

4th July, 2020

Dear NAACP,



Declaration of Grievances:

In this time of national civil unrest when institutions across America are reevaluating their eponymous buildings and commemorative monuments, members of our student body at Brigham Young University have made several attempts to rename buildings named after proponents of slavery and racial segregation. Today, we, the Black Student Union, write to you to declare our grievances against BYU, and we implore you and your organization to help us hold BYU accountable.

We unequivocally condemn the honoring and memorializing of slave masters, segregationists, and proponents of slavery on our campus. Therefore, we demand a swift move to rectify this gross immorality. In an effort to compromise and to be more diplomatic about this process, we propose a retroactive “unnaming” of all the buildings across campus.

We are aware that there is currently a policy that effectively discontinues the naming of campus buildings after prominent figures in our church. However, we would like to retroactively apply this policy to all buildings on campus. Hence, we invite you to join us in a concerted effort to urge the Board of Trustees and President Nelson to effectuate the removal of all the current names and renaming the buildings after the colleges or programs they serve. In this manner, no names or legacy of prominent figures in our church are singled-out or “defamed.”

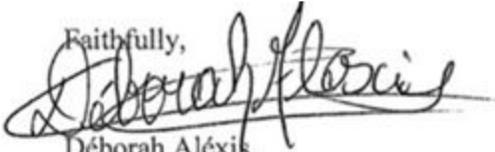
We anticipate that the move to rename all the buildings on campus would be announced as an effort to address racism at BYU, and reckon with our church’s history. Conversely, we do not expect this renaming to be a confirmation or denial of which past church leaders were racist; this moral judgment is beyond our prerogative. However, BYU, as an institution, has a moral duty to protect *all* of its students. Students of color, in contrast to their White counterparts, are devalued and constantly injured due to being compelled to enter buildings they know are named after enslavers. Thus, it becomes BYU's responsibility to address it. This is not about Abraham Smoot or Brigham Young. It is simply about keeping BYU students safe, and ensuring that as students of color at BYU, we feel like we belong, and are no longer subjugated to such gross assault on our self-worth.

From personal experiences as Black students, we know that it is physically impossible for us to feel like we matter or that we belong at BYU when arguably the most important building on our campus is named after a literal slave master. Therefore, we argue that independent of the rationale behind the discontinuation of naming buildings after people, we should retroactively move toward the unaming of all buildings on our campus.

For far too long, BYU has sat on the sidelines and allowed injustices, within the church and in the country, to go forward unopposed. In our opinion, this is unbecoming of a moral institution, and BYU's deafening silence persists to our detriment. BYU stood on the sidelines when thousands of saints, children of God, were barred from receiving full membership in the church due to ideological prejudices and racism. BYU watched as our grandparents, and their parents died without the opportunity to accept the Restored Gospel and receive the temple ordinances they needed to rightly progress toward exaltation. For decades, these racist policies, rooted in a culture of white supremacy and American political tribalism, deprived generations of zealous saints around the world from being accepted into the fold, relegating them to a sub-class membership in the church. This is a chance for BYU, as an institution, to dare to "do what is right" and we know beyond every shred of doubt that this is the morally responsible and right thing to do. Removing the names of enslavers from our campus should not be controversial, and certainly not in an institution tied to a religion modeled after the teachings of Jesus Christ.

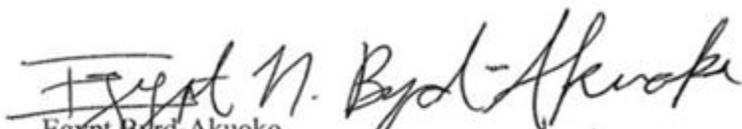
In the end, we have no power to make these institutional changes and we sadly doubt you alone have the influence to change the names of any building on our campus. But we hope that you will help us hold our university accountable. Nevertheless, when this becomes history, and our children wonder how it was ever acceptable to name buildings on our campus after slaveholders and segregationists, at least, we can say we did all we could to effectuate this change and ferociously address the enduring pandemic of racism in America and especially in our church.

Faithfully,



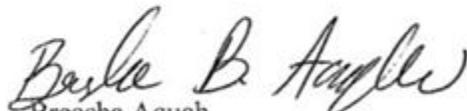
Déborah Aléxis,
President, Black Student Union

Egypt N. Byrd-Akuoko,



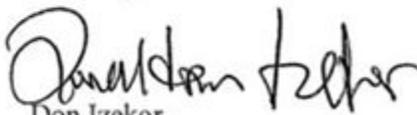
Executive Vice President, Black Student Union

Breasha Aquah,



Secretary, Black Student Union

Don Izekor,



Member, Black Student Union

Tendela Tellas,

Vice President of Advertising, Black Student Union

Additional Co-signatures

Andra Johnson



Kayla Sajava

Jayla White

Rachel Weaver

Karee Magwood

David Weaver

Kimberly Loufong



President Russell M. Nelson
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,
4th July, 2020

Dear President Nelson,

On Remembering and Monuments

Donned with the names of prominent figures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the buildings at Brigham Young University, not only allude to specific figures in our history, but they structure our daily experiences and interactions on our campus. They are like temples of knowledge, places where we, the students, gather to read, research, discourse, and refine our intellect. And though these temples undergo cosmetic lifts and ergonomic modifications, they remain fixed and unchanging in their commemoration to people who espoused divisive and contemptible ideologies that continue to perpetuate harm in our church. Today, we, the Black students of this university, walk through these temples in our Black skin wading through a sea of peers that do not look like us. Usually, we try to compartmentalize the isolation and marginalization we experience. However, it requires significant labor to repress the distress from these misfortunes, and we reason that our time at the university is short and so there is no need for us to make this space belong to us as it does to our white counterparts. As a result, upon graduation, we not only feel the relief of finally holding our earned diploma but also the freedom in the call to a more welcoming elsewhere.

When we try to compartmentalize, we soon find that there is no respite from this incessant problem. We sit in these same buildings on Sundays, and the demographic looks no different. We are again the few Black faces peppered across a White congregation. Sorely standing out is not so much the problem as is the accompaniment of uninformed rhetoric and, at times, the vicious treatment we face while moving through our church and our campus. Surviving this requires a serious fragmentation of the self while contorting to the discord between Christ's teachings and our culture's conscious and or unconscious fostering of anti-black practices. So, to withstand this treatment, we retreat parts of ourselves.

It is in that isolation that we employ the intellectual skills we have garnered from this university. In our search for solace, we pray for enlightenment while reading, researching, and discussing to learn the source of this malfeasance. It is in this ritual of discovery that we begin to understand the construction of our present. In this ritual, we learn that the figures immortalized on our statues and buildings created the "scholarship" of the racist and xenophobic iterations with which our contemporary systems are laced. In this ritual, we learned that these figures staunchly insisted in our subclass membership in the church and society even when valiant dissenters challenged them. And most importantly, it is through this ritual that we know that there is no curse, only fallibility, and consenting silence.

To those fortunate enough to not have to question their presence in our university, it may seem that the chapter of these historical figures have long since closed and have little relevance to our present. However, every time these figures permitted discriminatory policies and perpetuated racist practices, they laid bricks for the injurious present we experience in our Black bodies. We do not claim that we bear the sins of our forebears but that we bear the responsibility to do better and reconsider how we choose to remember these figures. Revering them while failing to recognize and understand the impact of their fallibility and exploitation, makes the university incapable of attempting to understand the current disparities in our institution and religious community. For those of us who are Black, and for those who understand what it is to mourn with those that mourn, these buildings, as namesakes and commemorative monuments, consequently, depreciate into symbols of selective history that undermine both our presence and their functions as temples of education.

All that we ask is that Brigham Young University recognizes that we, too, have the right to claim this space and that it is hard to do so with relics that myopically glorify a shameful past. Thus, retroactively applying BYU's current policy and "unnaming" all buildings on our campus will not only be an acknowledgment of the pain in our history, but an opportunity for the church to follow your counsel to repent.

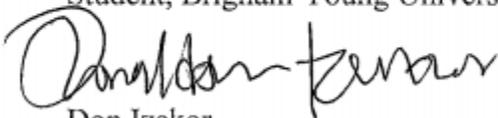
The question is not whether the names will change because we know they will, but rather when are they going to, and would you go down in history as the president who changes it? In the end, would we be able to say that we have created a history for which our descendants would not feel the need to constantly apologize?

Faithfully,



Déborah Aléxis,

Student, Brigham Young University



Don Izekor,

Student, Brigham Young University