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Victoria Sutton
Texas Tech University

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NATIVE AMERICA: UNIVERSITIES AS QUASI-CITIES, SOVEREIGNTY AND THE POWER TO NAME

By: Victoria Sutton

Abstract

Universities as quasi-cities have an obligation to reflect on their educational mission, and public universities have a responsibility to Native America through the unique federal trust responsibility owed to Native Nations by the federal government. The naming of buildings and transitioning to responsible adulthood requires universities, administrators, and students to reflect on who we were, who we are now, and whom we hope to be. Collaborative efforts to work with Native Nations should be undertaken with regard to naming issues.

Sovereigns possess power to control historical narratives and outcomes through their sovereign power to (1) name geographical places; (2) protect names as intellectual property; (3) use military naming protocols; and (4) name buildings. With this power comes the unique trust responsibility to Native Nations and Native Americans to recognize and acknowledge harms that have negative generational impacts. Universities are urban spaces and environments that are especially important spiritually to Native people who live, work, and attend classes there.

Once universities are on notice that buildings on their campuses may have names that inappropriately glorify those responsible for widespread human rights violations, they are at least ethically obligated to (1) review the alleged harms; (2) remove and replace the name; (3) mitigate the harm by offering a prominently displayed permanent educational explanation or exhibit that is based on facts; or (4) if the committee determines the second and third mitigation steps are not warranted, then the University should seek other means of recognizing harms by alternate programs, museum exhibits or other educational strategies, e.g., establish an American Indian Studies degree program.

Creating an environment of reflection and action to mitigate historical harms that come from failures of the past to recognize these harms is an important role for universities to protect and advance the future of Indigenous people in America.

I. INTRODUCTION

It was December 1598 when the Spanish conquistadors ravaged the Acoma people for provisions and attacked Acoma women on their way to their quest for silver. The Acoma fought back, and in response, a Spanish expedition for the sole purpose of punishment and retribution

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1 Victoria Sutton, MPA, PhD, JD. Associate Dean for Digital Learning and Graduate Education at Texas Tech University. Distinguished Horn Professor.
followed. A three-day battle ensued, and in retribution, Juan de Onate, imprisoned several hundred Indians to the Santa Domingo Pueblo, where they stood trial, presided over by Juan de Oñate, himself, who also delivered the punishment\(^2\) —

men over twenty-five had one foot cut off and were sentenced to twenty years of personal servitude to the Spanish colonists; young men between the ages of twelve and twenty-five received twenty years of personal servitude; young women over twelve years of age were given twenty years of servitude; sixty young girls were sent to Mexico City to serve in the convents there, never to see their homeland again; and two Hopi men caught at the Acoma battle had their right hand cut off and were set free to spread the news of Spanish retribution.\(^3\)

In 2020, on the University of New Mexico campus, countless Native Americans, and many from the very tribal nation of Acoma Pueblo so cruelly attacked by Juan de Oñate, are made to look up at a building named the “Oñate” building.\(^4\) In July 2020, the building sign was temporarily covered with the designation “Building 156.”\(^5\)

Juan de Oñate adoration is also on federal and state transportation property in the Southwest. Suppose you pass through the El Paso International Airport in Texas. In that case, you will look up at a conquistador bronze statue at the entrance to the airport that is Juan de Oñate, erected in 2007 because “no historical figure is perfect but when it's all said and done, he contributed to the culture of El Paso.”\(^6\) Cruelty is a “contribution to culture” we should reject.

In January 2021, the University of California-Berkeley removed the letters of their Kroeber Building—a building named after an anthropologist from the early twentieth century whose unethical work led to showcasing a California Native American Ishi in Kroeber’s museum without regard for his safety.\(^7\) In the recommendation to remove the name, the building naming review committee found that “Kroeber also declared the Ohlone people, Natives who traced their lineage to the Bay Area, to be


\(^3\) Id. at 145; see generally, Office of the State Historian, Don Juan de Oñate (last visited Nov. 27, 2022), available at https://www.tidridge.com/uploads/3/8/4/1/3841927/don_juan_de_ornate.pdf.


\(^7\) David Shane Lowery, An Obituary for Alfred Kroeber (or...Can American Indians Speak?), ANTHRODENDUM (Feb. 5, 2021), https://anthrodendum.org/2021/02/05/an-obituary-for-alfred-kroeber-or-can-american-indians-speak/.
cultur[... retains unwarranted authority and

14 Amherst College, Frequently Asked Questions, (Oct. 20, 2017), https://www.amherst.edu/amherst/story/amherst-pride/mascot/faqs. (“The College has no desire to change or erase the historical record or its past connection to Lord Heffery Amherst.”).
perpetuates their flawed body of work. Historical trauma and harm set in motion efforts to survive for generations and continue for descendants to this day. Native Nations are increasingly challenging these institutional harms. As trusted centers of learning, universities should be on the frontline of reflection and responsible education to address these harms.

Native Nations are sovereigns, and they are named with the states as one of the three sovereign types of governments in the United States Constitution. However, the United States Supreme Court characterize Native Nations’ sovereignty as that of “domestic, dependent nations.” This gives rise to the federal government's trust responsibility and obligation to honor its treaties. Honoring treaties means recognizing express and implied rights reserved to the Native Nations, which include hunting rights, fishing rights, and water rights, but also traditions and culture that contribute to the continuity of the Native Nations’ governments. The federal policy of self-determination recognizes the right to define the culture, identity, and traditions that are carried on by each generation. Harm can come when human rights harms and even genocidal histories and harms are misrepresented or buried in historical facades by the sovereign power responsible for protecting those Native Nations. The policy of self-determination is calling for Native Nations to reclaim and assert their inherent sovereignty, which has brought new reflection on confronting these ongoing harms to Native people and Native Nations that have violated treaties as well as human rights.

II. UNIVERSITIES AS QUASI-CITIES?

The functions of universities beyond education involves all of the functions required of a city—energy, utilities, trash collection, food service, security service, vehicle registration, mass transit services, apartments/dormitories, green spaces, and recreational spaces. Universities are educational industries that generate funding from tuition, federal loans for tuition, federal research grants, patents, and royalties. They maintain substantial endowments that are massive investment funds. Public universities have tax-free status and generally comply with all rules of the state that created them.

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16 See e.g., Alison Fields, Visualizing Juan de Oñate's Colonial Legacies in New Mexico, 4 J. GENOCIDE RES. (SPECIAL ISSUE) 471 (2022).
18 Cherokee Nation v. Georgia., 30 U.S. 1, 2, 8 L. Ed. 25 (1831).
19 Id. at 1. The federal government’s relationship with Native Nations is like that of “a ward to its guardian.” Although the court found the Cherokee Nation has no jurisdiction to bring a case, they ultimately reversed that holding in Worcester v. Georgia, 31 U.S. (6 Pet.) 515 (1832), so these two cases are read together, making the foundation cases uniquely fused. Christopher M. Holman, State Universities Push the Limits of Eleventh Amendment Sovereign Immunity at the Federal Circuit, 39 Biotech. L. Rep. 345, 348 (2020), available at https://www.liebertpub.com doi/epdf/10.1089/blr.2020.29194.cmh. “. . . the Federal Circuit has repeatedly held that state universities are an ‘arm of the state,’ and thus enjoy the privilege of state sovereign immunity under the Eleventh Amendment.”; see also Regents of Univ. New Mexico v. Knight, 321 F.3d 1111, 1124 (Fed. Cir. 2003) (recognizing the statutes of a state university as an arm of the state.).
fiscally, a university is very much like a city; and for public institutions, even more so like a city because they share many of the same features as the state, including state-approved budgets and sovereign immunity.  

Some universities have more power of self-governance than do the cities of their respective states. One example is that Harvard University predates the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and its rights are expressly preserved in the Commonwealth Constitution. Another example is the University of California which gained the status of a “public trust” in the 1879 California Constitution, giving it autonomy to control and build an educational network in the state. As a result of this successful model, the University of California at Los Angeles is the largest employer in the city, and so has as much or more power than cities. The California University system has even been referred to as the fourth branch of state government.

Free speech can be constitutionally limited in universities where there is the risk of “substantial disruption.” A recent report found that about eighty-eight percent of universities and colleges have some restrictions on free speech. Experimentation is underway on university campuses to limit a new category of speech termed, “hate speech.” Hate speech is constitutionally protected if it does not fall into categories of obscenity, fighting words, or other low-value speech categories. While hate speech is constitutional and cannot be limited, many universities are permitting the censorship of speakers that students disagree with or that espouse points of view that some students consider hate speech that might result in “substantial disruption.” However, where a public university speech code limits hate speech, at least one federal court has held this to be unconstitutional. This censorship is primarily out of fear of universities that the

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20 Christopher M. Holman, State Universities Push the Limits of Eleventh Amendment Sovereign Immunity at the Federal Circuit, 39 Biotech. L. Rep. 345, 348 (2020), available at https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/epdf/10.1089/blr.2020.29194.cmh. “. . . the Federal Circuit has repeatedly held that state universities are an ‘arm of the state,’ and thus enjoy the privilege of state sovereign immunity under the Eleventh Amendment.”; see also Regents of Univ. New Mexico v. Knight, 321 F.3d 1111, 1124 (Fed. Cir. 2003) (recognizing the status of a state university as an arm of the state.).

21 See M.G.L.A. Const.


26 Id.

27 Roberts v. Haragan, 346 F. Supp. 2d 853 (N.D. Tex. 2004). Plaintiffs brought suit challenging a university speech code banning “physical, verbal, written or electronically transmitted threats, insults, epithets, ridicule or personal
controversy will result in harm to property or persons, and while it is useful to take these precautions, it does diminish the free speech rights we enjoy in America. The role of the university as *en loco parentis*, or standing in on behalf of the parents as a kind of state parent, while the student is attending the university, is a form of acting in the place of parents, and in this case, to protect them from physical or emotional harm. So free speech is limited at universities and colleges, often overreaching permissible constitutional freedom. It could be argued that cities and public places do not have these limitations on free speech, so universities may be safer places but may also deprive students of important preparation for entering life outside the university. But the authority of naming buildings and streets on campus is an official act of the university, and in the case of a public university, acts as an extension of the sovereign.

Looking closer at the comparison of the university to the city, in both cities and universities, there is an inherent power over the student or resident, respectively. The university has the power to award degrees and even sanction bad behaviors. The city has the power to enforce ordinances and arrest and penalize crimes. Both are specific powers for those state-created organizations that are vested by the state. So, for our purposes, public universities imitate cities, though with more protective characteristics, and so provide a kind of *quasi-city* for students as they transition into independent adulthood to live in cities.

For all these reasons, naming buildings and transitioning to responsible adulthood requires universities, administrators, and students to reflect on who we were, who we are now, and whom we hope to be, and not forget that they are an extension of a sovereign government.

A. *What is an Indigenous View of this Question?*

Many Indigenous cultures think of this question in terms of the Seven Generations principle. The Seven Generations Principle tells us to take a view first, looking back three generations to see the impact the decision we are considering makes; then to take a view, looking at our current generation to whom we are currently responsible and consider how this decision we are contemplating will affect the current generation. Finally, to take a view looking ahead three generations, to consider how our decision we are

attacks . . . personally directed at one or more specific individuals based on the individual’s appearance, personal characteristics or group membership including, but not limited to, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, citizenship, veteran status, sexual orientation, ideology, political view or political affiliation.” The court held the speech code to be facially overbroad in covering “much speech that, no matter how offensive, is not proscribed by the First Amendment.”

28Dixon v. Alabama State Bd. of Ed., 294 F.2d 150 (5th Cir. 1961). The reduction of any constitutional right will require due process, unlike an absolute *en loco parentis* principle.
contemplating will affect the next three generations is our last step in the process. When naming buildings, we must consider our impact and influence on these seven generations. The impact we have on the students who pass through these buildings on their journey to adulthood should not be scarred by finding themselves in a society that glorifies those who would do them harm or crush the identity that comes from their family histories.

III. SOVEREIGNTY AND POWER IN NAMING

With sovereignty comes responsibility as well as the power to tax, govern, and regulate. Sovereignty in international law is the power to govern one’s territory and people. This has been a principle understood in international law since the founder of international law, Hugo Grotius, established the concept of the nation-state as the way people around the globe organize themselves. 

Sovereign power can be exercised (for this focus on naming) in several ways: (1) naming geographical places; (2) legally protecting names as intellectual property; (3) military naming protocols; and (4) naming buildings. These naming powers are vital because they become a part of the identity of the sovereign and its inhabitants and carry importance, authority, and sometimes the force of law.

A. NAMING GEOGRAPHICAL PLACES

With sovereignty comes the power of naming places. The names of the states and cities, geological landmarks, and even streets are official functions of the state and local governments. The federal government also has a naming role in geographical places. The United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) is responsible for the names of places within federal jurisdiction. Recognizing this sovereign role to name places, Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland appointed a new advisory board on name changes where inappropriate names are officially used and designated by the federal government. The board’s members are non-federal government individuals and federal officials, so all of its work will be open (The Sunshine Act), and documents will be available for the public to view (Freedom of Information Act). Many Native Nations have tolerated inappropriate names of sacred sites and other geographic features, which is a welcome recognition of

29 David E. Wilkins, How to Honor the Seven Generations, INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY (June 18, 2015), https://perma.cc/LYW8-XSU6.
31 It was created by Pres. Benjamin Harris in 1890 with Executive Order 28, and is still the body today that decides on geographic names in its present form under the Dept. of Interior. It was reorganized and institutionalized by Congress in 1947 and is codified at 43 USC sec. 364-364f. Current board at https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names/member-directory (visited May 15, 2022).
the federal government to exercise its sovereignty in responsible naming. In September 2022, the Board of Geographical Names announced the removal of more than 650 names using derogatory terms.33

The federal government, as a sovereign, has a unique trust responsibility to federally recognized tribes,34 and arguably that trust is also owed to state-recognized tribes by the federal government or state government. The distinction between federal and state-recognized tribes is a Twentieth Century convention, intended to limit federal obligations to only Native Nations that meet certain administrative criteria invented by the Executive Branch.35 The obligation extends to commitments in health care, food, housing, education, water, energy, and internet infrastructure. The trust responsibility should also extend to cemeteries, and other sacred sites but both remain unprotected by federal law or the United States Constitution.

The naming power of the sovereign has also failed when faced with an application to register offensive trademarks such as sports teams’ mascots. The United States Supreme Court held this violated the First Amendment Free Speech Clause because of the limitation on speech that is merely offensive. Had the court looked at these issues through the principle of the trust responsibility rather than framing these issues as Constitutional First Amendment issues,36 the outcome could have been different.

Using a First Amendment analysis, freedom of expression has the same test as freedom of speech and should be protected accordingly. However, the United States Supreme Court has determined there are exceptions to free speech that require protecting children, limiting obscenity, and prohibiting fighting words. Symbolic conduct that involves burning a cross was deemed not protected by constitutional freedom of expression where there is an intent to intimidate and because of a historical threat of violence associated with it.37

32 Id.
33 See Cherokee Nation v. State of Ga., 30 U.S. 1, 17, 8 L. Ed. 25 (1831) (the Supreme Court opined tribes are “domestic dependent nations” with the federal/tribal relationship resembling “that of a ward to his guardian); See Worcester v. State of Ga., 31 U.S. 515, 583, 8 L. Ed. 483 (1832) (when the Supreme Court heard a case that eventually incorporated this principle of “the existence of the Indians as a separate and distinct people, and as being vested with rights which constitute them a state, or separate community—not a foreign, but a domestic community—not as belonging to the confederacy, but as existing within it”).
But when a case came before the federal court that considered whether commercial speech should be protected, the court fashioned a new test in the Free Speech jurisprudence.

B. Sovereign Control of Trademark and Copyright

Sovereigns also control what can be named with a commercial value under trademark and copyright law. Eliminating the disparaging term, “Redskins” as a sports team trademark continued to gain support over years of litigation, including from the National Congress of American Indians, the diplomatic organization of Native Nations in the United States. The United States Patent and Trademark Office instituted a policy to reject offensive trademarks, citing as authority the Lanham Act, which prohibits any trademark that could "disparage ... or bring ... into contemp[t] or disrepute" any "persons, living or dead," and consequently rescinded the Redskins trademark. However, the United States Supreme Court found that offensive names are still protected speech under the First Amendment in 2017, and the Lanham Act disparagement clause violated the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. This United States Supreme Court opinion indicated the fight to remove the Redskins trademark was all but over when the Redskins team management voluntarily agreed to cease using the disparaging name, but only after sponsors threatened to withdraw their support.

Native Nations are also becoming more proactive in defending their identity in intellectual property as well as misappropriation. Native Nation names like “Cherokee” and “Navajo” have special meanings and identities for their citizens. They also carry significance in the Indian Arts & Crafts Act which criminalizes the sale of articles that are promoted as made by Native Americans. These Native Nation names have been used to portray a market-driven image of Native America in order to sell goods. The Navajo Nation has effectively stopped the appropriation of their name and merchandise being marketed by the retailer, Urban Outfitters, using trademark infringement as well as violations of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act. The case was settled in 2018 with Urban Outfitters agreeing to collaborate with the Navajo Nation to sell authentic Navajo jewelry and other culturally appropriate items. The Cherokee Nation asked

Jeep to stop the use of the Cherokee name on one of its Jeep models, but the CEO declined to cease the use of the name after talks with the Cherokee Nation Tribal Chair in 2021.43

C. Sovereign Control of Military Naming

The federal government’s military has built a tradition of naming national defense equipment after Native Nation names – examples are the Apache helicopter and the Chinook helicopter. The United States Army created a directive on how to “assign popular names,” and this directive included that Army aircraft will be named for “Native American terms and names of Native American tribes and chiefs.” The directive criteria require that “Names should appeal to the imagination without the sacrifice of dignity and should suggest an aggressive spirit and confidence in the capabilities of the time. . .” 44 Once a name is selected, the United States Army must seek permission from the Native Nation to use the name.45 Frequently, the Native Nation will provide a blessing, a dance, or the Native Nation’s specific tradition. A great deal of pride in naming an Army aircraft for a Native Nation or Chief is typically the case, and this is due in part to a process of collaboration with the Native Nation on the naming and launching process.46, 47 Not all agree with this naming tradition. Suzan Shown Harjo testified before the United States Senate that all of these naming traditions were dehumanizing and should stop.48

Not only are Native names used in military equipment, but they can also be used to name military operations. Despite the prohibition on selecting names that are offensive to Native Americans, in 2011, the military made an unforgivable blunder by giving their target, Osama bin Laden, the code name, “Geronimo.” The Manual on naming in the section on “nicknames” prohibits nicknames that “[C]onvey connotations offensive to good taste or derogatory to a particular group, sect, or creed.”49 However, there is no guidance or restriction on the selection of confidential code names, and the Osama bin Laden operation was deemed confidential as well as the name. But after the mission was complete, the first words heard by the public after the killing of Osama bin Laden was

44 U.S. Dep’t of Army, 70-3 at I-11 4(G), Army Acquisition Procedures: Army Pamphlet (2018)
45 Under Sec’y of Def. for Acquisition and Sustainment, Model Designation of Military and Aerospace Vehicles (2004)
“Geronimo EKIA,” clearly indicating Osama bin Laden was an enemy killed in action. This brought immediate sadness and rebuke from Indian Country, where many view Geronimo as a hero and resisted colonization as a true leader. In addition, Native Americans are overrepresented in the United States military service by twice their proportion of the population, and choosing this name felt much like a betrayal to all of Indian Country.

Jeff Houser, Chair of the Fort Sill Apache Nation (Geronimo’s last residence), wrote a letter to President Obama, expressing his disappointment in learning the codename:

Through various media reports our Tribe found out that the code name used for Osama bin Laden on this operation was Geronimo. As you may or may not know, Geronimo was a member of our Tribe. He is buried in the Fort Sill Apache Prisoner of War Cemetery on the Fort Sill Army Base in Lawton, Oklahoma where he died after almost 23 years of captivity.

We are quite certain that the use of the name Geronimo as a code for Osama bin Laden was based on misunderstood and misconceived historical perspectives of Geronimo and his armed struggle against the United States and Mexican governments. However, to equate Geronimo or any other Native American figure with Osama bin Laden, a mass murderer and cowardly terrorist, is painful and offensive to our Tribe and to all native Americans.

. . . This action by your Administration showed neither compassion toward Native Americans nor a change in the perception of us or an understanding of our struggle. Please do not allow this injustice against one of our greatest figures to stand. Only you Mr. President can take steps to right this wrong.

No apology or response was forthcoming from President Obama.
A Congressional hearing was held the next day. Susan Shown Harjo testified before the United States Senate and explained that using Geronimo as the codename for Osama bin Laden perpetuated the “Indian-as-enemy stereotype [that] is so deeply embedded in the American psyche.”

There was no apology, retraction, or response to this outrage from Indian Country over the naming of a terrorist after a revered freedom fighter, Geronimo. Unfortunately, this indicates the lack of cultural understanding and considerations of dignity and identity of Native Nations by the federal sovereign, which has failed in their trust responsibility.

D. Naming Public University Buildings

Hills are always more beautiful than stone buildings. Living in a city is an artificial existence. Lots of people hardly ever feel real soil under their feet, see plants grow except in flower pots, or get far enough beyond the street light to catch the enchantment of a night sky studded with stars. When people live far from scenes of the Great Spirit’s making, it’s easy for them to forget his laws.

----Tatanga Mani, Walking Buffalo, Stoney First Nation
Speech given in 1958.

We are a part of the ecosystem, and it is important not only to Native Americans but to humanity to consider how to continue to be a part of the environment, even when living in an urbanized world. In 2007, the number of people living in urban areas surpassed the number of people living in rural areas in the world. With the majority of humanity living in the built environment, it makes buildings even more important and meaningful. So, it follows that naming a building also has meaning and power.

Once universities are on notice that there are buildings on their campuses with names that are inappropriately glorifying those responsible for widespread human rights violations, they are at least ethically obligated to: (1) review the alleged harms; (2) remove and replace the name; (3) mitigate the harm by offering a prominently displayed permanent educational explanation or exhibit that is based on facts; or (4) if the committee determines the second and third mitigation steps are not warranted, then the


56 Hannah Ritchie & Max Roser, Urbanization, OUR WORLD IN DATA (Sept. 2022), https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization. “In 2017 55% of the world lived in urban settings. The UN estimates this milestone event – when the number of people in urban areas overtook the number in rural settings – occurred in 2007”
University should seek other means of recognizing harms by alternate programs, museum exhibits or other educational strategies, e.g., establishing an American Indian Studies degree program might be an appropriate response.

Naming buildings on university campuses has been often regulated by boards or committees who typically make choices about which alumnus should be honored with a building, but now these committees are facing a new role. Now they may be asked to reconsider decisions made in decades past about honorific naming choices. While these committees make recommendations, ultimately, the decision to act with responsibility lies with the governing board of the university. Because the public university is an extension of the state sovereign and so carries with it the responsibilities and obligations of that sovereign (e.g., equal protection, non-discrimination in hiring, etc.); there is also an obligation to carry out the sovereign obligations where there is a treaty relationship with the sovereign, federal or state.\textsuperscript{57}

Some universities have chosen a new tradition to make all names temporary. The University of Virginia’s committee on renaming suggested a policy to review honorific names every twenty-five years and donor names every seventy-five years.\textsuperscript{58}

The obligation to consult with tribal governments is a federal one,\textsuperscript{38} but where universities receive federal funding, it would be appropriate to include their compliance with consultation with Native Nations where cultural and traditional issues are raised. It is typical to include Executive Orders in grant proposal documents requiring agreement from the grant recipient university, and the Executive Order requiring consultation with Tribal governments\textsuperscript{59} should be part of the grant compliance.\textsuperscript{60}

IV. GLORIFICATION IS NOT EDUCATION

The glorification of historical figures is different from education about them. For far too long, all historical figures, whether it is the founders of a scientific field or founders of a nation, have been far too reluctant as a people to acknowledge their shortcomings for fear of denigrating the field or nation they founded. Experts are more likely to be believed if they can talk about the strengths as well as the weaknesses of their

\textsuperscript{57} The private university has constitutional compliance requirements but also an ethical and moral duty to its students, alumni, faculty and staff as a community, but they do not have the same obligations as a public university as an extension of the sovereign state.


\textsuperscript{59} \textit{MEMORANDUM ON TRIBAL CONSULTATION AND STRENGTHENING NATION-TO-NATION RELATIONSHIPS}, (Jan 26, 2021), \url{https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/26/memorandum-on-tribal-consultation-and-strengthening-nation-to-nation-relationships/}.


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scientific theories and conclusions in expert testimony. Similarly, we are likely to have
greater belief and knowledge about our founders and historical notables if we can talk
about all aspects of their lives, good and bad. So, education is not simply glorifying these
historical remembrances without discussing the truth of their unethically stolen wealth,
life successes on the backs of others, human rights violations, or misguided policies. We
must include all aspects of their character to be truly an educational experience.

When the USSR collapsed in 1991, the former Soviet countries were left with
thousands of statues glorifying the leaders of the oppressive communist regime in urban
spaces at public squares, parks, and municipal buildings, including Stalin and Lenin
statues. In Lithuania, a country of the former Soviet Union (FSU), they used the removal
of these statues as an opportunity to create a park with the statues on full display—
in order to never forget these mass murderers, glorified as great leaders, who once peered
down on them in every public place. It is a powerful reminder of overcoming an
oppressive past that has similarities with the genocidal past and dishonorable dealings
with America’s Indigenous people and lessons about how to regard the past without
trying to erase it, forgetting its lessons.

The presence of these historical characters represented by their names on building
signs or as statues can be turned into teaching moments to better understand our history.
If we omit these stories or try to erase them from our histories, we lose the chance to
make sure this past is never repeated. Further, if we try to erase past wrongs, it is even
more unlikely that retribution, truth, and reconciliation, or settlement for specific harms
will be achieved. Informational plaques that can explain the true histories of statues and
buildings can be pathways to healing this practice of glorification. Each situation is
different, using these factors when taking steps to address the misinformation of the past.
An approach to inform rather than to erase will go much further to ensure we, as a
society, do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

V. CONCLUSION

Sovereigns possess the power to control historical narratives and outcomes
through naming geographical places, protecting names as intellectual property, military
naming protocols, and naming buildings. With this power comes the unique trust
responsibility to Native Nations and Native Americans to recognize and acknowledge
harms that have negative generational impacts using these naming powers.

Currently, federal efforts are underway to replace the names of 650 geographical locations under federal control, named with an offensive name to Native Americans. It is time that universities, as quasi-cities and extensions of the state sovereign, acknowledge the special responsibility they have to educate and to be an environment of reflection and action to mitigate historical harms. Failing to recognize these harms in the past can be mitigated by acting in the present and reducing the burden of historical harms for the future generations of Indigenous people in America.