



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

What Named Spaces Tell Us About Academic Libraries

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Many academic library buildings are named after someone, whether an inspirational thinker, a wealthy donor, or an influential professor or college president. These names are so commonplace that it can be easy to ignore where they came from and what their significance is. This paper takes a case study approach to uncovering the meanings of these types of names. We will consider the purposes of named spaces, analyze the history and significance of named library spaces across several institutions, and explore how to make our spaces more reflective of our libraries' aspirational values. By examining what academic biases and societal oppressions the names of our buildings and spaces reflect, this paper will encourage thinking about race, gender, and class on our campuses in a new way.

INTRODUCTION

Academic library buildings and the spaces within them are often named after someone, which is a way to memorialize, honor, or recognize the people whose names they bear. The names of libraries act in ways that are commonplace, giving campus constituents an easy way to refer to a particular library or location. This makes it easy to lose sight of where these names came from and what they mean, including what they can tell us about the ways our libraries and universities function, and what values or types of success they implicitly endorse.

This paper takes a case study approach to uncovering the meanings of library names across several institutions: a community college, a HBCU, a regional public university, and a large private university. We will look at the purposes of named spaces, from funding to inspiration to academic branding, and consider specific named spaces at different settings through the lenses of whiteness and class. Through an examination of these names and what they reflect about each campus's history and values, we invite thinking about equity, diversity, and inclusion in a new way. We hope that readers will find relevance

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due to recognizing the named spaces at their library and on their respective campus, and that our examples will inspire reflection on their own environs, including how their workplace is shaped by and reflects certain world-views. Research that addresses library space typically does so through a functional lens, but this paper asks larger questions about the significance of one aspect of library spaces.

The names of our spaces matter. Academic libraries seek to welcome all learners, but are our claims of being open to all realistic when our physical libraries do not reflect the varied experiences and aspirations of our students? By looking at who our buildings and spaces are named after, and what it means when they are unnamed, we consider what we can learn about our institutions and academic libraries' places in academe—a hub that is sometimes reflective of slow-changing histories and canons, but with the potential for generating new ideas and opening knowledge at the same time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though named buildings and spaces in libraries and higher education have existed since the founding of these institutions, only in recent years have these names been under scrutiny that has resulted in significant changes being made. Monuments and statues have been a prominent focus for struggles led by student activists to remove symbols of white supremacy and genocide, most notably the “Silent Sam” statue of a confederate soldier that stood at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for more than a century.¹ Efforts to call attention to and change these physical manifestations of racism, colonialism, and patriarchy have taken place on campuses since the 1960s, though it is important to point out that many U.S. universities were quite literally founded upon slavery, the profiting from which funded their establishment, built campuses, and paid professors' salaries.²

The recent widespread reevaluations that have taken place at many colleges and universities in the United States began in Summer 2020, in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police and as a result of the ensuing protests worldwide for racial justice. While this review of named spaces is often framed as an institution's “reckoning with racist pasts” or a more sweeping and substantial goal, in actuality it often means an assessment of the most blatantly racist and offensive names, statues, artwork, or the university's namesake itself.³ It frequently takes the form of “unnaming” buildings or removing certain names of prominent university presidents and faculty that have adorned buildings for decades or more, but has also resulted in, for example, the removal of a weathervane from a college library building with an offensive depiction of an indigenous person.⁴

Specific to academic libraries, the literature primarily focuses on functional aspects of library spaces and rarely considers the symbolic significance of library buildings, especially from a critical perspective. There are notable exceptions, including Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro, who examine the racialized space of academic libraries, and Bales, who considers the role of librarians as a type of “temple custodians” who reflect a deep investment in the established social order.⁵ In the past year, a number of libraries have removed names, plaques, and other associations with slave-owning and racist donors, founders, and other individuals.⁶ We will now turn our attention to several case studies to examine what the names of particular libraries and spaces tell us about these libraries and institutions, as well as how their embeddedness in problematic legacies and perpetuation of systemic oppression might be interrupted.

DISCUSSION

Bronx Community College: The Hall of Fame for Great Americans - Cynthia Tobar

Part of a nationally landmarked campus in the Bronx that was originally owned by New York University, the Hall of Fame for Great Americans is significant not only as the first Hall of Fame in the country, but for being the first to commemorate persons of achievement across many fields: authors, educators, architects, inventors, military leaders, judges, theologians, philanthropists, humanitarians, scientists, statesmen, artists, musicians, actors, and explorers. The Hall was extremely popular when it opened in 1901, with this variety being unprecedented at a time when only political leaders or those who had achieved glory in war could expect such public commemora-

tion. However, a vast number of nominees elected consisted mostly of White men, with only a few women and a handful of African Americans ultimately selected for the Hall.

The Hall of Fame has unique contributions to make to the discussion regarding who decides who is a Great American. In 1973, New York University sold its University Heights Campus to the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York for use by Bronx Community College. Yet, the Hall commemorated largely white achievement on a campus that, by the late 1970s, boasted the highest number of Black and Latinx students in the City University of New York system. The Hall of Fame is a symbolic memorial that is not just channeling an earlier version of history, but it is also legitimizing that version of history. A critical reframing of this history can impact how we go about implementing more culturally responsive forms of commemoration.

Since the Archives was established in 2014, we have embraced *Community-Based Archiving*, an approach that acknowledges the reality of the disparities in the historical record that have too often excluded marginalized voices from mainstream representations in American history. Such an approach implores those of us who work in archives to reflect on *who we are doing this memory work for*. Reflecting on the removal of the Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson busts at the Hall in 2017, there is a greater urgency for us to explore how we can effectively challenge the power dynamics behind these past decisions and collectively reimagine what it means to be a “Great” American.

This spirit of inclusion inspired our public event on September 21, 2019, *Diversity in Public Art*, which was attended by hundreds of neighborhood residents. We posed a challenge for artists, giving them room to explore the evolving historical context of commemoration at the Hall by referencing our archival collection, centered on the question, “Were we to establish a Hall of Fame today, who would we include in this group?” Throughout the daylong event, participating artists took a stab at answering that question with creative interventions which included photo documentation, performance, sculpture, storytelling, and film. As we wrestle with how best to commemorate greatness, we are working to respond creatively to troubling histories while activating the archives to be more culturally responsive stewards of history; acknowledging that power is central to this conversation. This can expand our understanding of the extent that these “imposed invisibilities” have had on our collective definitions of nationhood and citizenry.

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University: Bluford Library - Harvey Long

The names of library buildings at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) capture African Americans’ stories, aspirations, and traditions. At North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (North Carolina A&T), an 1890 land-grant institution and the nation’s largest HBCU, the main campus library is named after Dr. Ferdinand Douglass Bluford, the university’s third president. When the original library opened in 1955, the Black press praised the modern million-dollar building as a testament to Bluford’s accomplishments and legacy.⁷ The practice of naming Black institutions, including libraries, after HBCU presidents can be traced back to the nineteenth century.

Black colleges and universities in the South were among some of the earliest institutions where formerly enslaved people named buildings, representing a kind of freedom and refusal of anti-Black logic. The first generation of HBCU presidents were well-respected members of the Black community, often extending access to K-12 education. As Imani Perry notes, “The tight connection between historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and K-12 education was both academic and cultural.”⁸ By the twentieth century, naming schools, clubs and libraries after HBCU presidents was commonplace. However, according to librarian Shaundra Walker, Northern, white capitalists like Andrew Carnegie sometimes denied African Americans naming opportunities.⁹ When the time came to name the new library at North Carolina A&T in the 1950s, the university’s president was an obvious choice.

Born to farmers in Capahosic, Virginia in 1882, Bluford represented Black possibility, graduating from the Wayland Academy, Virginia Union University, and Howard University before joining the faculty at North Carolina A&T in 1912. In the fall of 1925, the North Carolina A&T Board of Trustees unanimously selected Bluford to serve as the institution’s president, a post he held until he died in 1955, several months after the new library

opened.¹⁰ During his time as president, Bluford improved the college's rating, added academic programs, and launched a massive building campaign.¹¹ The university's decision to name the library after Bluford is consistent with twentieth century Black naming practices and reflects an intentional decision to highlight Black achievement. To meet the growing needs of the university, a new library was dedicated and named for Bluford in 1991.

In 2018, North Carolina A&T announced an ambitious capital campaign, *The Power of Do*, that aims to generate \$85 million in private gifts. To recognize individuals for their donations, the university plans to offer naming opportunities, including library spaces.¹² How will this campaign and similar campaigns at other HBCUs impact traditional Black naming practices?

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater: Andersen Library - James Castrillo

The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater is a regional comprehensive public state university in southeast Wisconsin. It was originally founded in 1868 as Whitewater Normal School, a teacher's training school. The school has grown to be a medium sized institution of approximately 11,995 students.¹³ As many regional public institutions have smaller donor bases compared to the flagship University of Wisconsin-Madison, many buildings are not named for donors funding the construction. The majority of buildings on campus are named after either prominent professors from the first 50 years of the university's history or after geographic features native to Wisconsin.

The library is the second oldest building on campus and was completed in February 1953.¹⁴ The library is named after Harold G. Andersen, a local businessman and member of the Board of Regents for the State University of Wisconsin system from 1947-1960.¹⁵ While not your traditional prominent donor to the project, Andersen is still the one most credited with securing the money from the state government to build the library. Andersen was the President of the Board of Regents when the project was first approved by the state legislature, and he had final say in naming the library after himself.

The other named space in the library is the Dwight Warner Reading Room.¹⁶ Warner was another local member of the Board of Regents from 1944-1947.¹⁷ He was involved with initial talks with the Board and state government to obtain the funds for the building of a new library. Warner is viewed as a much more controversial figure in campus history compared to Andersen. Warner was unique among local regents for his time. He viewed himself as "chief executive office of the campus" and believed in taking an "activist" role in running the college. A dispute with College President Claude Yoder over the college's policy and personnel decisions led to Yoder's resignation in 1946. It was Warner's belief that "it was the responsibility of the Regent to be involved in day-to-day administrative decisions for the college," and accordingly, "he was on campus nearly every day, and was involved in everything from budget allocations to faculty promotions."¹⁸ Warner died in a car crash in 1947.¹⁹ His local regent spot on the Board of Regents was filled by Andersen shortly thereafter.

While neither the library building nor the reading room space are named solely for donors, they are named for prominent, wealthy White men who are credited with securing the money for the building. Members of the Wisconsin State College Board of Regents were local regents. The men who were nominated consisted of prominent businessmen who lived and worked in the community of the college they represented. They are reflective of their times in terms of who had visibility, wealth, and power within their community. The men in power at the time chose to have campus buildings named after themselves as part of their legacy.

Columbia University Libraries - Eamon Tewell

Columbia University is a private selective research university located in New York City, with approximately 9,000 undergraduates and 24,000 postgraduates. It is an institution with a long history, being established in 1754, and it is very wealthy by any measure, with an endowment of more than \$11 billion in 2020. As a campus, Columbia may have more named buildings and spaces than not, reflective of not only a long history, but a cultivated blend of prestige, eliteness, and legacy in traditional Eurocentric terms. This history is largely one of Whiteness, capitalism, and patriarchy, and while challenges to these systems by student activists and community members have often taken place, the names given to and sometimes etched onto the façade of campus buildings convey the university's history in a meaningful way.

Columbia University has a system of 14 libraries, 10 of which are named. As of 1984 there were 22 libraries in the system, half of which were named, illustrating a reduction in library locations and an increase in naming.²⁰ All of the libraries are named after White men, and many of whom wielded immense influence and power, whether at Columbia as a president, in New York City as a philanthropist, or in the country as a large company's founder or CEO. In general, these libraries were named for one of two reasons: because someone donated a significant sum to Columbia and/or the Libraries, or because someone donated stuff (oftentimes, papers or books). A summary of the Libraries in the Columbia University system, along with whether they are named, and if so, who they are named after, is included as Table 1. Symbolically, the names of Columbia's Libraries, in conjunction with the neoclassical architecture and other factors, are one component of the institution's "attempts to impress the viewer with a sense of its access to, and creation of, power and powerful individuals," a power which is "invariably connected to a normative (male, able-bodied, upwardly mobile) Whiteness."²¹

TABLE 1

Summary of Libraries at Columbia University

Library Name	Named?	Namesake	Profession and Columbia Affiliation
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library	Yes	Henry Ogden Avery	Architect and first professor of architecture at Columbia in 1881. Avery's parents donated his papers to found the Avery Library after his untimely death in 1890.
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary	Yes	Walter Burke	Chief legal and financial advisor to inventor and businessman Sherman Fairchild, and 1948 Columbia Law graduate. Burke encouraged Fairchild to establish the Sherman Fairchild Foundation, which Burke served on the board of for more than 50 years and was an important benefactor of the University.
Watson Library of Business & Economics	Yes	Thomas J. Watson	Chairman and CEO of IBM. Powerful trustee of Columbia University from 1933-1956, and initiated a long relationship between IBM and Columbia that lasted from 1929-1970.
Butler Library	Yes	Nicholas Murray Butler	President of Columbia for 43 years, the longest tenure in the university's history, and carried out a major expansion of the campus. Columbia's main library, initially known as South Hall, was renamed Butler Library in 1946, a year after his retirement.
Starr East Asian Library	Yes	Cornelius Vander Starr	Founder of a major insurance group and operative of the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the CIA, in China during WWII. The Library was named in recognition of an endowment gift by the Starr Foundation in 1981.
Augustus C. Long Health Sciences Library	Yes	Augustus C. Long	Director of Texaco, oil and gas corporation, from 1950-1977. A donor made a major contribution to the building fund in honor of Long, who was chairman emeritus of the Board of Trustees for Presbyterian Hospital, which is affiliated with Columbia.
Journalism Library	No		(Formerly Arthur Hays Sulzberger Journalism Library)
Diamond Law Library	Yes	Arthur W. Diamond	Columbia graduate, captain in the United States Army Corps of Engineers during World War II, real estate developer, and benefactor to hospitals and other organizations. A gift of \$7 million was made to Columbia Law School by the Miriam and Arthur W. Diamond Charitable Trust, resulting in the naming of the library.

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Lehman Social Sciences Library	Yes	Herbert H. Lehman	Politician who served as Governor of New York 1933-1942 and represented New York State in the U.S. Senate from 1949-1957. Lehman's papers were donated to the Columbia University Libraries and are housed in the social sciences library, which was named in his honor.
Milstein Undergraduate Library	Yes	Philip L. Milstein	Real estate developer, banker, and philanthropist. Milstein graduated from Columbia College in 1971, later became a trustee, and donated towards the renovation of Butler Library, which named the undergraduate library in his honor.
Wiener Music & Arts Library	Yes	Gabe M. Wiener	Columbia music graduate and audio engineer, who after his untimely death in 1997, had the library named after him by his parents. His father, Michael A. Wiener, was an American business executive in the radio industry, who became a philanthropist after selling the company.
Rare Book & Manuscript Library	No		
Science & Engineering Library	No		(Formerly Ambrose Monell Engineering Library)
Social Work Library	No		(Formerly Whitney M. Young, Jr. Memorial Library of Social Work)

One example to briefly draw attention to is Thomas J. Watson Library, named after the long-time Chairman and CEO of IBM. Watson Library serves the Columbia Business School and the Department of Economics. It is one of many business libraries that are named: of the 46 business libraries in the Academic Business Library Directors group, a working group of library directors at top business schools in the United States and Canada, 70% are named, based on an informal survey conducted by Sandy Miller, Director of the Business Library at Southern Methodist University. This only makes sense, as business schools represent a concentration of money and power that is often unrivaled on university campuses. The Watson name connotes a variety of things—influence and innovation, along with monopolization, cutthroat business practices, and providing tabulating equipment to Nazi Germany—but among students the Watson name is casually thrown around as the business school students' primary turf and a library that allows for group study and snacking. While the symbolism is left unexamined by users of the space, visitors are reminded of the namesake with a portrait opposite the circulation desk, included as Image 1.



Image 1. Portrait of Thomas J. Watson, located in Watson Library of Business and Economics at Columbia University.

Butler Library and the Butler Banner project

Butler Library is known for its neoclassical design and façade with the names of well-known authors and thinkers. Edward Harkness, named the 6th richest man in the country in *Forbes* first “rich list” in 1918, provided the funds for the building’s construction, which was completed in 1934, but it would not be named for him or a member of his family. It was suggested to be named the Nicholas Murray Butler Library, the longtime University President, but he rejected that idea, so the Trustees named it South Hall to reflect its location on campus. It was renamed to Butler Library in 1946, after Dr. Butler retired, to honor him after 43 years of serving as University President. A distinguishing characteristic of Butler Library is the building’s façade featuring inscriptions of the names of 18 writers, philosophers, and thinkers, such as Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe. These names are all men, and men representing a certain tradition of Western thought that has constituted the Core Curriculum.

There have been multiple attempts to challenge the names Butler Library bears: in 1989 students attempted to hang a banner with the name of women writers but were prevented by campus security, and in 1994, students successfully hung a banner with 10 White women writers’ names for Women’s History Month. The Butler Banner Project was inspired by these efforts to mark the 100th anniversary of the Core Curriculum, established in 1919, with a new banner. Several librarians, students, and staff worked tirelessly to make the banner a reality, and in Fall 2019, the Banner was unveiled, featuring the names of eight writers and thinkers who are female-identifying people of color: Maya Angelou, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Diana Chang, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, A. Revathi, Ntozake Shange, and Leslie Marmon Silko, included as Image 2. To complement the display, the Libraries hosted an archival exhibition and a series of events honoring the writers and the themes they discussed in their works.²² Present for three and a half months, the banner was a short lived but successful initiative, generating dialogue on how women and people of color are erased from and marginalized within academe and curricula. At the end of the designated period the banner was removed and Butler Library resumed its original façade, a symbolic reminder that longstanding histories will not easily be changed.



Image 2. Butler Library, with the Butler Banner hanging above the names inscribed in the Butler Library façade.

In summer 2020, after the killing of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police and the massive protests seeking an end to anti-black violence that followed, a group was convened by the Interim Provost to examine campus names and symbols associated with matters of race and racism. As a result, a residence hall named after Samuel Bard, an 18th century physician, doctor for George Washington, and slave owner who advertised a reward for the return of a fugitive slave, will be renamed. The University President announced the building will be honored “with a name that represents our University’s values.” However, when a university’s history and operations are deeply intertwined with upholding white supremacy and capitalist subjugation, renaming buildings can be seen as little more than a necessary but entirely insufficient step towards recognizing and addressing an institution’s participation in oppression.

Vocational Awe and the Sacredness of Library Buildings - Fobazi Ettarh

From the inception of libraries in the Western world, religion and the sacred have been tied to the institution. For example, the carrels still prevalent in many academic libraries are direct descendants of their religious counterparts present within monasteries where the monks would read and write.²³ Reflecting their conjoined history, churches and libraries often have similar architectural structures; both were built to inspire awe or grandeur. Even now, when one pictures the stereotypical library, it is often seen as a grandiose and silent space.

And when it comes to the construction of libraries, one would be hard pressed not to mention Andrew Carnegie. Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish-American steel tycoon and philanthropist, became the most famous library philanthropist. Prohibited from using a local library as a young man because he couldn’t afford its fee, he later went on to establish over 2500 public and academic libraries; the very first was built in his hometown, and has an inscription over the door reading, “Let there be light.”²⁴ Arguably one of the most well-known Biblical phrases, Genesis 1:3 refers not just to physical light, but rather the mandate of all creation—that the Divine Light shine throughout the world, enlightening the masses and the world. This mandate has a direct correlation to the creation of libraries; Bivens-Tatum notes that public libraries “began as instruments of enlightenment, hoping to spread knowledge and culture broadly to the people.”²⁵ The sacredness of the library is not just in the materials, but in its accessibility and publicness.

And yet, it is important to note, that even at its inception the disconnect between the ideals of the library building and its reality did not match. Carnegie’s library-as-enlightenment ideal was never intended to uplift all equally; Shaundra Walker connects his investments in historically Black colleges and universities to an interest in keeping Black Americans in manual and industrial labor, and highlights his disinterest in HBCUs that did not adhere to “industrial-vocational” curricula.²⁶ Although he is known as one of the great library philanthropists, Andrew Carnegie was also a notoriously ruthless capitalist who often engaged in union-busting and was directly involved in one of the most violent and serious labor disputes in American history, à la the Homestead Strike.

And so, what is the appeal of funding and naming library buildings for these affluent and powerful men? These men, like Carnegie, understand the power libraries as an institution have, especially to the public. There are fewer narratives so tightly woven into the American identity as that of democracy. Therefore, tying an occupation or vocation to the narrative of democracy is ostensibly the highest honor and praise. And librarianship, without fail, is tied to democracy. So, as libraries, and librarianship by extension, continue to be venerated for their ties to democracy, a direct connection to a library building could arguably be seen as funding democracy itself.

But, as we can tell, naming structures are another way to see how access is still pay to play. And so, these names continue to show where true allegiance lies—White men’s vanity projects and their idea(l)s of democracy and equal access. With very few exceptions, one can walk into any library in any city and onto any college campus and uncover the problematic nature of the person whose name is on the library building. This article has discussed but a few in a vast number of stories. Vocational awe would have you believe that libraries are magical, non-commercial temples open to all, but the literal library names contradict these ideals—a truly democratic institution could not ever be named after people who enslaved others. Often the argument given is, “they paid for the privilege.” The important takeaway from all of this is that regardless of the financial reasoning behind naming practices, it will always be exclusionary as long as it’s based on the current pay to play model. If libraries are to begin to live up to the ideals they set for themselves, the naming practices will have to change.

CONCLUSION

Libraries possess an array of symbols that “position its patrons ideologically in relationship to the institution.”²⁷ Ideology, as the set of beliefs that are used to uphold our social arrangements, is embodied in institutions and often readily identifiable materially and through practices, whether in our stacks, at our reference desks, at our committee meetings, and in our catalogs. The names of library buildings are one instance of a symbol that positions patrons ideologically. As we have seen in the prior discussion, where the names came from and how they operate is highly dependent upon the setting. What remains true independent of other variables, however, is that academic libraries are one element among many in upholding the status quo at the institutional and community levels.

The role that academic library workers play in this situation is complex, especially given the often complicated relationship between an individual, their work, and an institution and its history. We are not exempt from systems of oppression in any setting. Finding opportunities to contribute our own acts of illumination and resistance, on whichever scale and degree is possible based on our situation, is essential. We can contextualize and be intentional about the roles of our libraries and institutions in many ways. It can mean discussing how the name of the library came about and the library's history within a community in a library instruction session. It can mean organizing a public event that considers the library's role in commemoration and what it means to different people. It can mean changing the names of libraries, replacing portraits, removing statues and plaques, and installing new ones. It begins with learning about legacies—of achievement, displacement, learning, and privilege—that are part of one's own workplace. It begins with bringing the assumptions and practices that constitute systems of structural oppression into plain sight so that they can be challenged and eliminated.

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