanketing campus.

Earlier this year, the Clemson University Board of Trustees chose to retain the name Tillman Hall on the building previously known as Old Main. In an editorial in the Greenville News, the chair of the Clemson University Board of Trustees was quoted as saying that the Board "would not consider the name change and wanted to make more meaningful changes beyond the 'symbolic gesture' to rename Tillman Hall." We respectfully disagree. Renaming Tillman Hall is more than symbolic, it is real. It is an affirmation that hatred, represented by actions or symbols, has no place in the Clemson University community now or in the future. While renaming Tillman Hall will, in isolation, fail to secure a sustainable and more inclusive future for the University, it is far more than symbolic. It is an affirmation that honoring those whose station and legacy were achieved in significant measure via the vilest actions of intolerance has no place at Clemson University now or in the future—even as the history, university-related role, and scholarly study of those same individuals must have an indelible role in our educational mission. It is an affirmation that community matters; that ignorance can be replaced with enlightenment; that the administration and our Board have a special responsibility as stewards of our institutional culture; and that we can hold, recognize, adapt to, and share changing values.

We have heard four reasons for not renaming Tillman Hall:

1. **It is merely a symbolic gesture with no real impact.** We disagree. The name may be symbolic but the removal of that symbol is a significant act. It is a public proclamation of what Clemson University is. Ben Tillman was complicit or directly responsible for the killing of many black people, an action for which he apparently felt no remorse. Why would we honor this legacy by retaining his name on one of the iconic buildings on campus? This is not to deny that such an action also contains symbolic elements. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in a recent Atlantic Monthly article speaking about the Confederate flag and its link to the killings in Charleston wrote: "The flag that Roof embraced, which many South Carolinians embrace, does not stand in opposition to this act—it endorses it." We do not believe that retaining the name Tillman Hall endorses (symbolically or otherwise) Roof's actions; however, removing the name provides strong and undeniably symbolic repudiation of his actions and the hatred engendered by individuals such as Mr. Tillman—and their checkered legacy.
2. **This is not the right time.** We agree, it is past the right time. The recent killings in Charleston dictate that we must make a clear statement that Clemson University is not the place for actions, or symbols, that support, even passively, bigotry and hatred.
3. **There is nothing Clemson University can do to change the name since the State legislature is responsible for renaming buildings.** We disagree. The Clemson University Board of Trustees has a policy for naming buildings and facilities. The Board policy includes a section on renaming

buildings. It states: “Under extraordinary circumstances when the continued use of the name would compromise the public trust and reflect adversely upon the University, Clemson University reserves the right to rename the building or facility.” We believe retaining the name Tillman Hall in honor of an individual whose hatred and fear were expressed in the murder of citizens of South Carolina absolutely reflects adversely upon Clemson University and the Board should exercise its right to rename the building. If the process mandated by the Heritage Act, thoroughly described in a forthcoming Open Forum, must be followed then the Board should initiate the process.

4. **If we remove the name people will forget the history of the Tillman period.** We disagree. This is neither a logical nor even reasonably probable outcome unless there is an accompanying vacuum of intellectual leadership and vision. The newly renamed building can have a plaque, a wall, a room and/or some other educational historical reflection on Mr. Tillman, his times, an even fuller account of his role in the birth of the University, and a greater expression and understanding of the complex historical record associated with Mr. Tillman that undoubtedly reflects a complex individual in a highly imperfect time. We think removing the name provides strong repudiation of his actions and the hatred engendered by the legacy of men like Ben Tillman. The name on that building is not a reflection of heritage, it is a representation of hatred.

The Chairman of the Clemson University Board of Trustees also said in the editorial that he believed he had a “good sense of most of the Clemson faculty, alumni and students” and that “There is no appetite to start changing the names of buildings.” We urge the Clemson University community to show that we do indeed have an appetite to change the name of Tillman Hall. We believe it is time to step up and commit to each other that we will maintain Clemson University as not only a high seminary of learning, but also ensure it is a beacon of moral and intellectual integrity. To do otherwise is a step back.

We, the undersigned Past Presidents of the Faculty Senate, extend to the Board of Trustees an open invitation to, and an offer of sponsorship or assistance in hosting, a campus forum having a format of their choosing in which they can better gauge the campus appetite for changing the name of Tillman Hall, and participate in a civil and intellectual exchange of views regarding the Tillman issue and the future of the University.

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