

Recognizing Renaming as a *Normal Act and Invaluable Opportunity*

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Sources of Excerpts Included for Reference

- The Role of the West in the Construction of American Identity: From Frontier to Crossroads
- What's in a Name? The Geopolitics of Renaming Landmarks
- Historical geographies of place naming: Colonial practices and beyond
- What's in a Name? How Words Are Monuments
- Why we must teach the ugly side of public lands history...
- Why Words Matter: The ideological battle over what we call things
- Recognition, Reinterpretation, and Restitution: Universities and their Contested Pasts
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- Queen's University Drops Sir John A. Macdonald's Name: A Symbolic Step Toward Reconciliation
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- It's time to own up to the racism and violence embedded in the names of parks and public lands
- What's in a Name? What It Means to Decolonize a Natural Feature.
- A Guide to Changing Racist and Offensive Place Names in the United States
- Principles and Values of Restorative Justice
- Renaming Streets to Promote Reconciliation

(Re-)Framing Arguments against (Re-)Naming

Recognizing Renaming as a *Normal* Act and *Invaluable Opportunity*

Renaming as Abnormal	Renaming as Normal
<p>Erasing History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “History” is fixed, we know it and what to think about it • History as recounting and recording • Recognizing “naming” as a historical act – both as a sociopolitical act by those doing the naming to establish what they identified as important (values as expressed in events, persons, etc.) and, as such, an act in history to be investigated, interpreted and analyzed (8-12) 	<p>Adding to and Improving History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “History” is incomplete and being better understood (5-6) • History as investigation, interpretation and analysis (5-6) • Naming anew is also a historical act – <i>we have the opportunity to make history</i>, in part reflecting our improving understanding of history and even more so as a sociopolitical act to express the values we identify as important and worthy of promotion (14-17)
<p>Applying Inappropriate Judgment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Recentism,” “nuance,” “singling out,” “perfection is an inappropriate standard” 	<p>Embracing our Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We have an opportunity to not be bound by prior limited judgment, knowledge, understanding</i> – and we can and should continue to look for such opportunities (13-21)
<p>Brand Loss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current name has recognition, and changing it will lead to a loss of a recognized name and the attention that that the name attracts 	<p>Brand Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We have the opportunity to come up with a valuable brand – particularly one that reflects our values and aspirations for the park and our community</i> • Renaming can <i>greatly</i> improve marketing opportunities
<p>Distraction for Government & Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are other more important matters for our attention, particularly for the Town administration 	<p>Regular, Productive Function</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Renaming is actually extremely common, and government bodies and processes for such are also common, which we have the opportunity to learn from</i> (13-17, 23-24) • <i>Arguments against renaming are unfortunately repetitive and obstructive of productive action to seize opportunities</i>

(Re-)Framing Arguments against (Re-)Naming

Naming Anew as an Opportunity to Strengthen Our Community - Looking to Restorative and Transitional Justice Models

Restorative Justice (General Framework)



Transitional Justice (More specific framework of Restorative Justice for Societal-Level Harms)



Taos Park Naming Opportunity



On History

and our progress of doing it, knowing it and understanding it

The Role of the West in the Construction of American Identity: From Frontier to Crossroads

- Considered as the founding father of [American] Western history, Frederick Jackson Turner is famous for a lecture he gave in 1893, entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History". [Turner's "frontier thesis"] has had an extremely long-lasting impact, and may be considered as one of the main documents of American historiography.
- Turner's thesis met with a huge success, and... remained the most convincing way to explain the American past and American identity for a very long time. Part of this success is due to Turner's nationalistic tone... [I]t depicted an American past that was as glorious and noble as that of any Old World power.
- According to Turner, it was the frontier that... distinguishes Americans from Europeans, and gives the American nation its exceptional character. Turner famously asserted: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development".
- Asserting that it is the westward movement that best defines the United States, Turner... even goes as far as claiming that slavery would not be such an important subject were it not for its relation to westward expansion.
- [N]ew Western History... suggests a new reading of the Western past. One of the main features of the movement is its rejection of the word "frontier", which the historians consider as racist and ethnocentric. To Turner, indeed, the frontier was "the meeting point between savagery and civilization".
- Despite the efforts of many scholars, during the twentieth century, to point out the shortcomings and inconsistencies of Turner's interpretation, and to call for a new paradigm to explain the American past... [t]he appeal of the frontier to popular imagination made it even harder for historians to discredit...

The Role of the West in the Construction of American Identity: From Frontier to Crossroads

- New Western Historians banish the "f-word" (Limerick 1994, 72) from their vocabulary altogether, and replace it with the idea of "conquest".
- While Turner depicted the westward movement as a march of civilization and progress, the new historians denounce the expansionism and colonialism of the nation. As prominent New Western Historian and author of the landmark study *The Legacy of Conquest* Patricia Nelson Limerick states: "Conquest forms the historical bedrock of the whole nation, and the American West is a preeminent case study in conquest and its consequences" (Limerick 1987, 27-28).
- Criticizing Turner for his focus on white male pioneers, [New Western Historians] also aim at writing the history of all the actors of the western past: men, women, families, African-Americans, Chinese, Mexicans, Native Americans, etc. The Western past is not a one-dimensional story of white men marching westward and replacing savagery by civilization, resulting in the ennoblement of the American character, but a multicultural tale highlighting ethnic and racial diversity, with people coming from the East, but also from the North, the South, and the West.
- Neither is it the story of the unique and exceptional subduing of an empty land, but a tale of environmental destruction and despoliation. In other words, far from the triumphalism, nationalism, and celebratory tones of Turner's interpretation, the New Western Historians' reading of the Western past is dark, emphasizing exploitation and conquest, and resting on moral ambiguity.
- [H]istorians Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron associate the [American West] with that of "borderlands", in order to study "the variegated nature of European imperialism and of indigenous reactions to colonial encroachments." Aware of the provincialism of their history in an era of globalization, New Western Historians themselves have called for, in the words of Patricia Nelson Limerick, "comparative studies of processes of colonialism and imperialism, [to locate] the region in the big picture of world history."

On “Naming”

as an historical sociopolitical act

What's in a Name? The Geopolitics of Renaming Landmarks

- Naming and renaming always carry performative meanings. By denoting places, we are engaged in a language game: conceiving and communicating in a certain language and translating it to others subtly reveals the assumptions and sometimes even ethical commitments we make as we call a place by one name and not another... [I]t is a way to assert civilizational identities by selectively and symbolically valorizing certain historical heritages over others.
- The ability to rename things is also a matter of interpretive authority and normative orthodoxy. Who has the knowledge to arbitrate what a thing is called? If you are the one to name it, you are also assumed to know it. To truly know something is a way to own it...
- [N]aming a landmark, region, or cultural practice is about collective ownership, way of life, and even being itself.

Historical geographies of place naming: Colonial practices and beyond

- Place name studies have witnessed a considerable evolution from the traditional approach to a more critical approach that considers power relations and the contested nature of the cultural politics of place naming.
- Studying the colonial act of place naming enables geographers to investigate how colonial powers named or renamed places to legitimise territorialisation and weaken territorial claims by indigenous populations.
- [Scholars] have explored how (re)naming was used to order society and assert political and ideological control by the coloniser.
- Power was inscribed onto the landscape through place names which helped to generate a sense of belonging for the coloniser and, ultimately, was a tool for exerting control over social and physical environments.
- By considering colonial place naming as an authoritative act, an understanding of how power is socially constituted and inscribed onto the landscape has been developed.
- Finally, as part of a discipline-wide attempt to decolonise geography, place name studies are challenging past colonial (re)naming processes. Scholarship that recognises the struggle and resistance underlying the process of place naming is crucial for reaching fair political and cultural representation and to prevent 'symbolic annihilation of marginalised social groups and their historical identities'. Recent geographical work has begun challenging past colonial (re)naming processes by confronting settler place names.

Words are Monuments (as of 2025)

What's in a Name? How Words Are Monuments

- A national reckoning with American history and racial injustice has been playing out across various sites, from monuments to museums, school curricula, and increasingly, maps.
- We encounter place-names all the time, relying on them every time we pull up an address on Google Maps, and every time we send or receive a package. Place-names are also a key part of the shared language through which we come to understand and navigate the world... They shape consciousness, recruiting us, in everyday life, into a manner of seeing, understanding, and relating to the land.
- From the colonial perspective, place-naming is an exercise in power and authority, a symbolic means of claiming sovereignty over a place. “It was only natural,” one researcher explained in 1925, “that the European colonists who first settled on the shores of America should commemorate their sovereigns and patrons by naming places in their honor.” What came “naturally” to the European colonists was domination. For them, naming was equivalent to claiming.
- For people whose ancestors were dispossessed of their tribal homelands and subject to brutal practices of cultural genocide (including the banning of Indigenous languages and cultural practices), colonial place-names are an extension of a long and ongoing project of forced assimilation—a violent means of forcing Indigenous Peoples to navigate the world according to coordinates defined by their colonizers. Like monuments to slave traders and genocidal colonists, colonial place-names are a source of ongoing violence for the descendants of slaves and colonized peoples who are forced to encounter them on a daily basis. As “spatial acts of oppression,” monuments work to set the historical coordinates through which people encounter the world.

The Wilderness Society (2019)

Why we must teach the ugly side of public lands history...

- While the conservation movement has many storied moments worth celebrating, the legacies we choose to focus on are far too often centered around the tales of white men “protecting” parks and public lands.
- In fact, the full history of national parks, forests and other public lands in the United States is interwoven with episodes of great cruelty and dispossession, often inflicted on the original and traditional inhabitants of what we call North America. And oftentimes the stories of people of color... are left out completely.
- Likewise, the story of how the Southwest became part of the U.S. is incomplete if it does not include the dispossession of Latinx landowners after the Mexican American War. Some of the lands taken after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo became a part of America’s public lands system, but we tend to gloss over that, or ignore it entirely, when extolling the beauty of these “shared” open spaces.
- To form an inclusive picture of U.S. public lands history, we must examine its many different layers and deal honestly with its darker chapters – and... tell this more complete story.

Why Words Matter: The ideological battle over what we call things

- Words have been in the news a lot lately, at least in terms of words that force us to face controversial parts of our history.... Many question whether they should remain as place names or mascot, band, and team names; others suggest that this is merely an overreach of political correctness. Who is right?
- Unfortunately, there is no easy answer, but perhaps the question being asked is the wrong one. The focus on whether we should eradicate the use of such terms, and the political maelstrom it engenders, diverts us from looking deeper into how these terms evolved and the social and cultural histories driving the battle over their use.
- A famous saying in linguistics is that 'each word has its own history.' While we often use words without knowing these broader histories, that doesn't mean this history is forgotten by all, or that our positions relative to this history will be the same.
- To begin with, many place names are colonial legacies... Given this history, and since the meanings of words include not just semantic aspects but, critically, also the connotations that those words take on as they are used over time, it's not hard to see why words become sources of socio-political struggle... Understanding where these words come from may help us to understand why they are, to some, deeply problematic and painful reminders of a racist past.
- Part of what makes us differentially sensitive to what terms mean is that we come to them from different perspectives. Our understanding of a name or term is often shaped dramatically by our experiences with those labels and the historical, social, and economic asymmetries that accompany them. We might not personally find a word offensive because the history behind it hasn't affected us. But that doesn't mean ignoring that history makes the word, or the world, a better place.
- We may not realize it, but in the 1960s and '70s, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names removed derogatory words from hundreds of American place names, including many with the N-word as well as the word Jap, as a result of their offensive and racist history. This more recent push for revising names is not new or unprecedented.

On Naming Anew

as an historic sociopolitical act

Recognition, Reinterpretation, and Restitution: Universities and their Contested Pasts

“Historians want to celebrate the past warts and all, [while those responsible for institutions] want to forget about it (insofar as it fails to enhance [their institutions’] positive image).”

- “Reinterpretation and renaming are responses to accepting the difficult parts of... history,” which come after research and recognition of difficult heritage
- “Working through” renaming and replacing contributes to society “com[ing] to terms with the past,” which requires addressing abuses that happened in the past, not ignoring them or minimizing them.
- While some suggest that renaming and replacing can either “erase history” (that is perceived to be admirable) or make difficult history less visible, rather renaming and replacing “adds to history,” filling in gaps and making it more complete.
- Of course, the history that was appealed to in naming a site in the first place is recorded, and the action of renaming or replacing can not only also be recorded as a means of capturing developing history, this documentation of the process can also present more completely the history in which the original namesake was a part with those marginalized by the previously incomplete history more appropriately featured.
- Otherwise, by not taking the opportunity, are we choosing to continue to actually make difficult heritage less visible, obscuring or diminishing abuses, if not actually implicitly validating them as justifiable in the name of whatever the motivation was to honor someone in the first place, protecting perpetrators at the cost of the victims?
- Renaming and replacing also allows for us to be more inspirational, particularly in representing the progression of society’s values beyond those now considered antithetical, treating earlier decisions as perfect and not considering from what more worthy, more inspiring history or values are we taking away the space to promote. We can both give ourselves and give future generations permission to update names and institutions to better reflect our ever more perfecting values.

Joanna Burch-Brown in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2020)

Should Slavery's Statues Be Preserved? On Transitional Justice and Contested Heritage

- Removing a monument or renaming a building is a historical moment in itself, which can make a lasting impression in public memory and become part of both written and oral records of events.
- In their best enactments, removals can mark a moment when a community made a decisive stance to acknowledge past wrongdoing, distance itself from the rationales that justified that wrongdoing, and reaffirm shared commitment to universal human rights and equality.
- These moments and the debates building up to them are potentially powerful pedagogical opportunities. They attract intense public attention and thus open a window in which it is possible to reeducate a public about the historical record and also set a direction for future values.
- Ideally, as exemplified in Mitch Landrieu's speech marking the removal of Confederate statues from New Orleans in April 2017, these events involve (1) forthright acknowledgment, apology, repudiation, or condemnation of the wrongdoing; (2) non vindictive, accessible explanations of the history and its significance; and (3) reaffirmation of core public values of equality, universal respect, joy, and togetherness.
- In their best forms, the overall effect can support healing, providing a sense of psychological resolution through acknowledgment, and reaffirming dignity and moral protection of the whole community.
- Removals can take place in very different ways. They can take place through well structured, consultative processes,.... [and] can also result from institutional leadership without wider consultation.

Christopher Eisbruger, Princeton University President, in *Washington Post* (2020)

I opposed taking Woodrow Wilson's name off our school. Here's why I changed my mind.

- Wilson [the 28th President of the United States, 1913-1921] was an undergraduate alumnus of Princeton, a distinguished professor on its faculty and eventually its 13th president. He transformed the place from a sleepy college to a world-class research university. When Wilson tried to reform the university's social clubs, the trustees fired him because his ideas were too progressive. [He] went on to become governor of New Jersey, president of the United States and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize [for his role in negotiating an end to World War I and developing the League of Nations].
- For decades, the university has celebrated Wilson's record of public service and his achievements... On the Princeton campus, Wilson's name was everywhere: on the prestigious School of Public and International Affairs, a residential college and the university's highest award for undergraduate alumni. The first part of the university's informal motto, "Princeton in the nation's service," was drawn from a Wilson speech.
- Wilson was also a racist. He discouraged black applicants from applying to Princeton. While president of the United States, Wilson segregated the previously integrated federal civil service, thereby moving the United States backward in its quest for racial justice and contributing to the systemic racism that continues to damage black lives and our country today.
- Wilson's genuine achievements, I thought, gave Princeton sound reasons to honor him. He is a far different figure than John C. Calhoun or Robert E. Lee, people whose pro-slavery commitments defined their careers and who were sometimes honored for the purpose of supporting segregation or racism. Princeton honored Wilson without regard to, and perhaps even in ignorance of, his racism.
- And that, I now believe, is precisely the problem. Princeton is part of an America that has too often disregarded, ignored and turned a blind eye to racism, allowing the persistence of systems that discriminate against black people. When Derek Chauvin knelt for nearly nine minutes on George Floyd's neck while bystanders recorded his cruelty, he might have assumed that the system would disregard, ignore or excuse his conduct, as it had done in response to past complaints against him. This searing moment in our national history should make clear to all of us our urgent responsibility to stand firmly against racism...
- When a university names its public policy school for a political leader, it inevitably offers the honoree as a role model for its students. However grand some of Wilson's achievements may have been, his racism disqualifies him from that role.
- For me, the decision was wrenching but right. Wilson helped to create the university that I love. I do not pretend to know how to evaluate his life or his staggering combination of achievement and failure. I do know, however, that we cannot disregard or ignore racism when deciding whom we hold up to our students as heroes or role models. This is not the only step our university will be taking to confront the realities and legacies of racism, but it is an important one. Our commitment to eliminate racism must be unequivocal, and that is why we removed the name of Princeton's modern-day founder from its School of Public and International Affairs.

Queen's University Drops Sir John A. Macdonald's Name: A Symbolic Step Toward Reconciliation

- [As Canada's first prime minister, Macdonald was] ...a foundational figure in the creation of Canada... [and] ...a figure of profound historical importance, ...instrumental in shaping the political and legal framework of the nation... His vision led to the creation of a unified Canada, forging a path for the country's development during the 19th century.
- [Macdonald also played a role in] "establishing and promoting the residential school system... designed to assimilate Indigenous children by forcibly removing them from their families, erasing their cultures, and subjecting them to systemic abuse.
- [C]onsultation revealed widespread concerns about the conflicting messages sent by Macdonald's name... For many, the continued association with Macdonald's legacy undermined their sense of belonging and safety with the university environment.
- Queen's University's decision to remove Sir John A. Macdonald's name from its law school building is a symbolic yet powerful act of reconciliation. It reflects the broader societal movement toward acknowledging the harm caused by colonialism and the need to address systemic racism. As Canada continues its journey toward healing, actions like these represent important steps in creating a more inclusive and just society. By reckoning with its past, Canada can move forward with a greater commitment to equality, justice, and reconciliation.
- For many..., the removal of Macdonald's name represents a meaningful acknowledgement of the harm caused by colonial policies. It is seen as a step toward healing and a recognition that institutions of higher learning must be places where all students feel valued, safe, and respected. This decision reflects Queen's University's broader commitment to confronting systemic racism and fostering an environment where all students, regardless of their background, feel welcome and valued.
- The removal of Macdonald's name is also part of a global movement that seeks to reframe the way we understand history. It invites us to acknowledge that history is not just a series of achievements, but also a collection of actions that have shaped the lives of people, especially those who have been oppressed or marginalized. [More specifically, it is] part of a larger movement that questions how historical figures associated with harmful colonial practices should be memorialized in modern times... part of a growing trend... where monuments, buildings, and institutions named after figures with problematic legacies are being reconsidered.
- This move also sends a message to the broader Canadian Society about the need for introspection and change in how we engage with our history. It challenges Canadians to reconsider the ways in which we memorialize historical figures, particularly those whose actions have caused lasting harm to marginalized communities. [The process] ...highlighted the need for... institutions to reconsider the way they honor historical figures whose actions contributed to systemic harm... leading to a broader conversation about how institutions can be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalized groups. By confronting the legacy of figures like Sir John A. Macdonald, these institutions can foster a deeper understanding of history and its implications for the present and future. The decision to remove Macdonald's name is not an end, but rather a beginning. Queen's University has pledged to continue its efforts to promote reconciliation and address systemic racism. The removal of Macdonald's name is part of a larger effort to build a more inclusive, equitable, and just university community.
- Institutions across Canada and beyond must continue to engage with these issues thoughtfully creating spaces where marginalized voices are heard and respected. This process will require ongoing dialogue, reflection, and, most importantly, a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths.

On Naming Anew

as an embrace of our progress

Taking a longer historical view of America's renaming moment

- The United States is amid a renaming moment as part of a wider global reckoning with public memorials, symbols, and names. Names affixed to a wide range of streets, university buildings, military bases, consumer products, sports teams, and even non-human species are being challenged and even changed because of their association with and valorization of racism, settler colonialism, slavery, and patriarchy.
- Meanwhile, there is growing pressure to address how the nation's traditions of naming have worked to erase indigenous ties to the land and neglect contributions of people of color, women, and queer communities.
- [O]pponents tend to stoke public resentment about where these campaigns will stop in rewriting the nation's landscape of names. These... appear more committed to maintaining the socio-economic order and avoiding difficult conversations than substantively addressing past and ongoing wounds of discrimination and challenging the oppressive structures underpinning that order.
- The wholesale dismissal of name reform as a superficial exercise too easily dismisses how members of historically marginalized groups... can and do view naming practices as important to their lived experiences, identity struggles, and political-emotional wellbeing.
- Stated directly, names play a significant role in the physical and ideological operation of the nation.
- Ongoing (re)naming conflicts are part of... deciding and debating which words and associated memories are used to identify the United States and who matters culturally or is recognized as a citizen.
- These debates strike at the heart of how the United States comes to terms with... the political aspirations of those groups and peoples long denied a place at the naming table.
- [S]truggles over American naming are part of the work of expanding civic imagination.

The Wilderness Society (2021)

It's time to own up to the racism and violence embedded in the names of parks and public lands

- [A]s the nation seemed to experience a moment of clarity and catharsis about some of its sins, ranging from European colonization to slavery to the murders of Emmet Till and George Floyd... [o]ne of the most visible manifestations of this awakening has been a discussion about our memorials, parks and other shared spaces—especially a renewed scrutiny of which ignoble people they honor.
- [T]he offending element isn't always a statue, which is relatively easy to remove. It can instead be something incorporeal yet very basic: the name given to the land itself.
- Numerous parks, national forests, wilderness areas and other public lands bear either racial slurs or the names of Confederate soldiers, racists and frontier figures responsible for killing or dispossessing Indigenous people.
- Part of the conservation movement's reckoning with its own historic racism, including some ideas and policies embraced by Wilderness Society founders, has to be owning up to those naming sins and our complicity in glossing over them as we promote the causes of public lands protection or outdoor recreation.
- Because we all have imperfect histories, we should feel comfortable revisiting them and rethinking our past judgments about who or what deserves to be immortalized.
- We're all imperfect, of course. But because we're aware of that imperfection, we should find it entirely appropriate to revisit our past decisions and those of our ancestors. We should feel comfortable, especially, realizing the imperfection of our judgments about who is a hero, and about which language deserves to be immortalized.
- Working together..., we hope to bring about a future when parks and public lands are fully inclusive – not only in the policies and culture that govern who gets to enjoy them, but in who or what they honor.

On Restorative and Transitional Justice

as models for approaching the opportunity to name anew our park

Dina Gilio-Whitaker in *Sierra*, the Magazine of the Sierra Club (2022)

What's in a Name? What It Means to Decolonize a Natural Feature. Can changing the title of a mountain or river make it more culturally accessible?

- Name-changing is more than just the acknowledgment of the United States' history of brutality toward... peoples. It signals a desire to account for this past and to build a future that holds the possibility of righting profound wrongs.
- After European settlers arrived in North America, sooner or later most sought to replace the Indigenous populations. Typically, this began with the claiming and (re)naming of the land. Colonizers routinely imposed the names of their old countries on Native American lands, ...with names that reflected their religions ...and ...names of some who actively worked to destroy Native American nations...
- It's particularly offensive to Native Americans when geographical features in our ancient homelands and sacred places bear the names of violent colonizers. Take Kit Carson Peak in Colorado...
- "What we need in Indian Country is to have advocates from outside Indian Country bring attention to these issues." – California assemblyman James C. Ramos, the first California Indian ever elected to the state legislature and former chairman of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians.
- ...[E]ducation is the key to correcting a legacy of place-names that celebrate a dishonorable past. As an Indigenous woman, I still remember the sense of dissonance I felt as a kid stemming from the incorrect history I was taught in school compared with the stories my mother told me about the injustices our people suffered. As an educator, I know firsthand that young people need to trust that they are being told a truthful story. Changing offensive place-names is a step in that direction.
- ...[I]n 2020, the Alterra Mountain Company, which owns a network of ski resorts in the United States and Canada, announced plans to change the name of [Squaw Valley] to Palisades Tahoe. The question now is, will municipalities that bear the same offensive moniker follow suit?
- ...[E]ducating the public is a major challenge when for so many years people have accepted the names, no matter how derogatory they are. "They say the name, you know, and they go... there... all those years. What's wrong with that? Well, it's been bad. It's been bad from the beginning, and it's bad now. But if we... don't... start getting these names changed, then we're going to see another 100 years go by with these names still there."

A Guide to Changing Racist and Offensive Place Names in the United States

- Place names tell important stories about our past and help shape our future. When we use them to honor people who perpetrated atrocities against Native Americans, we tacitly endorse a story in which colonial expansion, conquest and genocide is honorable. That story heroizes people who sought to exterminate the Native American men, women and children who have lived for time immemorial on these lands.
- A naming regime—and an accounting of history—that is more honest and inclusive and less tolerant of cruelty could recognize important figures and events in our nation’s history while also acknowledging the pain and perseverance of communities of color and other groups often forgotten in these retellings.
- Contrary to some popular rhetoric, renaming racially insensitive or otherwise inappropriately named geographic features or land units is not “canceling history.” Rather, it is an opportunity to provide a more honest accounting of America’s past and a gesture toward healing historic wounds.
- Of course, renaming geographic features is not a complete solution. It won’t undo the harm done to African Americans, immigrants, Native Americans and others by white settlers and the U.S. government. It certainly won’t undo slavery or the colonial takeover of Native lands. But it is a vital step nonetheless, and one that can initiate a broader conversation about our past, and how that past informs our present. In this way, renaming places plays a key role in the national discourse about racism and privilege.

Joanna Burch-Brown in *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2020)

Should Slavery's Statues Be Preserved? On Transitional Justice and Contested Heritage

- The debates over statues and place-names can be seen as part of movements for **transitional justice**.
- **The United Nations defines transitional justice as 'the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation'**.
- In its guidance on transitional justice, the United Nations enjoins communities to seek peace, reconciliation, and justice as mutually supporting aims, and it enshrines four key rights to (1) justice, (2) truth, (3) symbolic and material reparations, and (4) guarantees of nonrecurrence.
- **Preserving problematic monuments... sends an ambiguous message about a community's commitments to justice and accountability.** Removing honours from human rights violators is one of the few forms of corrective justice available when a rights violator is dead. Demonstrating commitment to accountability can be important for restoring the status of those harmed by human-rights abuses historic and present.
- **[P]reservation [of problematic monuments] stands in tension with rights to truth.** Commemorations usually honour a community's 'great and good'. Maintaining historically honorific statues may be in tension with truth-telling requirements if it has the effect of minimizing or downplaying the seriousness of an injustice.
- **[P]reservation [of problematic monuments] can stand in tension with duties of symbolic repair.** Objects like Confederate statues can reasonably be read as expressing disregard for those harmed by the community's historic injustice. Mere preservation sends an ambiguous message. A better strategy will be one that decisively reaffirms the dignity of a derogated group.
- **[P]reservation [of problematic monuments] can symbolize disregard for the lives of a derogated group, thus providing little reassurance... that their rights will be protected...** reinforcing wider social messages of disregard... [and] being regularly primed to think of the racist motivations behind the monuments.
- **[W]hen institutions are perceived as obscuring difficult history, this leads to distrust and tension between communities.**

A Restorative Place (2020)

Principles and Values of Restorative Justice

- [R]estorative justice aims to unite communities in celebration of shared values while addressing and resolving conflicts with a focus on reconciliation.
- Restorative practices are centered in addressing and mending harm... repairing the damage done to relationships when wrongdoing occurs, which causes individuals and communities to experience a sense of violation.
- [R]estorative justice... provides a framework for accountability but also promotes the restoration of relationships and the well-being of the entire community.

Respect

- [E]ngaging in restorative practices as a way to repair harm demonstrates respect... Community members must acknowledge any harm caused to another... regardless of intent...

Responsibility

- When community members... can understand how others were affected, they are expected/responsible to initiate the process of repair.

Repair

- Restorative practices call for the restoration of broken relationships and involve a commitment to taking the necessary steps to rectify the inflicted harm.
- In the process of repairing the harm we may get to root causes [and] mindsets... recognizing that some harm may surpass the capacity for quick repair.
- In restorative practice we also recognize the systemic elements that cause irreparable harm and take into consideration how they might be infused within conflict spaces.
- Identifying the harm and contributing to its repair involves the active participation of... stakeholders, allowing individuals to regain or strengthen their connections, self-respect and the respect of others.

Dina Walters for the American Planning Association (2023)

Renaming Streets to Promote Reconciliation

- In the aftermath of the Civil War and the rise of the Lost Cause myth, symbols of the Confederacy rose across the South, including street names. Following George Floyd's murder and the protests that followed across the country in the summer of 2020, street names, among other memorials of the Civil War, became a focus of change in the City of Charlotte.
- In the Druid Hill community of Charlotte, North Carolina, a predominantly Black neighborhood, residents lived with a constant reminder of the pain and enslavement their ancestors suffered under Jefferson Davis Street. The street was named after the president of the Confederate States, a slave owner who took on the role of chief executive during the Civil War.
- Under the leadership of Mayor Vi Lyles, the city determined it was time for reconciliation and concrete change that reflected the diverse population of the city, and telegraph a message of inclusivity and equity.
- Mayor Lyles, along with city council members, appointed a 15-person Legacy Commission to make recommendations for making these changes. The commission was tasked with reviewing all of the monuments and street names on public property in Charlotte.
- In the report on the Legacy Commission's recommendations, more than 70 city streets were identified as having ties to the Confederacy, slavery, and white supremacy. This presented a significant undertaking, one that the city was limited in budget to overcome.
- With the Legacy Commission, Charlotte demonstrates that visible, progressive change is possible. An effort of this scope, while undoubtedly challenging, is worth the outcome to undo generational harm.