

**MEMORANDUM**

**FROM: WWU Board of Trustees Ad Hoc Legacy Review Committee**

John M. Meyer  
D. Chase Franklin  
Karen Lee  
Faith Pettis

**TO: WWU Board of Trustees**

**RE: Findings of Fact and Recommended Conclusions with Respect to the Naming of Huxley College**

---

Condensing the extensive resources gathered through the Legacy Review process and posted to [the Legacy Review Task Force website](#), the Ad Hoc Legacy Review Committee presents for the full Board's consideration the following findings of fact and recommended conclusions from applying the principles of de/renaming that have been advanced through the process.

**Findings of fact with respect to the personal legacy of Thomas Henry Huxley:**

1. Huxley was an accomplished anatomical biologist, prolific author, and public speaker on a wide range of topics relating to science, sociology, politics, and religion. He was a fierce debater and advocate of Darwin's theory of evolution, applying its principles to reassess the place of humanity in nature prior to Darwin's own efforts in *The Descent of Man*. In so doing, he took on the religious establishment of his time, and incurred an enduring hostility from parts of it that continue to this day.
2. Huxley's writings on race form a relatively small part of his total output. Like most white people living in Victorian England, Huxley subscribed to and expressed some views about non-white people that would today be considered patently racist. However, there is little evidence to suggest that his remarks about race were not squarely within the mainstream of popular opinion at the time, and indeed, some of his remarks on race were comparatively progressive.

3. The most commonly noted problematic expression of Huxley's views about racial hierarchy come from his 1865 essay "Emancipation Black and White," which he wrote in response to the end of the U.S. Civil War: "It may be quite true that some negroes are better than some white men; but no rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the average white man." In addition, one of the reasons he thought slavery should be abolished was because "moral law dictates that no human should dominate another without grievous damage to his own nature," and that the "master will benefit by freedom, more than the freed-man." The abolition of slavery would therefore result in the double emancipation implied in the title of the essay.<sup>1</sup>
4. Huxley's application of the theory of evolution to humans in *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* may also be understood as supporting or implying a racial hierarchy among human beings. Following an argument in Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Huxley attempted to break down the clear distinctions between species in order to show that a continuum existed between humans and higher primates, rather than differences of kind (e.g., as in Biblical creationism). Huxley's most persuasive argument (which he thought demonstrated a continuum or gradual gradation between humans and primates) was that a greater difference existed among the different "races of man" than existed between "the lowest Man and the highest Ape." By "lowest Man" Huxley meant what he thought of as "primitive" man or "savages," and he commonly used Australian Aboriginals as an example. Thus, it appears that Huxley implied that "primitive man" is more similar to the higher primates than to Caucasian humans. While this may not have been Huxley's intention in the broader context, others have used this conclusion as support for scientific racism, and it is consistent with the aforementioned commonly held views about natural racial inequalities to which Huxley subscribed.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [On page 3 of her invited contribution to the Legacy Review Task Force](#), scholar Sherrie Lyons notes that this view about the natural inequality of Black and white people was not only typical of the times but held by most abolitionists. Lyons goes on to note that the main point of the essay was to argue that women and Black people should be granted the same civil and political rights as white men, as well as equal opportunity of education. While fully in agreement with the prevailing view of his time that women and Black people were naturally inferior, his advocacy for equal opportunities was an attempt to remedy that inferiority through the actions of society: "The duty of man is to see that not a grain is piled upon that load beyond what Nature imposed, that injustice is not added to inequality."

<sup>2</sup> All four scholars invited to contribute their expertise to the process agree that this argument at least provides room for a racist interpretation and a new, scientific basis for long-held, culturally founded beliefs about racial hierarchy and value. However, the scholars disagree as to whether that was Huxley's intent with the statement in the larger context of this work. One of the scholars, [Nicolaas Rupke](#), reads this as an explicit and intentional effort to point out that Black and brown humans are closer to being primates than they are to the "higher" Caucasian "races." Rupke calls this "Huxley's Rule" and believes that it was a foundational contribution to a new, biologically grounded form of scientific racism that continues to this day. The other three invited scholars (and mainstream

5. Opponents of denaming the College claim that these two primary arguments for Huxley’s problematic racism originate from anti-evolutionist sources in the 1970s seeking to discredit Huxley.<sup>3</sup>
6. Some students of color at WWU, including members of [the Black Student Organization](#), have stated that they experience the naming of the College after Huxley as a harm, and in contradiction of the institution’s claims to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment.
7. In public life, Huxley was a champion of progressive education reform, campaigning for universal education, and the introduction of science and other modern subjects into schools and university curricula. In so doing, he opposed one of the most entrenched ideological and institutional hierarchies in Britain at the time, that of class.

**Findings of fact with respect to the historical process of naming of the College after Huxley:**

8. Neither Huxley nor his family have ever made any made any financial, service, or scholarly contributions to the development of Western Washington University.
9. According to [the Heritage Resources Huxley College Naming Report](#), the naming of the College after Huxley happened quite informally. A small group of faculty and administrators (including Past President Jerry Flora and former Dean of Research Herb Taylor) began using the name in academic administration planning meetings, and from there it spread to informal use among campus journalists. There are no records indicating that there was a formal process or a discussion among the Board of Trustees about whether to name the College after Huxley.<sup>4</sup>

**Recommended Conclusions Based on Considered Principles of De/Renaming**

In the course of its deliberations thus far, the Board of Trustees has given special attention to the principles of de/renaming captured in [the Legacy Review Task Force charge](#), as well as those

---

opinion among scholars in general) agree that Huxley’s intent was not to point out differences in kind among humans, but rather to show that there is a close, gradual biological kinship between humans and the higher primates. In Huxley’s words, “...if man be separated by no greater structural barrier from the brutes than they are from each other—then it seems to follow that...there would be no rational ground for doubting that man might have originated...by the gradual modification of a man-like ape.”

<sup>3</sup> See “Response to the WWU Legacy Review Task Force Report”, by Landis, Hollenhorst, et al.: <https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-10/Response-to-LRTF-report-updated-9-9-2021-2.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> From an oral interview with President Emeritus Flora: “Herb Taylor recommended that we call it Huxley College, after T.H. Huxley. I thought it was a great idea, he was Darwin’s bulldog, and all this stuff, so, from the beginning, we called it Huxley College. From the first inception of it. When I was sitting in the committee—Paul Woodring’s committee—instead of talking about the college of environmental studies, I kept calling it Huxley College as a proposal. By the time it became a reality, its name was automatically Huxley College. Everybody was just calling it Huxley College.” ([https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-04/wwucentennial\\_flora\\_02\\_04a.pdf](https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-04/wwucentennial_flora_02_04a.pdf))

used by [the Yale University Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming](#). Based on the findings of fact above, the Ad Hoc Legacy Review Committee recommends the following application of those principles for consideration by the full Board.

1. The Legacy Review Task Force charge states that consideration for removing a name should be guided by at least the following factors:
  - A. The harm caused by retaining the name.** Does the behavior or legacy of the person for whom the feature is named compromise or conflict with the University’s mission, including both its commitment to intellectual integrity and its commitment to diversity and inclusion of all members of the Western community?
  - B. The potential harms of de/renaming.** The names of certain University features may have a positive value for students, faculty, staff, or alumni, who may find de/renaming disrespectful of their views.
  - C. Considering and weighing relevant factors.** Such factors include:
    - i. The relation of the honoree to the University’s history.
    - ii. The behavior of the honoree in terms of creating a significant negative impact on the core mission of the University and its teaching and learning environment.
    - iii. Broader community identification with the feature.
    - iv. The strength and clarity of the historical evidence.
    - v. Whether the harm [of retaining or removing a name] can be mitigated, and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing an individual’s wrongful behavior.

**Recommended Conclusions Based on Principles of De/Renaming in the Task Force charge**

2. **The harm caused by retaining the name.**
  - A. Huxley’s statements in “Emancipation Black and White” are clear, and for his era, common, expressions of racism. His work on the differences between and among humans and primates in *Man’s Place in Nature* may be interpreted as providing support for racial hierarchies and scientific racism, even if that was not his intention in the broader context of the work. Regardless of how these statements are contextualized or interpreted, some students of color at WWU experience them as harmful, and they do not reflect the institution’s current values around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Asking these students, and the University community more generally to try to appreciate the more nuanced historical and academic context in which they were made seems to be callous and inconsiderate of the experiences of those who have been traditionally unwelcome in higher education and that Western is committed to serving. Perpetuating

even a perceived harm in defense of a person who has made no contribution to WWU reflects the wrong priorities.

3. **The potential harms of de/renaming.**

A. The university's commitment to intellectual integrity may come under fire.

Understanding Huxley's statements in their broader social and academic context is not only significant, but it also involves the kind of evidence-driven critical thinking central to the teaching mission of higher education. On this view, it is this principle of academic integrity, not the honor of Huxley himself, that is ultimately at stake. By removing the Huxley name, the University may be communicating that its commitment to the feelings of its students and faculty of color supersede its commitment to pursuing the evidence and the truth in all its details, and wherever it leads.

4. **Considering and weighing the relevant factors.**

- i. The relation of the honoree to the University's history. **Huxley has no relation to the University's history, other than the fact that the College has been named for him for over 50 years.**
- ii. The behavior of the honoree in terms of creating a significant negative impact on the core mission of the University and its teaching and learning environment. **It appears that retaining the name will have a negative impact on the teaching and learning environment, especially for the sense of inclusion among students of color. While criticisms may be leveled about the academic integrity of the assessment of Huxley that could lead to denaming, these would not seem to have the same significance of impact to the core mission of the University or the teaching and learning environment.**
- iii. Broader community identification with the feature. **Some alumni identify strongly with the Huxley name, and University Advancement has received at least one letter promising to retract a bequest if the name is removed. Faculty who are opposed to removing the name appear to be more concerned with the issues in 3A above than with their affections for Huxley, per se. Students generally do not seem to be aware of who Huxley was, or, for the reasons presented in 2A, do not wish to be identified with the name.**
- iv. The strength and clarity of the historical evidence. **As noted, the historical evidence is complex and may be reasonably interpreted in different ways.**
- v. Whether the harm [of retaining or removing a name] can be mitigated, and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing an individual's wrongful behavior. **An effective effort to communicate the complexities involved in the Board's decision—and the specific reasons why the action was**

taken—may be the best approach to mitigating the harms of removing the name.

### Recommended Conclusions Based on [The Yale University Principles of Renaming](#)

- A. Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the university? **Again, the facts are complex. Huxley made claims about race that are in conflict with the mission and values of the institution. Huxley was also a champion of universal education and increasing the role of science in curriculum and policy.**
- B. Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived? **On the topic of race, Huxley’s views were firmly within the mainstream of Victorian thought, and in some respects (see footnotes above), he was progressive. His views on the common ancestry of humans and higher primates were contested in his own time by various religious figures.**
- C. Did the University, at the time of naming, honor a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University? **The records do not indicate this was the case.**
- D. Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University’s mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University’s mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University? **While the College is not a gathering place, per se, it is reasonable to think of the College as a community. Unlike many schools where students identify with the university as a whole (e.g., WSU or UW), students at Western tend to identify with their departments, majors, and colleges.**
- E. Decisions to retain a name or rename come with obligations of non-erasure, contextualization, and process.
  - i. When a name is altered, there are obligations on the University to ensure that the removal does not have the effect of erasing history. **This may be addressed by creating signage or a display of the kind mentioned above.**
  - ii. When a name is retained, there may be obligations on the University to ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history. **The Ad Hoc Committee recommends removal of the Huxley name.**
  - iii. The University ought to adopt a formal process for considering whether to alter a building name on account of the values associated with its namesake; such a process should incorporate community input and scholarly expertise. **Developing a formal process of this kind going forward, based on lessons learned from this process and best practices from other institutions with**

**more experience, could be among the actions taken by the Board in rendering its decision on these cases.**