

Remarks to the Western Washington University Board of Trustees

August 20, 2021

Steve Hollenhorst and Wayne Landis

Steve Hollenhorst

Dr. Landis and I are here regarding the section of the Legacy Review Task Force report dealing with Thomas Henry Huxley. In a few weeks I step down after nine-plus years as Dean of Huxley, so this time with you marks one of my last important actions as dean on behalf of the college. Thank you for the opportunity.

The response document in your hands is the result of a collaborative effort between scientists, historians, science educators, and other scholars from Western and around the U.S. and the world, who are reading and analyzing the LRTF report. We have posted it at a link we've shared with Rayne and will update it periodically as more contributions are submitted and vetted.

Their work reveals that the claims in the report are not only demonstrably false and misleading, but derived from disinformation sowed by anti-evolution creationists. For decades, creationists have used deceitful tactics such as *gaslighting* and *quote-mining* to undermine evolution and its most prominent figures. This disinformation is strategically placed at pseudo-science websites where it is unwittingly picked up and spread by well-meaning individuals. Sadly, that's exactly what is happening here at Western.

To be sure, Huxley's earlier views reflected some Victorian-era prejudices and bigotry. But the report ignores that he overcame these prejudices. The beautiful irony of his work on human diversity is it ultimately leads him to see the common origin, and therefore oneness and equality, of all humanity, and to become a radical social reformer whose life work was to make science and society *more* inclusive.

It ignores his leadership in the democratization of science and science education and for bringing education opportunities to the most marginalized members of society. It ignores his fight for the admission of women to universities. It ignores his role in the secularization of society and the rise of secular institutions, like Western. It ignores his decades-long battle against the powerful Anthropological Society of London, and their abhorrent support for scientific racism, polygenism, social Darwinism, the Confederacy, and slavery. It ignores his work to advance sustainable resource management.

In all, it ignores that Huxley initiated a new era of both inclusive scientific inquiry and social reform, fueled by ideals that are still relevant to our social justice work today.

This is a critical moment for Western, with national and international implications. We can succumb to creationist anti-science ideology, or we can stand up for our core mission, the pursuit of truth, and on solving the critical problems of humankind.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. taught us that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. Each generation of social reformers travels a different segment of that arc, navigating by a moral constellation unique to their time and place in history. Huxley wasn't perfect, but he brought himself and the rest of society to a more just place on that arc. We should celebrate his journey for making ours possible.

Thank you. Dr. Landis will now describe some of the most troubling aspects of the report, and a constructive way forward.

Wayne Landis

As journal editors, peer reviewers, book authors/editors, and with the support of international collaborators, we found that the Task Force report has a number of structural and factual flaws that would preclude its publication as a scholarly document or survive as an expert report to a state or federal agency.

First, the report did not use objective and independent evidence to demonstrate the claims of Huxley's racism. Many of the points and even the phrasings are taken from sources known to be biased and to support an anti-evolution agenda. We document these sources, providing the citations and even the specific phrasing. Our evidence is listed starting with Henry Morris on page 3 and continues to Brian Thomas on page 4.

Second, the committee solicited reviews from four noted scholars. White, Lyons and Reidy provided objective scholarship. N. Rupke is recognized for his extensive and respected biography of Richard Owen, a noted contemporary of Huxley. However, Rupke has taken the mantle of continuing Owen's attacks Huxley regarding the evolution and the decent of man.

Third, we rebut four specific problematic claims starting on page 7. These are 1, that Huxley contributed to values that have made education less inclusive, 2, that Huxley was not uncommonly progressive in regard his attitudes towards black people, 3, that the invitation of his grandson Julian Huxley, to speak at WWU was evidence of T. H. Huxley's views, and 4, that Huxley's claims about the inexhaustibility of fisheries contributed to the decline of salmon runs central to Coast Salish cultures. In each instance we provide fact-based refutations and in the case of the Salmon run issue we quote T. H. Huxley's specific words.

Our response identifies the anti-evolution sources the LRTF used, point to the uncited ideas and wordings, and provided the relevant correct information. In expert reports each of these issues would be problematic and disqualifying, let alone in combination.

It is absolutely imperative that Huxley College and WWU become more diverse and inclusive. Unfortunately, the disinformation and falsehoods in the LRTF report, even in the pursuit of a noble goal, stains the process, demeans the University and precludes progress. We conclude by recommending a path forward advanced Western's commitment to both social justice and academic excellence.