

Education and Transparency: Changes in Campus Iconography

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Woodrow Wilson's standing has been widely recognized and honored in academic and public life. He was the APSA's sixth President, 1909–1910, while he was President of Princeton University, and he was U.S. President 1913–1921. The charge for the APSA's Woodrow Wilson Award, created in 1947 specifies: "The Woodrow Wilson Award is given annually for the best book on government, politics, or international affairs. The award, formerly supported by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, is sponsored by Princeton University. It carries a cash prize of \$5,000."¹ Princeton University created "the School of Public and International Affairs" in 1930, and in 1948 when "a graduate professional program was added, the School was renamed to honor Woodrow Wilson, who served as the 13th President of Princeton University, governor of New Jersey and 28th president of the United States."² Other major national institutions have been created, including the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in Washington, D.C., which hosts visiting scholars, and serves as "the official memorial to President Woodrow Wilson. . ." It is "the nation's key non-partisan policy forum for tackling global issues through independent research and open dialogue. . ."³

The invitation to write a short essay on the recent call by student members of the Black Justice League to remove Wilson's name from various Princeton institutions was extended to "a wide range of colleagues whose views on this issue will interest our readers."⁴ I willingly accepted this invitation to comment on this controversial request. The idea is not limited to Wilson and Princeton University as a number of Universities and Colleges, states and local

governments have been called upon to change their names, and divest themselves of their current identities, flags, colors, namesakes. At Yale, students have challenged the name of Calhoun College, a residential College named after John Calhoun, South Carolina Senator, Vice President, Secretary of State and strong defender of slavery. Yale's President Peter Salovey greeted last Fall's 2015 freshman class with a call to "have a thoughtful and public discussion of what we ought to do"⁵ The conversation is still underway although a portrait of Calhoun was removed from the College dining room in January of this year.

More recently, Princeton University's Board of Trustees announced that it would not change the name of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs or Woodrow Wilson College. A Trustee Committee appointed to review the question, recommended "transparency in recognizing Wilson's failings and shortcomings. . . , a strong reaffirmation by the Board of Trustees of the University's commitment and determination to be a place that is truly diverse and inclusive. . ."⁶

The Trustee report, part of a complicated process of learning about Wilson, convened a conversation about Wilson, his views and his writings, consulting with scholars and biographers,⁷ University administrators, alumni, faculty, and students, and opened a website for a discussion in which more than 635 comments were offered. The Trustee Committee noted. ". . . Wilson had a transformative impact on the University, the country, and the world. *It is also clear that he held racist views and took or permitted racist actions.*"⁸ In citing and remembering Wilson, Princeton has venerated him in a way that has not been forthcoming or transparent about this harmful aspect of his legacy."⁹

The decision not to remove Wilson's name was accompanied by administrative recommendations, movement toward "education and transparency," changes in "campus iconography," and changes in Princeton's motto. On April 5, following the recommendation of a May 2015 report of a Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the University announced the appointment of LaTanya Buck, the founding director of Washington University in St. Louis's Center for Diversity and Inclusion, to a new Princeton position, Dean for Diversity and Inclusion. Princeton's decision will be criticized by some as holding closely to the status quo, and failing to take the appropriate action, to divest the institution of its well honored, but "racist," to quote the Princeton Trustee Committee, former President and graduate.

I agree with this recommendation to retain the Woodrow Wilson name. Removing the name of an

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esteemed President and Political Scientist would be highly controversial, but avoiding controversy is not the reason to retain Wilson's name within the APSA's institutional domain. Annette Gordon-Reed, the Harvard Law School scholar of Thomas Jefferson and his relationship with Sally Hemings, recently served on a Harvard Law School Committee which considered whether the Law School's crest, which bears a symbol of the Isaac Royall, an Antigua slaveowner whose gift endowed the first law professorship at Harvard, should be removed.¹⁰ Gordon-Reed opposed the committee's recommendation to remove the crest, arguing "people *should* have to think about slavery when they think of the Harvard shield; but, from now on, with a narrative that emphasizes the enslaved, not the Royall family."

But the APSA has not proposed an end to the use of Woodrow Wilson's name, nor has it even begun to discuss the possibility of such a proposal. It would be wise for the Association's members and leadership to consult the various Princeton University materials that have been created in the wake of this debate, including the *Report of the Trustee Committee on Woodrow Wilson's Legacy at Princeton* 2016 (see footnote 6) and also the online exhibition "In the Nation's Service? Woodrow Wilson Revisited" <http://www.puwww.us/exhibit.html>. It is important for any academic association, especially the national association of Political Scientists to understand more fully than Wilson's prominent place in the nation's history has previously permitted, the man to whom we offer such praise and honor.

Notes

- 1 American Political Science Association URL <http://www.apsanet.org/PROGRAMS/APSA-Awards/Woodrow-Wilson-Foundation-Award> accessed April 4, 2016 4:59 pm.
- 2 Woodrow Wilson School, "Our History", <http://www.princeton.edu/about-wws/our-history>, accessed April 4, 2016.

- 3 Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, About the Wilson Center <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/about-the-wilson-center> Accessed April 4, 2016.
- 4 Jeff Isaac, Editor in Chief, *Perspectives on Politics* Email: "Invitation to Participate in a Symposium—Perspectives on Politics, December 9, 2015. Alexandra Markovich, "Princeton Board Votes to Keep Woodrow Wilson's Name on Campus Buildings", *The New York Times*, April 4, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/05/nyregion/princeton-board-votes-to-keep-woodrow-wilsons-name-on-campus-buildings.html>
- 5 Noah Remnick, "Yale Grapples with Ties to Slavery in Debate Over a College's Name." *New York Times*, September 11, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/12/nyregion/yale-in-debate-over-calhoun-college-grapples-with-ties-to-slavery.html>
- 6 *Report of the Trustee Committee on Woodrow Wilson's Legacy at Princeton* 2016. <http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S45/97/32G05/Wilson-Committee-Report-Final.pdf>
- 7 See the Wilson Legacy Review Committee and the section on Scholars and Biographers for their comments: <http://wilsonlegacy.princeton.edu/observations>
- 8 Emphasis added by this author.
- 9 Report of the Trustee Committee. . . , p. 3.
- 10 See Annette Gordon-Reed's dissent: "A Different View" https://today.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Shield_Committee-Different_View.pdf, and Anemona Hartocollis, "Harvard Law to Abandon Crest Linked to Slavery", *The New York Times*, March 4, 2016: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/05/us/harvard-law-to-abandon-crest-linked-to-slavery.html?_r=0 accessed April 15, 2016.