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# Report of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History

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## Executive Summary of the Report

Our report begins with a recap of the establishment of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History, the charge and work of the Task Force, and the foundation of that work in core University values and the principles for naming and renaming significant University assets recommended by last year's President's and Provost's Advisory Committee on University History (the "Coleman Committee"). We review public input to the Task Force and then present the four cases we were charged with considering. In examining these cases, we provide a review of the individual's career, including accomplishments as well as actions that have drawn sharp criticism. As called for by the Coleman Committee, after reviewing their careers we provide a set of arguments for and against removing the name from each building. We conclude each case analysis by applying the principles of change, diversity, preservation, exceptionality, and deliberation, as recommended by the Coleman Committee, to determine whether removing a name from a building is warranted. Our report concludes with a discussion of initiatives beyond naming that might be taken up by the permanent Advisory Committee to the President on University History that will begin its work this semester.

President Eric Kaler and Executive Vice President and Provost Karen Hanson [charged Task Force members](#) on October 4, 2018, calling on the Task Force to "recommend actions regarding the specific buildings mentioned in 'A Campus Divided' (Coffman Memorial Union, Coffey Hall, Middlebrook Hall, and Nicholson Hall) and the [Minnesota Student Association proposal](#) to rename Coffman Memorial Union," and to utilize tools to gather community feedback on the buildings in question. Under Section VII of the Board of Regents [naming policy](#), the decision whether to remove a name from a building or other significant University asset lies with the Board of Regents. The policy states that "for all namings requiring Board approval, the Board reserves the right to revoke them. Other namings may be revoked by the president or delegate." The advisory recommendations of the Task Force will be considered by President Kaler and Provost Hanson, following which President Kaler will present recommendations to the Board on the four buildings in question.

The Board of Regents [Policy on Namings](#), Section II, states that "it is critically important that the integrity, history, behavior, and reputation of the named individual or organization be consistent with the academic mission and values of the University." This formulation sets actions and adherence to institutional values to be of the highest importance in the naming process. As we employ and apply core University values and the Coleman Committee's guiding principles in our analysis, we do not seek to impose arbitrarily on individuals of the past our expectations from today. Although it is reasonable for today's values to guide what we wish to honor with the distinction of a naming, we also believe and understand that individuals need to be assessed within the context of their own time and what was then imaginable and possible. We endeavor to measure their actions against the norms and practices of their day but also consider whether the values they stood for are in conflict with those of our own time. History teaches the perils of uncritical condemnations as well as commendations, reinforcing the importance of exercising empathy and humility in examining the words and deeds of generations past, asking ourselves what values we would have held had we lived then, and remaining mindful of how the future might regard our values.

**Coffman Memorial Union** was completed in 1939 and named posthumously for Lotus Delta Coffman, president of the University from 1920-1938. The building is located on the East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. President Coffman is remembered most frequently for his expansion of the University, both in its physical facilities and in its outreach to broader student populations through

educational innovations like the General College. Coffman also saw throughout his term increasing demands for equity and inclusion of student populations who were subject to various forms of discrimination. Rather than working to redress these inequities and promote integration, however, Coffman used his authority to exclude African-American students from University facilities, most evidently in housing, some medical training programs, and athletics. President Coffman sometimes claimed to be acting in the best interests of the students excluded from facilities, programs, and activities and denied that the University had a policy of exclusion, but archived correspondence shows that Coffman and other members of his administration regarded exclusion as the presumptive norm, particularly with respect to student housing. Our report provides details of his actions in historical context, and concludes with a recommendation to remove his name from the student union.

Completed in 1890, **Nicholson Hall** is located on the East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The building once served as the student union and now serves as the home to academic departments, centers, and programs. In 1945, the building was named for Edward E. Nicholson, who served as the University's first dean of student affairs from 1917 until his retirement in 1941. Nicholson was a complex and controversial figure. Affectionately called "Dean Nick," he was seen by some as a benevolent leader who cared deeply for students. Examination of archival material, however, reveals a man who also abused his official powers. Nicholson censored political speech on campus and conducted surveillance on student activists in coordination with former State Auditor (1921-1931) and former U.S. Representative (Republican, At Large, 1933-35) Ray P. Chase. Nicholson exhibited antisemitism and racism in his actions as a University administrator, often targeting Jewish and Black students whom he labeled "communists." Our report on Nicholson concludes with a recommendation to remove his name from the building now known as Nicholson Hall.

**Middlebrook Hall** is an undergraduate dormitory on the West Bank campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The building also housed graduate students when it opened. Before its construction, it was named for William T. Middlebrook in 1966. William T. Middlebrook had a long career in the upper echelons of University central administration, serving as comptroller from 1925 to 1943 and as vice president for business administration from 1943 until his retirement in 1959. Middlebrook's accomplishments were many. He dedicated much of his career and his administrative acumen to building and managing the physical structure of the University, including student housing, in order to increase its capacity to provide educational opportunities to citizens in Minnesota. In his official capacity, however, research reveals that he worked on behalf of the University to support policies and practices that discriminated against students of color and Jewish students with respect to access to housing. In decades when the University faced recurrent calls for equity in the provision of campus housing for all racial and ethnic groups and integration of these spaces, Middlebrook did not use his considerable power and discretion to assist in the provision of such facilities. Instead, his work enabled and perpetuated discrimination. In light of this research, our report recommends the removal of his name from the undergraduate dormitory.

Built in 1907 and named for Walter Castella Coffey in 1949, **Coffey Hall** is located on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. After serving as dean of the Department of Agriculture (1921-1941), Walter Castella Coffey served as president of the University (1941-1945). Coffey was viewed as a student-oriented leader who extended the reach of the Department of Agriculture across the state and stewarded the University through the war. Coffey's wartime administration also coincided with a critical period of social

struggles for civil rights and equal access at the University. Rather than working to realize the democratic vision of the University that students fought for during the 1930s and which President Guy Stanton Ford officially adopted in 1937, President Coffey and his administration reversed course. Our research reveals the role President Coffey played in establishing segregated housing in 1942. President Coffey and his administration supported policies that attempted to exclude and segregate Blacks, ensuring that the University he presided over was a less equitable institution than the one he inherited from President Ford. Our report recommends the removal of his name from the St. Paul campus administrative building.

Our recommendations to remove the names from these buildings do not deny that these individuals operated within structures and systems that imposed constraints on what they saw as possible ways of carrying out their official duties. But neither do we believe they were without choice, particularly given the power and discretion they exercised in their administrative roles. Other choices were often being made at other institutions, and significant levels of community and campus activism, protesting University policies and practices at the time, showed that other ways of thinking were powerfully present. And other University administrators, such as President Guy Stanton Ford, did make different decisions.

For all four of these buildings, whether the name is removed or not, we recommend the installation of a permanent exhibit that explores the legacy of the named individual, including their positive accomplishments and the research detailed in this report. We also recommend that the “A Campus Divided” exhibit, previously and temporarily housed in Andersen Library, be permanently installed in the student union.

We conclude our report with recommendations of various types of initiatives the president and provost could consider to continue the work of reckoning with our institutional history and building a welcoming, inclusive campus. When [announcing the formation](#) of the Task Force on September 13, 2018, the president and provost posed a series of questions that guided our consideration of possible initiatives the University might pursue in the next stage of this work led by, as the president and provost announced, a permanent committee on University history that would begin its work in spring 2019: “How do we link past practices and actions, our University history, with contemporary issues across our campuses? Where are there opportunities for scholarship to build upon the ‘landscape of memory’—as some describe the at times politically contentious nature of remembering the past? How should we institutionalize and support these reflective practices?” With these questions in view, we identify a range of potential kinds of initiatives that could help the University respond to these questions.

## I. Introduction

University of Minnesota President Eric Kaler and Executive Vice President and Provost Karen Hanson [announced the formation](#) of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History on September 13, 2018. The Task Force was created as an outgrowth of the recommendations of the President’s and Provost’s Advisory Committee on University History (the “Coleman Committee”), which [issued its report](#) on May 9, 2018. The committee’s creation was inspired by the exhibition of “[A Campus Divided: Progressives, Anti-Communists, and Anti-Semitism at the University of Minnesota, 1930-1942](#),” at the Elmer Andersen Library at the University of Minnesota from September-December 2017. The exhibit, curated by Emerita Professor Riv-Ellen Prell and doctoral student Sarah Atwood, examined issues of segregation, discrimination, antisemitism, and political monitoring of students at the University of Minnesota from 1930-1942. Exploring the

involvement of administrators in these actions as well as the efforts of students, faculty, staff, and community members to change these practices, the exhibit’s findings spurred discussions about whether certain campus building names should be changed and what additional steps might be taken to learn from our institutional history.<sup>1</sup>

President Kaler and Provost Hanson [charged Task Force members](#) on October 4, 2018, calling on the Task Force to “recommend actions regarding the specific buildings mentioned in ‘A Campus Divided’ (Coffman Memorial Union, Coffey Hall, Middlebrook Hall, and Nicholson Hall) and the [Minnesota Student Association proposal](#) to rename Coffman Memorial Union” and to utilize tools to gather community feedback on the buildings in question. The original report submission date of November 15, 2018, was later extended to February 2019. A list of Task Force members appears in Appendix A.

Under Section VII of the Board of Regents [naming policy](#), the decision whether to remove a name from a building or other significant University asset lies with the Board of Regents. The policy states that “for all namings requiring Board approval, the Board reserves the right to revoke them. Other namings may be revoked by the president or delegate.” The advisory recommendations of the Task Force will be considered by President Kaler and Provost Hanson, following which President Kaler will present his recommendations to the Board on the four buildings in question.

The report of the Coleman Committee notes that “namings of buildings and exterior public spaces are perhaps a university’s highest honor. They are eminently visible and enduring. The university forges a bond with the named individual or entity and will be seen to endorse their legacies, either actively or passively, both by members of the campus community and all others who visit or move throughout the campus. Namings, as a prominent aspect of our experience of the University’s built space, also provide an important intergenerational connection between campus and community members.”<sup>2</sup>

It is with these ideas and ideals in view that we approach the charge we have been given. Based on our intensive research and analysis and after careful deliberation, the Task Force recommends that the names of Coffman Memorial Union, Coffey Hall, Middlebrook Hall, and Nicholson Hall be changed. We do so even as we recognize and endorse the Coleman Committee’s presumption that name removals ought to be exceptional events. History teaches the perils of uncritical condemnations as well as commendations, amply illustrating the importance of exercising empathy and humility in examining the words and deeds of generations past, asking ourselves what values we would have held had we lived then, and remaining mindful of how the future might regard our values.

We have taken seriously our charge to reconsider four significant symbols of University history and tradition—the names that have been affixed to specific buildings—and we are fully aware that our recommendations for renaming in all four cases carry their own symbolic value. The aim of our

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibit drew large audiences. Hundreds of visitors left [comments](#) as they finished viewing the exhibit. The exhibit also inspired campus [demonstrations](#).

<sup>2</sup> Because the report of the Coleman Committee provides extensive background material on the current University process for naming of significant University assets, we refer the interested reader to that report for additional detail on University policies and practices.

recommendations, however, is not merely to call for the replacement of one set of symbols with new ones. Our report communicates the importance of sustained engagement with our university's history in all its complexity, as we think both about and beyond naming and renaming. It is in that spirit that in the conclusion of this report we offer a set of the types of initiatives and programming for the University's academic administration to consider in the ongoing effort to explore our institutional history, bringing the past into dialogue with the present in advancing our educational mission and strengthening and enriching campus life. We envision an array of curricular innovations, archival projects, creation of new signage and historical exhibits, and other collective endeavors to better understand our institutional history and institutionalize these reflective practices.

## II. Public input to the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History

In October 2018, the Task Force website launched a public web form where community members could share comments on the work of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History. As of January 11, 2019, approximately 275 comments had been received, including a small number of emailed comments. These responses do not constitute a scientific sample but rather the input of those individuals who chose to provide their perspective.<sup>3</sup>

The comments were individually sorted according to the responder's role, which fell into one of the following categories: alumni (23%), faculty (6%), graduate students (8%), staff (28%), and undergraduate students (35%).<sup>4</sup>

The most common arguments in favor of renaming one or more of the buildings in question were, in descending order of frequency:

1. Renaming buildings would help build trust between communities and promote inclusivity, diversity, and equality, and would condemn racism.
2. Buildings should be named after inspiring people, specifically notable alumni, with a preference on honoring women, people of color, and historically marginalized communities.
3. Buildings should not be named after people. Some suggested building naming systems included naming buildings after their function rather than an individual; numbering buildings and avoiding building names entirely; naming buildings after the Minnesota landscape (e.g., Lake Superior Hall, Boundary Waters Union, etc.); naming buildings with Native American tribal nations in mind; and naming buildings after the University of Minnesota itself (e.g., Gopher Union).

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<sup>3</sup> We also note as a form of input to the Task Force that the Minnesota Student Association petition regarding the renaming of Coffman Memorial Union was unanimously endorsed by MSA and included 24 student group cosponsors and 16 faculty and staff sponsors.

<sup>4</sup> The Task Force thanks Nicole Borneman for providing this summary of the public input.

4. Buildings should be named after people who have met the highest ethical standards. If a person has been proven to have violated or undermined the University's code of ethics, the building should be renamed.

The most common arguments against renaming buildings were, in descending order of frequency:

1. The names should be preserved and used as a teaching/learning experience instead of erasing their history.
2. Building names are not a pressing issue and are a poor use of university resources.
3. The current building names are historic and make campus feel familiar and welcoming to alumni, regardless of how long ago they graduated.
4. Renaming buildings erases the negative aspects of a person but also the positive aspects. Keeping building names and acknowledging a person's flaws is better than erasing their contributions entirely.

A small number of respondents provided some alternative suggestions. Five percent mentioned installing plaques or other informational material in a building that explain why they are named what they are. If a building is renamed, respondents suggested a building's previous name to also be mentioned on the plaque, including why it was renamed. Two percent mentioned permanently installing the "A Campus Divided" exhibit on campus, preferably in Coffman Memorial Union.

Overall, about 43% of respondents supported renaming the buildings and 37% considered renaming to be unnecessary. The remaining 20% provided comments that were too vague to discern their position or did not speak directly to renaming.

Looking across the five groups, the percentage supporting renaming, opposing renaming, or not providing applicable responses were, respectively: Alumni: 26%, 41%, 31%; Faculty: 81%, 13%, 6%; Staff: 53%, 27%, 20%; Undergraduate students: 38%, 48%, 14%; Graduate students: 50%, 27%, 23%.

### III. Work of the Task Force

The Task Force first met on October 9, 2018, and met for its tenth and final session on January 11, 2019. Summary notes from the [Task Force](#) meetings indicate the scope of our inquiry and discussions. In addition to our in-person meetings ranging from one to four hours, Task Force members engaged in considerable primary research regarding but not limited to the actions portrayed in "A Campus Divided," making significant use of the University Archives and other resources. Subgroups of Task Force members also met to work on various sections of our report. In addition, the Task Force considered the public input it received primarily through the Task Force website.

#### III.1 Founded upon core University values

Our study of and deliberation over the careers and actions of the individuals for whom the four buildings in question are named—Walter Castella Coffey, Lotus Delta Coffman, William T. Middlebrook, and Edward E. Nicholson—was guided by consideration of core University values.

The Coleman Committee report notes that core University values are articulated in several University documents serving different purposes. The Board of Regents [Code of Conduct](#) is a key document, which applies to members of the Board of Regents; faculty and staff; any individual employed by the University, using University resources or facilities, or receiving funds administered by the University; and volunteers and other representatives when speaking or acting on behalf of the University. (Students are covered by the Board of Regents [Student Conduct Code](#).) Section II.1 of the Board of Regents Code of Conduct (December 8, 2006) identifies the following core University values:

- excellence and innovation
- discovery and the search for the truth
- diversity of community and ideas
- integrity
- academic freedom
- stewardship and accountability for resources and relationships
- sharing knowledge in a learning environment
- application of knowledge and discovery to advance the quality of life and economy of the region and the world
- service as a land grant institution to Minnesota, the nation, and the world.

Section III of the Code of Conduct provides standards of conduct that build and elaborate on core University values. These standards of conduct are:

- act ethically and with integrity
- be fair and respectful to others
- manage responsibly
- protect and preserve University resources
- promote a culture of compliance
- preserve academic freedom and meet academic responsibilities
- ethically conduct teaching and research
- avoid conflicts of interest and commitment
- carefully manage public, private, and confidential information
- promote health and safety in the workplace.

The Code of Conduct provides detail on each of these standards of conduct. Because they are values and standards that play an especially significant role in our work, we provide the Regents' detail for three of the standards here:

- **Act Ethically and with Integrity.** Ethical conduct is a fundamental expectation for every community member. In practicing and modeling ethical conduct, community members are expected to:
  - act according to the highest ethical and professional standards of conduct;
  - be personally accountable for individual actions;
  - fulfill obligations owed to students, advisees, and colleagues;
  - conscientiously meet University responsibilities; and
  - communicate ethical standards of conduct through instruction and example.



- Be Fair and Respectful to Others. The University is committed to tolerance, diversity, and respect for differences. When dealing with others, community members are expected to:
  - be respectful, fair, and civil;
  - speak candidly and truthfully;
  - avoid all forms of harassment, illegal discrimination, threats, or violence;
  - provide equal access to programs, facilities, and employment; and
  - promote conflict resolution.
- Preserve Academic Freedom and Meet Academic Responsibilities. Academic freedom is essential to achieving the University's mission. Community members are expected to:
  - promote academic freedom, including the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression, and to speak or write as a public citizen without institutional restraint or discipline; and
  - meet academic responsibilities, which means to seek and state the truth; to develop and maintain scholarly competence; to foster and defend intellectual honesty and freedom of inquiry and instruction; to respect those with differing views; to submit knowledge and claims to peer review; to work together to foster education of students; and to acknowledge when an individual is not speaking for the institution.

The guiding principles in the Board of Regents [Mission Statement](#) describe the appropriate working environment for the University as one that reflects the core values and standards of conduct stated above.

This environment:

- embodies the values of academic freedom, responsibility, integrity, and cooperation
- provides an atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance
- assists individuals, institutions, and communities in responding to a continuously changing world
- is conscious of and responsive to the needs of the many communities it is committed to serving
- creates and supports partnerships within the University, with other educational systems and institutions, and with communities to achieve common goals
- inspires, sets high expectations for, and empowers the individuals within its community.

Lastly, the current Board of Regents [Policy on Namings](#), Section II, also highlights the important connection between the University's core values and the naming process in three of the principles delineated to guide naming. These principles are:

- Naming for an individual or organization is an honor that forges a close link between the individual or organization and the University. As such, it is critically important that the integrity, history, behavior, and reputation of the named individual or organization be consistent with the academic mission and values of the University.
- The University shall ensure that namings preserve the long-standing traditions, values, culture, and prestige of the University.
- Namings as part of sponsorship agreements shall be consistent with the University's reputation and core values and the highest standards for business and financial integrity.

### III.2 Guided by Coleman Committee's principles on naming and renaming

Our work was also based on consideration of the five guiding principles recommended by the Coleman Committee to inform honorary naming, renaming, and removing names of buildings, spaces, and significant University assets. These principles are:

#### *Change*

Change in our campus community occurs continuously as students, faculty, and staff advance in their studies and as physical spaces, including buildings, are erected, remodeled, and dismantled. Indeed, our own understanding and interpretation of campus history can also change over time. We should not be incapacitated by the idea and actuality of change including considering renaming long-standing building names. Carefully considered changes can be made on campus and yet the University still maintains its history, culture, values, and traditions. Changes are sometimes needed to preserve our core values.

#### *Diversity*

Throughout the history of the University of Minnesota, substantial and positive contributions have been made by many unique individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, as befits a public, land grant university, the diversity of Minnesotans should be a prominent consideration in the process of naming and renaming buildings and significant University assets.

#### *Preservation*

It is incumbent upon us today to acknowledge the full, living history that formed this University community. History can be used to both illuminate and obscure our shared experiences. It is our task to make room in our story for those voices held silent in the shadows of the past and to make certain our future conversations include everyone. Thus, before a decision is made to rename or remove a name, care must be taken that the process does not erase critical, even controversial, historical moments, persons, or places since erasure is anathema to the principles of a liberal education. Changing the name of a building, space, or university asset does not and should not mean erasure. The process to name or rename or remove a name should be considered part of the pedagogical mission of the University.

#### *Exceptionality*

The renaming of a building named to honor an individual's contribution to the University is a serious matter and must be undertaken with great care. Only in exceptional instances, when the values reflected in the current name are in opposition to the values embraced by the University, should renaming or removing a name take place. As stated by our colleagues at the University of Michigan, "it behooves us to understand that it is impossible to hold someone accountable for failing to share our contemporary ideas and values. Instead, the question must be what ideas, values, and actions were possible in a particular historical context." Our colleagues at Yale University note, "Historical names are a source of knowledge. Tradition often carries wisdom that is not immediately apparent to the current generation; no generation stands alone at the end of history with perfect moral hindsight. ... A presumption of continuity in campus names helps ensure that the University does not elide the moral complexity often associated with the lives of those who make outsized impressions on the world." We do anticipate, however, there will be exceptional instances in which renaming is appropriate to reflect a new understanding or awareness regarding a namesake and the principal legacy of the namesake that conflicts fundamentally with the University's core values.

## *Deliberation*

Consideration of naming and renaming is a complicated issue lacking a universal formula or checklist. Each naming or renaming must be considered on its own via a careful, informed, inclusive, and deliberative process.

### **III.3 Informed by scholarship on the University's history and public history**

An important consideration in the work of this Task Force lies in the relationship of named buildings to history, public memory, and commemoration. One of the most frequently heard arguments in opposition to the renaming of a building or the removal of a monument is that the removal constitutes an erasure of history. Monuments and buildings do not, however, embody or represent history except in a simplified manner. Such forms of commemoration often minimize or obscure the complexities, nuances, and counter-perspectives to that simplified history.<sup>5</sup> In seeking to uncover and explore these dimensions of the University's past, we do not deny the contributions made by the individuals commemorated in this way, but we do insist upon the vital importance of attending to what (or who) has been left out of our institutional history, and the reasons why these absences exist and persist. Thus, as we employ and apply the values and principles listed above, we do not seek to impose arbitrarily on individuals of the past our expectations from today. Although it is reasonable for today's values to guide what and who we wish to honor with the distinction of a naming, we also believe and understand that individuals need to be assessed within the context of their own time and what was imaginable and possible then. We endeavor to measure their actions against the norms and practices of their day but also consider whether the values they stood for are in conflict with those of our own times. This is not to deny they operated within systems that imposed constraints on what they thought they could do in the positions they occupied at the University, but neither do we believe they were without choice, particularly given the power and discretion they exercised in their administrative roles.

Both naming and renaming can serve a powerfully important educational purpose. To remove a name from a building, to change a name, does not mean losing the memory of the contributions of an individual or saying the contributions have no value. It is possible to see individuals as having made major contributions while also understanding that some of their actions, including actions that did not receive significant attention at the time, may have promoted values contrary to the University of today. We can still recognize their contributions in various ways while choosing to change the name of a building. Moreover, there is pedagogical merit in using a renaming to teach our students about the history of their university and it is integral to the University's educational mission to promote such forms of inquiry and reflection beyond the confines of the campus as well. Collectively reckoning with our institutional history also provides an occasion for emphasizing that individuals, particularly leaders with significant authority in their roles, are responsible for their own decisions. In the context of large and complex institutions such as the University, individuals entrusted with positions of power can and do make choices and should be held to account when they deviate

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<sup>5</sup> Dolores Hayden, 1997, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; David Glassberg, 1996, "Public History and the Study of Memory." *The Public Historian* 18(2): 7-23; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 1995, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press; Ciraj Rassool, 2010. Power, Knowledge and the Politics of Public Pasts. *African Studies* 69(1): 79-101; Paul Shackel, 2001. Public Memory and the Search for Power in American Historical Archaeology. *American Anthropologist* 103(3): 655-670.

from the principles and values they were charged with upholding. And it may also come to pass that the principles and values advanced or maintained by a given individual may be so misaligned with those that now define our community that retaining their name on a campus building is no longer in order.

Another important consideration that has shaped our approach is that the preservation of the University's heritage requires us to be in dialogue with the past even as we serve as its custodians--to engage in critical thinking about our institutional history so as to clarify our values in the present and chart a path forward into the future. Our work has proceeded with an acute sense of the complex relationship between history and memory. Preserving the past, in our view, is a dynamic enterprise, one that entails active scholarly consideration of the historical record. As we amass and examine archival records, oral histories, and other materials to better understand the past, our historical memory may be in conflict with what we unearth and learn.

The archival materials we have examined have shown us that demands for equal rights and justice have been advanced by students, faculty, staff, and community members at many stages of the University's history. To bring these struggles to public attention entails focusing attention on the responses of individual University administrators—and indeed, individual acts are at the center of this report—but it is important to view this work as an effort to understand and address institutionalized injustice and inequity when and where it happens. Our focus here is on individuals and buildings, because this is our charge and we do have a long-standing practice of affixing names on parts of the built environment that is the University campus. There is an inescapable tension between the values of preservation and change, but preservation properly understood must entail thoughtful assessment and reassessment of the values that have been etched in buildings and memorialized in other, less concrete ways all around campus. Our research continues the task of squarely confronting our past, of continuing to grapple with the troubling features of our institutional history and working together as a community of scholars to promote dialogue among us, as well as with the past, doing so with empathy, humility, and an abiding belief in the power of examining history to enhance and clarify our moral vision and enable us to promote equity and inclusion both on campus and in the society at large.

It is not enough to examine history but to learn from it and, when appropriate, to act based on that knowledge. Our examination below is intensive and reveals new information, but parts of the story have been long known. Community and on-campus opposition to the administrative actions we discuss were present from the 1920s through the 1950s. Hyman Berman, a University of Minnesota professor, in a 1976 article detailed political surveillance of Jewish students by Dean Edward Nicholson. Mark Soderstrom explored the discriminatory actions of Lotus Coffman toward African-American students in a 2004 dissertation. In a 2008 article, Richard Breaux examined the work of the African American and other press to challenge Jim Crow at the University of Minnesota and the University of Kansas.<sup>6</sup> But these studies and others did not lead to reconsideration of any building names or other actions beyond naming, and official

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<sup>6</sup> Hyman Berman, "Political Antisemitism in Minnesota during the Great Depression," *Jewish Social Studies* 38, No. 3/4 (1976); 247-264; Mark Soderstrom, "Weeds in Linnaeus's Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900-45," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004); Richard M. Breaux, "Using the Press to Fight Jim Crow at Two White Midwestern Universities, 1900-1940," in E.H. Tamura, ed., *The History of Discrimination in U.S. Education*, pp. 141-164. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008.

University histories typically do not reference these aspects of our history.<sup>7</sup> Our work stands on the shoulders of these previous studies and the catalyzing work of “A Campus Divided,” and it presents to the University community recommendations about building names as well as additional strategies for the University to further explore its history and act on the findings of these inquiries.

## IV. Discussion of the four cases

This report proceeds now to consider each of the four cases at hand: Lotus Coffman (Coffman Memorial Union); Edward Nicholson (Nicholson Hall); William Middlebrook (Middlebrook Hall); and Walter Coffey (Coffey Hall). For each, as called for by the Coleman Committee, we review the historical record, examine arguments for and against removing the building name, and apply the five guiding principles articulated above in section III.2 to arrive at recommendations. In our deliberations and in our review of arguments for and against removing the building name, we considered the public input we received, primarily through the Task Force website. Given the scope of our research and writing tasks, there is some variation of writing style across the cases, but all members of the Task Force reviewed, commented on, and edited the case discussions.

Archaic and offensive racial terms and slurs were present in many of the historical documents the Task Force examined. In this report, the Task Force attempts to use archaic and offensive terms only when they appear within illustrative historical quotations or in proper nouns (such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or the Negro History Study Club). In some cases (as in the proper names just mentioned), this language was neutral at the time. In other cases, the quoted racial terminology was offensive even when it was written, and maintaining the original language conveys that fact. In the footnotes where we cite folders in University archives, we use the folder names as they appear in the archives.

## IV.1 President Lotus Delta Coffman and Coffman Memorial Union

### Introduction

#### Context

Racial inequality was a pervasive feature of the Minnesota landscape in the mid-twentieth century. Although the Minnesota Legislature was among the first states to enact civil rights legislation prohibiting racial

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<sup>7</sup> Official presentations of University history include [presidential profiles](#) and the volume by James Gray commissioned by the University to mark its 100th anniversary (James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951, [available online](#) from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy). Presidents Coffman and Coffey and Dean Nicholson are discussed at some length in Gray’s volume. Comptroller and Vice President for Business Middlebrook is mentioned briefly. Several [University history projects](#) can be accessed through the University Archives website.

discrimination in public accommodations after federal legislation in this area was struck down by the Supreme Court,<sup>8</sup> the first five decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the proliferation of restrictive racial housing covenants throughout the Twin Cities, discriminating against African Americans, Jews, and other minorities. These groups and their allies pushed the state's preeminent public higher education institution, the University of Minnesota, to recognize their rights to equal access to all of the University's facilities, including campus housing. Because restrictive covenants and rental housing discrimination limited the access of students of color and Jewish students to housing near campus, access to adequate accommodations became a pressing educational concern. For these students as well as those advocating on their behalf, equal access to campus housing was considered synonymous with obtaining equal educational opportunity. This same period saw the dissemination of various strains of scientific racism within and outside of the academy, which excited fierce scholarly debate concerning the nature, extent, and significance of racial difference, with very immediate implications for public policy and civil rights. Early progressive efforts to expand access to public education were undertaken even as proponents and opponents of such initiatives contended about the integration or exclusion of racialized populations within higher educational institutions. This climate of opinion shaped and was shaped by the University of Minnesota's policies regarding access to facilities, educational programs, and extracurricular opportunities. Over the course of Lotus Delta Coffman's term as President of the University, social movements coalesced in the Twin Cities and beyond, setting a new civil rights agenda as leaders of these movements called for an end to racial discrimination and segregation. The response on the part of institutions of higher learning varied and it remained common for racial science to be mobilized to naturalize racial hierarchies to justify discrimination, land dispossession, and exclusion of immigrants. Before and during Coffman's presidency, alternative ways of thinking of the origins and meanings of racial difference were articulated and advanced by scholars and activists who fought to bring an end to policies and practices of racial exclusion and segregation within and beyond the confines of the University of Minnesota.<sup>9</sup>

### President Coffman's actions

Lotus Delta Coffman was president of the University of Minnesota from 1920 to 1938. President Coffman is remembered most often for his expansion of the University, both in its physical facilities and in its outreach to broader student populations through educational innovations like the General College. As detailed below, our investigations into University archives reveal that President Coffman had the discretion and authority to choose between maintaining exclusionary and discriminatory actions in the University or creating a more

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883), the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 to be unconstitutional, ruling that the federal government did not have the authority to prohibit discriminatory acts between private individuals, such as a business refusing to serve customers of a particular race. In response, the Minnesota State Legislature adopted an Equal Accommodations Act in 1885 and further expanded the reach of its civil rights laws in 1897, 1899, 1905 and 1943. The 1885 act guaranteed equal public accommodations to "all citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude," and was amended in 1943 to also prohibit discrimination based upon "national origin or religion." Act of March 7, 1885, ch. 224, s 1, 1885 Minn.Laws 295, 296; amended by the Act of April 23, 1897, ch. 349, ss 2-3, 1897 Minn.Laws 616; Act of March 6, 1899, ch. 41, s 1, 1899 Minn.Laws 38, 38-39; Minn.Rev.Laws ch. 55 (1905); and Act of April 23, 1943, ch. 579, s 7321, 1943 Minn.Laws 831, 832.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Baker, 1998, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Herbert Hovenkamp, 2017, "The Progressives: Racism and Public Law", 59 *Ariz. L. Rev.* 947.

equitable institution. We find in archived correspondence that he routinely chose the former. He misrepresented the degree to which he and others adopted or maintained discriminatory policies. This misrepresentation suggests that he was aware of alternatives and decided against them.

## Recommendations

In a March 22, 1939, vote of the Board of Regents, the new student union building on the East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities was posthumously named after President Lotus Coffman. Based on our review of the legacy of President Coffman, we recommend the removal of Lotus Coffman's name from Coffman Memorial Union. We also recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Coffman's complicated legacy. In recognition of its role in raising public awareness, we also recommend adding a permanent installation of the "A Campus Divided" exhibit in the student union. These steps, we believe, should be taken whether or not the name is removed from the building. We discuss in section V of this report a series of potential initiatives designed to increase our understanding of our institutional history and to serve and enhance the opportunities for today's students.

## Overview

The aim of this extensive historical review is to better understand whether Coffman's actions produced or perpetuated systems of racial inequality or other forms of injustice, which were fundamentally at odds with University values during his tenure as president and today.

In order to explore these questions our Task Force sought to educate itself about:

- The history of Lotus Coffman's presidency and his career at the University of Minnesota, including his scholarship, philosophy of higher education, and administrative actions.
- The societal context within which President Coffman acted—specifically how his actions were received on campus, as well as in terms of how other institutions of higher education at the time promoted or challenged racially exclusionary policies and practices.
- The social context and racial attitudes in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota during Coffman's presidency, particularly with respect to housing practices and segregation.
- The original reasons for creating and naming the building for President Coffman and the purposes and significance attached to the building and its namesake over time.
- The climate of opinion on campus today—with specific attention to how other institutions of higher education are addressing calls to rename buildings, due to a history of racial discrimination or other forms of injustice associated with specific namesakes.

## Discussion and Analysis

### Standard biographical account of Lotus Coffman's presidency

The well-known and frequently cited accomplishments of Coffman's term as president of the University from 1920 until his death in 1938 focus most upon his work in expanding the physical facilities of the campus and the creation of the General College (now closed). The following is a summary biography provided by Erik Moore, head of University Archives:

Lotus Delta Coffman was born in Salem, Indiana, in 1875. He graduated from Indiana University AB 1905, MA 1910, and Columbia University Ph.D. 1911. He was a professor of education at Columbia from 1912-1915. He came to the University of Minnesota in 1915 to serve as dean of the College of Education. Coffman was selected to become the fifth president of the University of Minnesota in 1920 and served until his death on September 22, 1938. His presidency was marked by widespread expansion of the University including the creation of the General College, University College, the Center for Continuation Study, the University Art Gallery, and the first University-based radio station. Memorial Stadium and Northrop Memorial Auditorium were built during his presidency, the first two University facilities built in part through fund-raising campaigns. The first men's dormitory, Pioneer Hall, was built despite sharp criticism from fraternities and local landlords. The construction of a new student union also began during his tenure. In the 1920s, Coffman admonished the Minnesota Legislature for an anti-evolution bill that would have prevented the teaching of evolution in Minnesota public schools and state universities. Coffman wrote several works while serving as president including The State University: Its Work and Problems; The Youth Problem and Leisure; and Freedom Through Education, on the subjects of the social, cultural, and recreational needs of youth, students, faculty, and staff. Prior to his death, Coffman took a leave of absence from the University during the 1937-38 academic year. During his absence, Guy Stanton Ford served as acting president. Coffman returned to his role in July of 1938; however, he passed away the week before the start of the fall semester. As part of the eulogy for Coffman provided in the Biennial Report of the President, 1938-40, representatives of the student body published a tribute to Coffman that included a critique of his "vigilance" against the "threat of propagandists" and the resentment held by students.<sup>10</sup> (See also the [biography](#) posted on the Office of the President's website.)

The reference to political tensions and the "threat of propagandists" was described in more detail in a published University history by James Gray, commissioned for the University's 100th anniversary. Gray described Coffman's struggles to control an increasingly activist student body, and his frustrations with not being heeded.<sup>11</sup> Gray, however, does not narrate any of the demands for equity and access by African-American or other student populations during this period. The biography on the Office of the President's website focuses solely on Coffman's educational innovations and campus expansion.<sup>12</sup>

### Coffman's early educational writing

In order to better appreciate the intellectual and ideological dimensions of Coffman's work as both a scholar and an administrator, the Task Force read more extensively into his research and scholarly writings, which were principally in the field of education. His doctoral work at Columbia University culminated with his 1911 dissertation, "The Social Composition of the Teaching Population." In this study Coffman utilized surveys of grade school teachers across multiple states to assess their social backgrounds, taking into consideration their gender and marital status, socioeconomic background, natal family composition (including nativity,

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<sup>10</sup> <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/91585>

<sup>11</sup> James Gray, *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951), 78.

<sup>12</sup> James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951), 263-294. <https://president.umn.edu/about/presidential-history/lotus-d-coffman>



education, and training), years employed, and current salaries. The conclusions drawn by Coffman in part reflect the contemporaneous conditions and concerns about the public school teaching population: a lack of standardized teacher training and certification (something he continued to write about through the rest of his career), disparate standards between rural and urban schools, and the inadequate compensation given to teachers.

We highlight here a few aspects of Coffman's study. While the focus of the work was framed by "economic level and conditions from which the teachers came, their age and sex distributions, the nationality factor and the group interrelationships of salary, position, training, and experience," particular assumptions are evident in his conclusions. Introducing his analyses of survey data relating to family background, he wrote, "Certainly the lower the class from which teachers come in social position the more inadequate their rational basis and insight for determining the values of the materials and technique of education." When distinguishing Anglo-Saxon from Catholic national origins in survey groups he cited a prominent eugenicist to indicate the dangers of large families from "inferior stocks." His sampling of teachers, described as a random sample of teachers in twenty-two states included no teachers of color, a choice that was not commented on but is evident in the demographic statistics included in the study.<sup>13</sup>

Under a concluding chapter, Coffman listed specific "problems" including the feminization of the teacher population, inadequate salaries and pensions, a low bar to entry into the profession, and a corresponding lack of teacher training programs. The latter concerns may be read as a progressive call to increase support and standards for public education, but many of these recommendations were also couched in aims to increase the number of male teachers of higher social class (and native-born white parentage) as the most intrinsically qualified. Although he admitted that the tide of females in the profession could not be reversed, he felt it was the result of lowered standards: "Feminization of the teaching force has been due in part to the changed character of the management of the public schools, to the specialization of labor within the school, to the narrowing of the intellectual range or versatility required of teachers, and to the willingness of women to work for less than men."<sup>14</sup> One scholar has observed that Coffman's analysis here correlated with contemporaneous concerns about the large number of Irish Catholic women who had entered the teaching profession by the turn of the 20th century.<sup>15</sup>

Coffman's progressivism entailed working towards wider access to high quality education, but it rested upon a belief in social evolution and a hierarchy of populations. His early research had been undertaken in a period when older theories of racial difference grounded in a genetic or biological essentialism were challenged by

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<sup>13</sup> LD Coffman, 1911, page 3, 54-57, 69; "The Social Composition of the Teaching Population." New York City: Teachers college, Columbia University. Accessed via HathiTrust, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t8jd5fn59>

<sup>14</sup> Coffman 1911: 82. He continued: "Since the early 70's arguments have been advanced against the disproportionate increase of women in teaching and the arguments have without exception proved ineffective. The movement is the natural result of a swift moving social evolution, whose tide the voice of no leader nor the act of any legislative assembly can stem. Feminization therefore is descriptive of a condition which cannot be averted. The condition could only be changed by providing radically different selective agencies and this is not likely to be done."

<sup>15</sup> Janet A. Nolan, "'The Nun Who Stopped Traffic' and 'The Patrick Henry of the Classroom': Justitia Coffey, Margaret Haley, Chicago's School Wars." *Radharc* Vol. 5/7 (2004–2006), pp. 33-52.

the view that culture and environment are more powerful determinants of difference. Coffman's writings show his efforts to accommodate both views, continuing to the end of his term as University president. In the posthumously published text of Coffman's last biennial report to the Board of Regents, titled "Freedom through Education," he wrote in a section on "Democracy or Totalitarianism": "If education is to serve the aspirations of a democratic people, it must remain free and untrammelled. It must not become the tool of any class or sect, or the proponent of any special doctrine or theory or of any particular ideology or faith."<sup>16</sup> He also pronounced that "freedom is not a right but a privilege to be earned." He continued:

Freedom does not exist in general, or in the abstract. It is a matter of growth within the individual and represents a conquest over instincts, inheritances, and maladjustments of all kinds. The ability to exercise freedom comes with maturity and experience and learning. Freedom is relative to circumstances and conditions; it does not exist in the absolute or in a vacuum. Freedom must be earned, and the price is self-discipline.<sup>17</sup>

The reference to the "instincts, inheritances, and maladjustments" that must be disciplined echoes the racial science of the day as developed in the field of anthropology and was used to justify a broad array of policies supporting segregation and immigration restrictions. Practitioners of this science also lent support to eugenics, which was pursued by several faculty and administrators at the University of Minnesota during this period. Coffman was in correspondence in the 1920s with Charles Dight, a physician who taught briefly at the University and who was the founder of the Minnesota Eugenics Council. Their exchanges focused on proposed state legislation to create an office of State Eugenicist, which would determine "socially unfit" recipients requiring enforced sterilization beyond those who were already state wards. Dight's proposal that the University would serve as home to this agency was brought to the Board of Regents by Coffman in 1926. Although he reassured Dight that all were in sympathy with the aims of the proposed agency, the Board ultimately decided that the University could not act in such a capacity, which they deemed to be within the domain of the state's "police powers."<sup>18</sup> Believing that the educational component of the eugenics movement was within the scope of the University, Coffman discussed with Dight the potential endowment of a eugenics program at the University the following year. The University's archives also contain an undated pamphlet produced by Dight, which included a quote in support of eugenics attributed to Coffman: "it is my opinion that the great hope for the race lies in the intensive study of eugenics applied to human families."<sup>19</sup>

The predominance of racial explanations (positing intellectual and social abilities as correlated with observable phenotypic traits) had already been subject to serious critique and challenge within sociology,

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<sup>16</sup> LD Coffman, 1939. *Freedom Through Education*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota. Accessed via HathiTrust, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b17495\\_14](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b17495_14)

<sup>17</sup> LD Coffman, 1939. *Freedom Through Education*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota. Accessed via HathiTrust, [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b17495\\_16](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b17495_16)

<sup>18</sup> Dight to Coffman, 8/9/1926, unsigned to Coffman 10/4/1926, Coffman to Dight, 10/19/1926; Eugenics files, Box 5, Files "Eugenics, correspondence & misc., July-Sept. 1926" and "Eugenics, correspondence & misc., Oct.-Dec. 1926" Charles Fremont Dight Papers. Minnesota Historical Society. Permission to publicly share doc images required.

<sup>19</sup> Dight to Coffman 2/27/1927, Eugenics files, Box 5, Files "Eugenics: corresp. & misc., 1927" and "Eugenics: corresp. & misc., undated." Charles Fremont Dight Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

anthropology, and psychology by the time of Coffman assumed the presidency. Yet within policy discussions, the idea remained that non-white or marginalized immigrants could be “Americanized,” which was frequently entwined with the idea that their allegedly “natural” (racial) tendencies towards objectionable social or political values could be “corrected.” A range of approaches to “racial purification” were supported in University faculty research during this period, including in the work of A.E. Jenks in the Department of Anthropology, who directed the Americanization Training program and was an avid advocate of forced sterilization and institutionalization of “subnormals.”<sup>20</sup> Another strong belief of eugenics advocates was that interracial marriage was to be discouraged at all costs: “[r]easoning that many relationships are formed when people are students, they also counseled against integrated education.”<sup>21</sup> Coffman’s apparent sympathies for the eugenics movement cannot be regarded as wholly outside the mainstream. They are considered here for their correlations to particular administrative actions.

### Creation of the General College

The General College was an institutional unit to which students of insufficient academic preparation were directed. The General College grew into a place much admired for its focus on the unique needs of students, with the aim of best assisting them in benefitting from the University environment, despite barriers to quality educational opportunities due to socioeconomic status. According to Gray, the initial impetus for the college came from Coffman’s observation of an enormous rate of attrition of students prior to completion of their degrees, most following their freshman year.<sup>22</sup>

In reviewing the reports of the “Committee of Seven,” which Coffman constituted in the 1920s to consider educational innovations, some of the language and methods they deployed echo scientific racism and eugenics (e.g., using intelligence testing and physical examinations as predictive of academic success, ideals of moral and mental “hygiene”). The aims, however, were not grounded in assumptions of inherent population hierarchies. Rather, the General College was founded on the notion that each student has a complicated life history that factors in her/his/their abilities to succeed, and that knowing this reality would allow the General College to tailor the college experience to the student’s needs, strengths, and weaknesses.<sup>23</sup> This student-centered model (as championed most famously by John Dewey) more closely resembles anthropological theories of culture that arose in opposition to the racial science that predominated in the late 19th century. The arguments for the creation of the General College, therefore, stand in contrast to the efforts described below to maintain the segregation of racialized student populations

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<sup>20</sup> The Americanization training program prepared case workers to “assist” new immigrants in assimilating to American cultural, social, economic norms, based on the worker’s knowledge of supposed ethnic and racial traits. As noted by Soderstrom (2004: 81) these norms as outlined by Jenks included anti-Black racism; see for example A.E. Jenks, 1921, “The Practical Value of Anthropology to our Nation,” *Science* 53(1364): 147-156. Jenks to Dight 3/1/1926, Eugenics files, Box 5, Files “Eugenics, correspondence & misc., Jan.-June 1926.” Charles Fremont Dight Papers. Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Hovenkamp, 2017, “The Progressives: Racism and Public Law,” 59 *Ariz. L. Rev.* 947, 965.

<sup>22</sup> Gray 1951: 282-283.

<sup>23</sup> General Committee on Education, Report of Sub-committee on Student Personnel, 28 November 1927, Committee of 7. Box 12, Folder B F752 #81 Minnesota. University. Committee of Seven. 1921-June 1928, Ford, Guy Stanton, 00000966 University Archives, University of Minnesota.

in particular areas of the University during Coffman's administration. The establishment of the General College, a positive legacy from the Coffman years, demonstrates the alternative, more equitable worldviews that faculty and administrators had access to and to some degree held, even as they chose to uphold exclusion in other cases.

### **Coffman's actions in support of racial exclusion on campus**

Policies and practices of racial exclusion and segregation were maintained in a number of University programs and facilities during Coffman's administration, often in the face of opposition from students and other stakeholders on and beyond the campus. As early as 1925, a complaint was registered via the Women's Christian Association of Minneapolis regarding a postgraduate nursing student, Dorothy Waters, who was barred from completing her residency on the basis of race. Because Ms. Waters had resigned a position in Chicago to enroll in the program in Minnesota, this administrative action placed her in very difficult circumstances. Coffman and Dean Lyon of the Medical School claimed in response that this did not constitute discrimination on the part of the University but rather the hospital to which she was assigned that would not allow Black nurses to serve white patients.<sup>24</sup> There was, however, no apparent effort made to reassign Ms. Waters to a different hospital. Although the complaint suggested that Ms. Waters was considering legal action, no further records on the case have been identified.

By the 1930s, Black activists had gained sufficient influence to force Coffman and other leaders of the University of Minnesota to defend or change policies that discriminated on the basis of race. In 1929, the University's School of Nursing denied admission to Frances McHie, who was born and raised in Minneapolis and applied with "top recommendations from her teachers." The rejection letter explained that because the University had no ties to hospitals that had "colored wards, . . . we are unable to provide the necessary clinical experience."<sup>25</sup> Asserting that a Black student would not be permitted care for white patients, the director of the school offered to recommend McHie to a hospital that served African-Americans in Chicago. McHie sought assistance from Gertrude Brown, a close friend of her family who ran the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House in North Minneapolis. Brown had previously assisted the University by offering rooms to Black students who were denied housing on campus, but she saw McHie's rejection as a clear case of discrimination. The local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) agreed and prepared a legal case while publishing the letter and sending copies to state authorities. S.A. Stockwell, a longtime champion of racial equality who represented Minneapolis in the state House, was "enraged and astounded" by McHie's treatment, and Governor Theodore Christianson was "highly indignant that such a condition should exist in Minnesota." Other legislators were incredulous when Stockwell told them of "the attitude of the University toward permitting the Negroes to have full benefit of the institution," but he convinced them by arranging for Brown to describe McHie's treatment on the floor of the House. "The impact was like a firecracker," recalled McHie, who accompanied Brown to the Capitol, adding that

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<sup>24</sup> Paige to Dean Lyon, 10/21/1925 (UMedia page 7), Coffman to Paige, 10/30/1925 (UMedia page 8), and Lyon to Paige, 11/2/1925 (UMedia page 9), in University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19, folder "Negro, 1921-1936."

<sup>25</sup> From Coffman To Mrs. James Paige, 30 October 1925, President's Office, Box 20, Folder 19, Page 8, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archive

lawmakers voted “overwhelmingly” to direct the Board of Regents to admit her immediately to the School of Nursing.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning in the 1930s, a series of African-American students requested to be housed within University dormitories, but were persistently turned away. In 1931, John Pinkett Jr. was removed from the newly constructed Pioneer Hall after a single night, and was encouraged to seek housing at the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House, where African-American students typically resided. As pointed out by a 1935 report, the house was several miles from campus, which presented significant obstacles to students who were required to commute to campus for classes and research in labs and libraries.<sup>27</sup> Pinkett’s removal was the subject of a number of complaints communicated to President Coffman, as found in archived correspondence, notably from the student’s family and family friends, as well as the NAACP. A newspaper clipping of an editorial item preserved in these files suggests that Pinkett was not even given the opportunity to pack up his own belongings upon being summarily removed from Pioneer Hall. In a letter to the President of the NAACP in the wake of this episode, Coffman explained that “The difficulties involved in this situation were pointed out to [Pinkett],” who “stated that he preferred to live with those of his own color.”

In 1933, Ahwna Fiti was removed from nursing student housing at the explicit request of Comptroller William Middlebrook and Dean of Women Anne Blitz (although opposed by Medical Dean Elias Lyon) to President Coffman. In this case, what was described as the “general policy” of excluding Black students from campus dormitories was applied to nursing school housing when the matter came to the administration’s attention. In considering the case of Ms. Fiti, administrators had discussed her character as an orphan who had an illegitimate child in their deliberations not only as to whether to allow her to reside in campus housing her but also whether to admit her to the University in the first instance.<sup>28</sup> In 1934, Norman Lyght, an African-American student from Minnesota, was assigned to Pioneer Hall by lottery but was turned away before he could move in.<sup>29</sup> This case caught the attention of the Farmer-Labor Association at the University, which

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<sup>26</sup> William P. Everts Jr., *Stockwell of Minneapolis: A Pioneer of Social and Political Conscience* (St. Cloud: North Star Press, 1996), 276-279; Ann Juergens, “Lena Olive Smith: A Minnesota Civil Rights Pioneer,” *William Mitchell Law Review* 397 (2001); Maurine Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities—Based on Documentary Sources,” (MA Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1932), 47.

<sup>27</sup> University Archives, Dean of Students, Box 10, Folder “ODS Negro 1939-1941,” 1935 Report of Council Committee on Negro Discrimination.

<sup>28</sup> From University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19, accessed via UMedia, pages 37 (Katharine Densford to Dean Lyon, 10/2/1933), 43 (Katharine Densford to Dean Lyon, 10/23/1933), 44 (Dean Lyon to Pres. Coffman, 10/24/1933), 45 (Pres. Coffman to Dean Lyon, 10/25/1933), 60-62 (Dean Lyon to Pres. Coffman, 10/9/1933), 63 (Middlebrook to Pres. Coffman, 10/10/1933), and 64 (Pres. Coffman to Dean Lyon, 10/11/1933).

<sup>29</sup> University Archives, Benjamin Lippincott Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, “Memorandum to Minnesota Local 444 of American Federation of Teachers, by Warren Grissom et al.”

protested directly to the administration.<sup>30</sup> Local media reports in 1934 indicate that students, Black and white, were aware of these instances and objected to them.<sup>31</sup>

Though the University administration sought to represent the incidents as minor cases of misunderstanding, archived correspondence demonstrates that a policy of exclusion was in place, and that Coffman's administration was extremely cautious about allowing even a single instance to establish "precedent" for integrated housing.<sup>32</sup> This correspondence also shows that administrators became increasingly concerned with the legality of their position, and followed court cases at comparable universities regarding such discrimination (further described in section IV.3 on William Middlebrook).<sup>33</sup> Yet to public audiences the administration insisted that there was no policy, and that segregation was sustained by mutual agreement of all students. Responding to the father of John Pinkett Jr., Coffman insisted that there was no policy of exclusion or segregation so far as University dormitories were concerned, rather that out-of-state students could not expect campus housing, which prioritized Minnesota resident students. Yet Norman Lyght, a Minnesota resident, was subsequently turned away from Pioneer Hall. Coffman also suggested that it was simply common sense that dormitories would not be integrated: "The races have never lived together, nor have they ever sought to live together."<sup>34</sup>

A student group called the All-University Council Committee on Negro Discrimination submitted a report in 1935 to the Coffman administration, objecting to the evident discrimination by the University. The report outlined several key factors: first, an interview with President Coffman established that the University policy was to "exercise its judgement as to the best interests of all individuals concerned"; second, that segregation was illegal, either under the state public accommodations law or under the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* interpretation of the 14th Amendment (students charged that the University did not provide "separate but

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<sup>30</sup> University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, Folder 19, LR Harmon to Dean Willey, 12/10/34; Dean Willey to Pres. Coffman, 12/12/1934 (UMedia pages 77 and 78).

<sup>31</sup> "Student Leader Hits "U" Racial Discrimination," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 11-30-1934; "Campus Comment," *Minnesota Daily*, 12/12/1934.

<sup>32</sup> Housing of Colored Students in Nursing Program President's Office, Box 20, Folder 19, pp. 60-64, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archives: See correspondence regarding 1933 case of removal of a nursing student from University housing; in Coffman's penultimate decision written to Dean Lyons, he refers to the "rules of the University" as justification. Oct. 11, 1933, in collection Office of the President, Administration, Folder "Negro." This file also contains numerous letters written to the president regarding reported instances of discrimination. Dorothy Waters Nursing School Housing, President's Office, Box 20, Folder 19, pp. 7-10, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archives.; Home management-economics housing, President's Office, Box 20, Folder 19, p. 11, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archives; McHle Nursing School Housing, President's Office, Box 20, Folder 19, pp. 12-17, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archives.

<sup>33</sup> The decision on a case at Ohio State was shared amongst administrators. One copy of this letter filed in the Dean of Students correspondence has a handwritten note (unattributed) observing that the University of Minnesota did not conform to the standard set out in the Ohio case because it could not claim to provide comparable accommodations for Black students. See University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, Folder 19, "Negro, 1921-1936," under cover letter from Carl Steeb (1/31/1934), UMedia pages 51-59.

<sup>34</sup> Pres. Coffman to John R. Pinkett Sr., Oct. 5, 1931, in University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19, pg. 34.

equal” facilities as required by the Supreme Court ruling); and third, quite apart from its legal infirmities, the segregation policy was morally objectionable and educationally harmful.<sup>35</sup>

In a 1935 letter responding to the report, President Coffman described the separate housing provisions as “in the best interests” of both white and Black students, but also referenced a “general policy” that the Board of Regents supported. More specifically, he noted, “The University has maintained consistently that it should provide residential conditions in so far as possible for the accommodation of the students of the University, and that final judgement as to where students may live or not live should reside with it. The Regents propose that the administration continue to exercise discretion with regards to this matter.” This stance effectively designated Coffman as the final authority who had the discretion to determine whether Black students would be included or excluded from University housing. In terms of addressing the report’s concerns, Coffman acknowledged only the inadequacy of existing student housing: “The Regents recognize that deficiencies exist at the University with regard to housing and they wish to correct this as rapidly as possible for all students, including Negro students.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite the identification of the policy in addressing the student committee, Coffman’s explanation of what had happened in the case of John Pinkett Jr. changed in the retelling to individuals outside the University. In some correspondence he claimed Pinkett had been placed in Pioneer Hall at the urging of a national organization simply to create a stir. In others he claimed that young man had “actually lived in the dormitory for a time. He told me he didn’t wish to live there, and a little later, with our assistance, secured accommodations which were more congenial to him.” In most instances, however, he claimed that there were “no rules” against Black students living in the dormitory.<sup>37</sup>

As public attention increased, members of the University administration realized that they were in danger of being out of compliance with federal law, with or without an explicit policy, if they did not address the lack of adequate housing for African-American students. In an effort to solve that problem, Coffman resurrected the idea of creating an International House for non-white students. He had appointed a committee in the late 1920s to investigate the need and feasibility of such a facility.<sup>38</sup> The original committee recommended that due to the expense and the small number of international students such a house was not needed, and instead such students could be housed in the University dormitories and provided with additional support services.<sup>39</sup> Records show that Coffman remained interested more broadly in how to support international

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<sup>35</sup> University Archives, Dean of Students, Box 10, Folder “ODS-Negro, 1939-1941”: “Report of the Council Committee on Negro Discrimination.”

<sup>36</sup> Pres. Coffman to the All-University Council on Negro Discrimination, August 1, 1935, in University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19, UMedia pg. 67. The letter was brought to public audiences by student council members, as reported in the Mpls Spokesman, Oct. 25, 1935, “Negro Bar in “U” Housing Is Upheld by Regents.”

<sup>37</sup> Coffman to Harmon 12/14/1934; Coffman to Stokes, 4/1/1935, University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19 “Negro, 1920-1936” (UMedia pages 114-115 and 92 respectively).

<sup>38</sup> Coffman to Lawrence, Nicholson, Blitz, Erickson and Barnum, July 17, 1929. University Archives, Office of the President, Box 14, Folder “Foreign Students International House, 1929-1940.”

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence to Coffman (memorandum), 11/30/1929, University Archives, Office of the President, Box 14, Folder “Foreign Students International House, 1929-1940.”

students, but in 1935 presented a potential new role for the house as a solution to the issue of adequate segregated housing. In the letter to the president of the All-University Student Council referenced above, in which he rejected calls for opening Pioneer Hall to Black students, Coffman suggested the idea of an International House and encouraged students to work with the administration to pursue the idea:

I think instead of starting a controversy on whether or not one or a half dozen Negroes should live in Pioneer Hall, that we might actually do something constructive... For a number of years, I have been of the opinion that we should consider seriously the possibility of providing an International House. I have had the matter looked up two or three times, not very thoroughly I think, but there didn't seem to be much sentiment in favor of it. The University of Minnesota has for years, as you perhaps know, had one of the largest foreign enrollments of any university in the country. International Houses have been built at Columbia, Chicago, and California (Berkeley). I do not for the moment know what they cost, nor what policies have been adopted for their administration. I think, however, that these buildings are open to all students regardless of race."<sup>40</sup>

He convened a new committee in 1935 to investigate the feasibility of creating such an International House, this time with positive responses up to the level of the Board of Regents, but ultimately all found the cost prohibitive at that time. Curiously, in March 1936 Coffman asserted in a letter to Roy Wilkins of the NAACP that "the University now has a building of its own in which Negro students who are not members of the fraternity or of the sorority may live."<sup>41</sup> There is no evidence that such a facility was ever made available by the University during Coffman's administration. Whether Coffman's reference was to his anticipation of a future International House is unclear.

Another area of controversy concerning race during Coffman's presidency relates to athletics. In 1923, Jack Trice, an African-American athlete on the Iowa State football team, died from injuries sustained during a game against Minnesota. In later interviews, players differed on whether the death resulted from assault or a risky maneuver Trice had taken. President Coffman adopted the latter account in a letter to the Iowa State president. According to Coffman, the play "took place directly in front of me. Of course, it is difficult to describe these things after they have once happened, but it seemed to me that he threw himself in front of the play [*sic*] on the opposite side of the line. There was no piling up."<sup>42</sup> In fall 1934, news reports and angry correspondence arrived on Coffman's desk regarding a football game with Iowa, with writers asserting that Iowa's African-American player, Ozzie Simmons, was targeted by Minnesota players. Coffman defended the team and rejected the assertion that the targeting was motivated by racial antagonism.<sup>43</sup> No official inquiry took place.

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<sup>40</sup> Pres. Coffman to the All-University Council on Negro Discrimination, August 1, 1935, in University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19, folder "Negro, 1921-1936" (pg. 67 in UMedia).

<sup>41</sup> Coffman to Wilkins 6/30/1936, UA Office of the Dean of Students, Box 10, Folder "Negro 1939-1941."

<sup>42</sup> L.D. Coffman to Raymond Pearson, 10/18/1923, letter in Jack Trice Papers, University Archives, Iowa State University Library (cited in "The Life and Legacy of Jack Trice" by Dorothy Schwieder, 2010, *The Annals of Iowa* 69: 379-417).

<sup>43</sup> University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, folder 19, Wilkins to Coffman, 1/13/1934 (UMedia page 46; Coffman to Wilkins, 1/19/1934 (UMedia page 49); Wilkins to Coffman, 1/23/1934 (UMedia page 50); HB Knox Jr. to Coffman, 11/1/1934



In 1934, Roy Wilkins (a University of Minnesota alumnus and Assistant Secretary in the national NAACP) wrote to President Coffman that a varsity basketball coach from the University of Michigan claimed “that there was an ‘unwritten agreement’ in the Big 10 schools, to the effect that colored players will not be permitted on the basketball team of any school.” Coffman denied this, although at that time there were no players of color on the team, by reminding him that there had been in the past. Historians of college athletics in this period bear out what Wilkins indicated to Coffman was true at the time: there was a “gentlemen’s agreement” among coaches to bench African-American athletes in games against all-white teams.<sup>44</sup> As late as 1935, Coffman received complaints from the NAACP that the University had benched Black players in a game against a southern university because those opposing teams would refuse to play otherwise. In that sense, even though the Minnesota team was integrated, the University did not pursue a practice that would allow for equal opportunities for athletes who were racial minorities.<sup>45</sup> These episodes indicate that Coffman was aware of the disagreement with such policies and practices, yet failed to address clear racial tensions at the University with respect to athletics.

Opposition to the discriminatory practices in housing, nursing school admissions, and athletics was clearly and persistently demonstrated through the 1930s, as documented in letters sent to President Coffman and in campus and local media coverage. The instances drew attention from local and national offices of the NAACP. Perhaps the most influential was an article published in the *Minnesota Daily* literary magazine (1937) by African-American student Charlotte Crump titled “The Free North,” documenting various forms of anti-Black racism on campus. Its power derived from the poignant and very personal terms Crump expressed through the format of letters home to her sister, speaking of the shame and discomfort engendered in her exclusion from facilities and hostile personal interactions.<sup>46</sup> A more direct critique of Coffman was published as a letter from a white student in the *Minneapolis Spokesman* in 1937, recounting how Coffman refused to address in public meetings questions from students about University housing policy. Another media piece from 1937 suggested that, per Coffman’s conversations with graduate student Arnold Walker, the administration saw protest as propaganda: Coffman asked “why students from out-of-town were so interested in fighting existing prejudice at the ‘U’ when the residents of the Twin Cities and students were perfectly satisfied.”<sup>47</sup>

Archived correspondence offers numerous examples of Coffman’s deep suspicions of protests, such as an instance when he sought information about an African-American student from Ohio State who had inquired about campus conditions at Minnesota. Dean Malcolm Willey also appealed to that suspicion when he suggested that Farmer-Labor concern with the case of Norman Lyght was “obviously out to make an issue of

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(UMedia page 73); Coffman to Knox, 11/5/1934 (UMedia page 74); news clipping “The Baptism of Oze Simmons,” undated (UMedia page 71). MPR “The Origin of Floyd Rosedale” by Mark Steil, 11/17/2005.

<sup>44</sup> See Schwieder 2010, and Jaime Schultz 2007, “‘Stuff from which legends are made’: Jack Trice Stadium and the politics of memory.” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24(6): 715-748.

<sup>45</sup> White to Coffman, 10/14/1935, University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, folder 19 “Negro, 1920-1936,” UMedia page 111.

<sup>46</sup> Crump, Charlotte. “This Free North.” *Minnesota Daily Literary Review* (Winter Quarter 1937), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Mpls Spokesman 2/19/1937, “Student Council to Fight Race Bias at State ‘U’”

racial discrimination.”<sup>48</sup> Shortly after, student Warren Grissom reported to the University of Minnesota chapter of the American Federation of Teachers on extensive discrimination and student opposition to discriminatory housing.<sup>49</sup> While numerous print media opinion pieces demonstrated a widespread local protest of the exclusions and demands for integrated housing, President Coffman continued to insist that Black and white students did not want to share housing. Throughout this period, President Coffman’s active hand in maintaining discriminatory policies and practices despite widespread calls for change is well documented through archived correspondence and public media.

### Surveillance and policing of students on campus, and suppression of student protests

During the period of Coffman’s presidency, in addition to student protests against racial discrimination, there was also considerable activism on campus related to workers’ rights and international peace. Student activists were frequently viewed with suspicion and arbitrarily associated with communism and labeled anti-American. This was particularly true of Jewish students, who some assumed to be subversive regardless of their political views or actions.

Such views found a sympathetic ear at the University in this era, most notably on the part of Dean Edward Nicholson, who collaborated with former Congressman and Minnesota State Auditor Ray Chase to identify groups and individual students as potentially dangerous based on their political leanings. Dean Nicholson made efforts to prevent the formation of particular student groups, and to prevent student participation in public protests.

President Coffman’s role in this area included a continued authorization of Nicholson’s efforts.<sup>50</sup> In the student actions to end compulsory military drills on campus (viewed as an anti-war effort), President Coffman held the authority to grant or deny petitions by students not to participate, but we find no evidence of his opinion on the practice prior to a vote by the Board of Regents in 1935 to end the requirement. Additional detail on this aspect of campus climate can be found in section IV.2 of this report, on Edward Nicholson.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, folder 19, Pres. Coffman to Pres. Rightmire, OSU, 3/27/1935; Willey to Coffman 12/12/1934; UMedia pages 90 and 78. He was not alone in the practice of racializing radicalism, for example another issue of the Mpls Spokesman reporting on campus issues also included notice of a forum at Hallie Q Brown on the topic “Are Communists Exploiting the Negro?” *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Jan. 21, 1938, page 1.

<sup>49</sup> University Archives, Benjamin Lippincott Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, “Memorandum to Minnesota Local 444 of American Federation of Teachers, by Warren Grissom et al.”

<sup>50</sup> Monitoring and active management of student protest is demonstrated in a letter from Willey to President Coffman, October 25, 1935, in which he describes having coaxed the *Minnesota Daily* editor into representing student protests as minor and insignificant; in University Archives, OAP Box 22, Folder: Peace Plans, Strikes etc. 1929-1939. A January 30, 1936 *Minnesota Daily* editorial “The Senate Committee Solves the Propaganda Problem” critiques the rules put in place for the approval of student groups and speakers on campus, and notes that according to those rules public materials “must be approved by an officer of the University appointed by the President,” evidently referring to Nicholson as the former and Coffman as the latter. Coffman’s refusal to allow student protesters the use of buildings is recounted in James Gray (1951), *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pg. 368.

<sup>51</sup> There were more general aspects of monitoring students’ lives at the time in addition to the monitoring of protest and activism. Archived correspondence shows that Coffman brought a policy proposed in 1932 by Dean Nicholson to the Board of Regents. This proposal would have given the University the power to track and approve off-campus student housing and to

## Comparable context at other universities

In this section we examine the societal context within which President Coffman acted, specifically exploring how other institutions of higher education at the same time promoted or challenged racial segregation, antisemitism, and the policing and surveillance of students on their campuses.

Although there has not been extensive research on the history of housing African-American and Jewish students at public universities in the North during the 1920s and 1930s (the decades of Coffman's tenure as president), it is well established that "institutional racism pervaded the American college and university system of the 1930s," and there is enough research and documentation to suggest that segregated housing and/or exclusion from campus dormitories was a general practice in both southern and northern institutions.<sup>52</sup> The emergence of a student protest movement in the 1930s and a growing number of legal challenges worked to effect change on these campuses.

### *The South*

Under Jim Crow, which was at its height between 1890 and 1935, higher education in the southern states remained rigidly segregated into "white" and "Black" schools. The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1890 provided substantial funding intended to benefit Black students, but it allowed for the distribution of these funds on the "separate but equal" basis that in 1896 was established as legal precedent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The subsequent decades saw the rapid expansion of the 1890 segregated land-grant colleges, and enrollment of African-American students increased from 2,700 to 44,000 between 1915 and 1940. African-American students from the North often attended these historically Black colleges because of the racism that pervaded predominantly white northern campuses and their surrounding communities. In 1933 there were approximately 23,000 Black undergraduates, and 20,300 of them were on Black campuses.<sup>53</sup> The racial segregation of higher education in the South, however, hardly left Black and white colleges on an equal footing, and the combination of expanding enrollments with limited opportunities at Black colleges created "the institutional backdrop to the efforts that, beginning in the 1930s, led Black southerners to seek admission to various programs in 'white' schools."<sup>54</sup>

### *The Ivy League*

As Ivy League admissions rose after World War I and put pressure on student housing, these elite institutions sought to limit the presence of minority groups, particularly Jews, who were increasingly being represented

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require students to vacate any residence that was "not conducive to study, health, or morals." It appears that the proposal was approved in a modified form. Nicholson to Coffman, October 20, 1932, in University Archive, President's Office, Administration, Box 111, housing inspection file 1932-57; Nicholson to Coffman, October 20, 1932, in University Archive, President's Office, Administration, Box 111, housing inspection file 1932-57; University of Minnesota Board of Regents. (1932). Minutes: Board of Regents Meeting and Committee Meetings: November 5, 1932 and November 19, 1932. University of Minnesota. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/58657>.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 206.

<sup>53</sup> See Peter Wallenstein, ed., *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Marybeth Gasman and Roger L. Geiger, eds., *Higher Education for African Americans before the Civil Rights Era, 1900-1964* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Wallenstein, *Higher Education*, 5.

in their applicant pools. Harvard took the lead in developing a selective system of admissions that was explicitly aimed at reducing the percentage of Jews in the college and freshman houses. This quota system operated through the last decade of the presidency of A. Lawrence Lowell (1909-33) and into the administration of James Bryant Conant (1933-53). Princeton and Yale imposed similar admissions quotas on Jews through the late 1940s. While Harvard and Yale accepted small numbers of African-American students during this same period, Princeton excluded them from admission.<sup>55</sup>

An incident at Harvard in 1922 invites comparison with the case of John Pinkett Jr. at the University of Minnesota. Roscoe Conkling Bruce—a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard, Class of 1902—applied for a room for his son in a freshman residence hall at Harvard. The application was turned down by President Lowell, who wrote: “We owe the colored man the same opportunities for education that we do to the white man; but we do not owe to him to force him and the white man into social relations that are not, or may not be, socially congenial.” Many alumni strongly objected to Lowell’s position, which led to a “compromise” policy stating that “men of the white and colored races shall not be compelled to live and eat together, nor shall any man be excluded by reason of his color.” Despite the vague appeal to non-exclusion, Lowell’s segregationist policies appear to have continued into the 1950s.<sup>56</sup>

While Ivy League institutions, in general, admitted very few African Americans until after World War II, Cornell is something of an exception, admitting 150 between 1904 and 1943. As a land-grant institution, its mission was to provide educational opportunities regardless of gender, religion, and race. But housing issues arose there as well, particularly for female students at Sage College (Cornell’s college for women), since they were required to stay on campus. In 1911, two hundred students from Sage College delivered a petition to the trustees of Cornell stating they could not tolerate living with Black women students. After the New York chapter of the NAACP took up the issue, Black women “begrudgingly but not consistently were permitted to live on campus” according to historian Stefan Bradley. Bradley notes that by 1939 “Black women were again having difficulty accessing Sage College with little support from the administration.”<sup>57</sup>

### *The Midwest*

Racial segregation and exclusion in midwestern colleges and universities has not received as much attention from historians as the South and Ivy League, although the “A Campus Divided” exhibition addresses the issue in depth in the specific case of the University of Minnesota. There is evidence to suggest that Minnesota’s discretionary practice of excluding African-American students from residence halls, as detailed in “A Campus Divided,” was typical for a large public university in the Midwest. Herbert C. Jenkins, an African-American sociology student at the University of Iowa, writes in his 1933 master’s thesis on “The Negro Student at the University of Iowa”:

No negro students lived in University dormitories but all were accommodated in private homes, a Home for Women, or in the two-colored fraternity houses. This is not at all unusual in white colleges and is one of the drawbacks to colored students attending many northern universities. While, as it

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<sup>55</sup> Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

<sup>56</sup> Nell Painter, “Jim Crow at Harvard: 1923,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 1971), 627-634.

<sup>57</sup> Stefan Bradley, *Upending the Ivory Tower: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League* (New York University Press, 2018).

will be shown later, there are no rules against Negro students living at university dormitories at Iowa[,] those in charge felt that it would be best for them to find accommodation with members of their own race.<sup>58</sup>

White college administrators who supported such racial discrimination were ready to respond when they perceived threats to these practices, as “A Campus Divided” has shown in the cases of John Pinkett Jr., Norman Lyght, and Ahwna Fiti.<sup>59</sup> At Ohio State University in 1933, Doris Weaver, an African-American home economics student, was denied housing with white students in Ohio State’s “home management house.”<sup>60</sup> At the University of Michigan in 1934, an African-American student, Jean Blackwell, was barred from a white dormitory and told she could find vacancies in a house that took only colored women.<sup>61</sup> Historian Richard M. Breaux, who has studied racial politics at several predominantly white flagship universities in the Midwest (Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota), notes that “as campuses added dormitories to college life, all but UW [Wisconsin] prohibited Blacks from rooming in dorms before 1936.”<sup>62</sup> Breaux also reports that a number of Big Ten universities had student-run Ku Klux Klan chapters.<sup>63</sup> A KKK float appeared in the University of Minnesota Homecoming Parade and was featured in the 1923 yearbook, *The Gopher*.<sup>64</sup>

As the case of Wisconsin suggests, there does appear to have been some variation in responses from administrators to the “problem” of housing African-American students, although exclusion from university dormitories was the majority position in the 1930s. In 1935, Arthur P. Stokes, an African-American student at Ohio State University, wrote to President Coffman seeking information for a survey of 11 northern universities “regarding their Negro students,” a project Stokes was conducting under the supervision of Ohio State’s YMCA. The results of the survey are recorded in a five-page document with responses to 15 questions, including: “Are negro students permitted to live in University dormitories?” The survey records three “yes” responses to this question (Wisconsin, Chicago, and Michigan), and seven “nos” (Northwestern, Purdue,

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<sup>58</sup> Herbert C. Jenkins, “Negro Students at a Big Ten University,” *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*, vol. 12, no. 10 (October 1934): 296-298, 319; Herbert Crawford Jenkins, “The Negro Student at the University of Iowa: A Sociological Study,” M.A. Thesis, University of Iowa, 1933.

<sup>59</sup> *A Campus Divided: Progressives, Anticomunists, Racism & Antisemitism at the University of Minnesota, 1930-1942*, <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/>; see also Mark Soderstrom, “Weeds in Linnaeus’s Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900-45,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004.

<sup>60</sup> *State v. Board of Trustees of Ohio State University*, 126 Ohio St. 290 (1933).

<sup>61</sup> Michigan’s Story: The History of Race at U-M, online exhibition curated by University Library MLK Planning Committee, <https://www.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/history-of-race-at-um/diversity-in-student-life/living-on-campus>

<sup>62</sup> Richard M. Breaux, “Nooses, Sheets, and Blackface: White Racial Anxiety and Black Student Presence at Six Midwest Flagship Universities, 1882-1937,” in Marybeth Gasman and Roger L. Geiger, eds., *Higher Education for African Americans before the Civil Rights Era*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers (2012): 52.

<sup>63</sup> Breaux, “Nooses, Sheets, and Blackface,” p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> *The Gopher*, volume 36 (1923): p. 261. The image is viewable at UMedia Archive, <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/584093>.

Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Iowa, Illinois).<sup>65</sup> By 1936, Northwestern had opened its dormitories to two Black students according to news reports that Dean Willey forwarded to President Coffman.<sup>66</sup> The pressure to provide equal access was felt widely, and institutions were looking to one another in facing this issue.

President Coffman and Comptroller Middlebrook were concerned enough about the legal consequences of the University of Minnesota's refusal to house African-American students in its dormitories that they circulated information about a legal action at Ohio State University, a Big Ten peer institution in a state with a public accommodations law similar to Minnesota's.<sup>67</sup> In January 1934, Ohio State's business manager wrote to Middlebrook and the business managers of four other major midwestern universities, providing him with a copy of the 1933 court action brought by Doris Weaver against Ohio State's Board of Trustees.<sup>68</sup> Weaver, whose case had been taken up by the NAACP, claimed that she was unjustly denied housing in the home economics dormitory. Ohio State did not dispute the facts of the case, but claimed that even though Weaver had been refused housing with white students, she had been offered separate-but-equal accommodations. The court sided with the university.<sup>69</sup> It is worth noting that Middlebrook and Coffman were examining this case just as they were trying to justify their own refusal to house Ahwna Fiti in the Nurse's Home at the University of Minnesota.

As historian Robert Cohen has shown in his study *When the Old Left Was Young*, a powerful student protest movement emerged in the 1930s that took up the cause of racial equality.<sup>70</sup> The National Student League made an issue of racial discrimination early on, holding a Student Conference on Negro Student Problems in New York in April 1933 that denounced the harm being done to education in both the South and the North by the Jim Crow system.<sup>71</sup> As "A Campus Divided" has shown, students at Minnesota directly challenged the exclusionary policies of the Coffman administration. Such efforts were furthered by organizations like the NAACP, which mounted legal challenges to discriminatory practices, and by African-American students and scholars like Herbert Jenkins and Arthur Stokes, whose work made the unequal educational conditions for African Americans at Midwestern universities more visible. Despite these growing anti-discriminatory efforts through the 1930s, college administrations in the Midwest, including Coffman's, nevertheless continued to believe that exclusionary policies were the best way to avoid conflict and ensure racial harmony.

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<sup>65</sup> The 5-page survey from 1935, along with related correspondence, can be found in the UofM Archives, Office of the President records, folder "Negro"; the court action against The Board of Trustees of Ohio State University, and related documents, are found in the same folder.

<sup>66</sup> Willey to Coffman 1/16/1936, University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, Folder 19 "Negro, 1920-1936." UMedia pages 116-118.

<sup>67</sup> See "Legislation, Race Equality by Statute," 84 U. Pa. Law Rev. 75 (1935-36).

<sup>68</sup> University Archives, Office of the President, Box 20, Folder 19, undercover letter from Carl Steeb (1/31/1934), UMedia pages 51-59. See also Middlebrook report.

<sup>69</sup> State v. Board of Trustees of Ohio State University, 126 Ohio St. 290 (1933).

<sup>70</sup> Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 206.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 206.

## Comparable context in the Twin Cities

In this section we examine the wider climate of opinion and state of affairs in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota, particularly with respect to residential segregation, fair housing practices, and other initiatives that worked to promote or challenge racial discrimination, antisemitism, and the policing and suppression of political dissent.

The exclusion of African-Americans from student housing at the University of Minnesota must be understood in the context of a longstanding, and ongoing, struggle over racial equality in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota. Indeed, students who protested those policies in the 1930s pointed out that the policies violated the spirit, if not the letter, of a law enacted half a century earlier prohibiting racial discrimination in hotels, restaurants, transportation, “or other place of public refreshment, amusement, instruction, accommodation or entertainment.”<sup>72</sup>

Historian William Green observes that the public accommodations law exemplifies a broader tension between “Minnesota’s commitment to civil and political equality for Blacks” and the state’s “ambivalence to social equality.”<sup>73</sup> The initial impetus for the law was the embarrassment felt by local activists in the Republican Party who could not find a hotel that would admit Frederick Douglass, the famed abolitionist and the most famous African-American in the United States at the time, after they invited him to speak in Saint Paul. In 1885, Minnesota joined 18 states that adopted laws modeled on the federal Civil Rights Act of 1875, which was struck down in 1883 by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the federal government lacked authority to prevent racial discrimination by private businesses. Responding to this Supreme Court ruling, Minnesota legislators declared it “essential to just government that we recognize the equality of all men before the law” and “the duty of government in its dealings with the people to mete out equal and exact justice to all, of whatever nativity, race, color, or persuasion, religious or political.” With these words, the state articulated a higher standard than the “separate but equal” principle that the Supreme Court would adopt in its 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.<sup>74</sup>

Green also notes that the tension between ideals and practice was reflected in the 1885 law’s failure to ensure effective enforcement or the imposition of serious penalties for violations. The weakness of the statute and resistance to its implementation was revealed a few years later when legislators amended the law to include “saloons” to the list of covered establishments because drinking establishments in the St. Paul continued to discriminate on the ground that they were not specifically named in the original law.<sup>75</sup>

The tensions also made Minnesota an important launching ground for civil rights activists who cut their teeth enforcing the law. Frustration with the 1885 law led Saint Paul attorney Frederick McGhee to take a leading role in the Niagara Movement, the precursor to the NAACP. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, an Anoka native and graduate of Hamline University, established the first African-American political lobby in Washington, DC (the

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<sup>72</sup> William D. Green, *Degrees of Freedom: The Origins of Civil Rights in Minnesota, 1865-1912* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 223

<sup>73</sup> Green, *Degrees of Freedom*

<sup>74</sup> Green, *Degrees of Freedom*, 133, 129-130.

<sup>75</sup> Green, *Degrees of Freedom*:

National Council for a Permanent FEPC), and was the only woman on the organizing committee of the 1963 March on Washington. Roy Wilkins was raised in Saint Paul, graduated from the University, and edited Saint Paul's Black newspaper before heading the national office of the NAACP. University of Minnesota graduate Clarence Mitchell led an Urban League campaign against employment discrimination in St. Paul before becoming the NAACP's head lobbyist in the Washington, DC.<sup>76</sup>

Facing criticism and threats of legal action for denying admission to Frances McHie, Coffman and other administrators nonetheless continued to exclude African Americans from full access. In 1930, two Black students at the University of Minnesota Medical School were denied clerkships at a county hospital in Saint Paul, but the decision was reversed following a formal protest to the County Board of Commissioners. The following year, when confronted by John Pinkett's father and the NAACP, Coffman contended that Pinkett had moved on his own accord. Despite McHie's rejection just two years earlier, Coffman insisted that the University "has never discriminated against colored students" and that Black students had been admitted "without question" to classes, public events, and receptions.<sup>77</sup>

Coffman was repeatedly and soundly challenged by students, parents, and many in the local community.<sup>78</sup> "Your action and that of your staff strikes me as an outrage, both on my son and on society," wrote John R. Pinkett Sr., in a letter that was copied to Minnesota Governor Floyd Olson. Minneapolis NAACP leader Lena Olive Smith contended that because Pioneer Hall was state property, the 1885 Public Accommodations Law prohibited the University from excluding "a citizen because of his color." In 1934, the All-University Committee on Negro Discrimination resolved that although "the judgement of the University has been that the best interests of both Negroes and whites are served by the Negroes' living elsewhere than at the official dormitories," this "policy is a violation of the rights of the persons concerned." Asserting that a "tax-supported institution" was obligated to serve all "tax-paying citizens," the committee stated that "on a moral basis . . . this practice could not be justified." Citing the 1885 Public Accommodations law, as well as the equal treatment clause of the Minnesota State Constitution, the students concluded that "even if they do not

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<sup>76</sup> Green, *Degrees of Freedom*, Jennifer Scanlon, *Until There is Justice: The Life of Anna Arnold Hedgeman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Roy Wilkins and Tom Mathews, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: Viking, 1982); Denton L. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr.'s Struggle for the Passage of Civil Rights Laws* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1990).

<sup>77</sup> Lotus D. Coffman to L.O. Smith, October 5, 1931, University of Minnesota Archives, OAP Box 20 Negro Folder, 1931.

<sup>78</sup> In addition to cases involving housing and admissions, Coffman received correspondence highlighting a variety of discriminatory forms of treatment at the University from the beginning of his term as president. For example, W. Ellis Branch, local president of the NAACP, wrote to the president concerning an April 1921 incident in which an African-American student was denied his alphabetical seat in a political science classroom by the instructor, Jeremiah Young. The student, Willard Morrow, asked if the students could vote on the matter. They did, and Morrow took his rightful seat. Branch expressed concern with any discrimination at a taxpayer-funded institution and "encouraged UM administrators 'to promptly suppress any act of' discrimination practiced by faculty or any representatives of UM" (Eileen H. Tamura, ed., *The History of Discrimination in U.S. Education: Marginality, Agency, and Power*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); *Minneapolis Journal*, "Equal Rights Voted for Negro Student," April 21, 1921.



specifically include university dormitories . . . it certainly follows that a state university, operating on state funds, is obligated to accommodate equally all people regardless of race or color.”<sup>79</sup>

Critics of the University contended that its president had a greater obligation toward equal treatment than other citizens and even other public officials. Highlighting “the anomaly of an educational institution not only failing to combat racial prejudice but officially encouraging it,” the All-University Committee on Negro Discrimination framed the debate over student housing as “an outstanding opportunity for education to play its role, for by allowing white and colored university students—the better representatives of each race—to live under the same roof, the University could help to develop in each race a sympathetic understanding of the problems of the other.”<sup>80</sup>

The need for such moral leadership and provision of educational opportunities on the part of the University was amplified by the broader challenge to racial discrimination and segregation in the Twin Cities. Maurine Boie, a University of Minnesota student and Urban League activist, identified 14 cases that utilized the 1885 law to challenge racial discrimination between 1926 and 1931. Most were resolved quickly with small fines to restaurants, hotels, and other places of public accommodation, but Boie explained that many cases never made it to court, because victims decided not to pursue them or were not aware of the law. She cited the case of a Kentucky woman who made a hotel reservation in advance but was turned away when she arrived, and learned only after returning home that she could have sued.<sup>81</sup>

A particularly dramatic conflict over racial discrimination erupted the summer before John Pinkett Jr. arrived at the University. In July 1931, Arthur Lee, a Black city employee and World War I veteran, purchased a bungalow in South Minneapolis, and almost immediately his white neighbors began taunting him and his wife and daughter. The Lee family received no police protection, even after their home was pelted with garbage and paint and signs planted on the lawn reading, “We don’t want n-----s here,” and, “No n-----s allowed in this neighborhood—this means you.” (The racist slurs on the signs and in the report were fully spelled out.) Only after the homeowner received an anonymous telephone call warning that a mob of 500 people would storm the house the following evening did police intervene, but even then, their strategy was to convince the family to accept a buyout and move away. The Lees seem to have been on the verge of backing down, but NAACP activists convinced them to challenge the city to defend them. They lived in the house for two years before moving away due to financial troubles.<sup>82</sup>

In the context of such conflicts, Coffman’s housing policies denied Black students respite from the discrimination that was rampant throughout the Twin Cities. A survey conducted by University of Minnesota students in 1929 and 1930 found that of the 34 restaurants adjacent to campus, three “absolutely refused to

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<sup>79</sup> John R. Pinkett Sr., to Lotus D. Coffman, September 30, 1931, University of Minnesota Archives, OAP, Box 20, Negro Folder, 1931; Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation,” 49; “Report of the Committee on Negro Discrimination,” University of Minnesota Archives, Office of Dean of Students Papers, Box 10, “Negro, 1939-1941” folder, 3-4.

<sup>80</sup> “Report of the Committee on Negro Discrimination,” University of Minnesota Archives, Office of Dean of Students Papers, Box 10, “Negro, 1939-1941” folder.

<sup>81</sup> Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation,” 50-56.

<sup>82</sup> Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation,” 6-41; Juergens, “Lena Olive Smith.”

serve Negroes under any circumstances,” while others discriminated more subtly by providing Black customers with “pointedly slow service” or putting “an unusual amount of salt in the food.”<sup>83</sup> Contradicting Coffman’s claim that Black students had preferable alternatives to campus housing, a survey conducted by the All-University Committee on Negro Discrimination found that it was “nearly impossible for Negro students to secure accommodations near the campus.” Of 45 Black students enrolled in 1934 and 1935, they found that 16 lived within a mile of campus and the rest were “scattered throughout distant parts of the Twin Cities.” As a result, each Black student lost approximately five hours a week “due to unnecessary commuting” and was prevented from working in laboratories and libraries at night. The University provided students with a list of approved boarding houses near campus, but the committee found that 58 out of 62 of them “would not take Negroes.” They learned of one Black student who, “after having been refused admittance to Pioneer Hall,” spent two days “in an unsuccessful attempt to secure a room from the list.” He eventually secured “a porch room, protected by screens only,” but had to move in with friends once the weather turned cold. “He is one of the very few Negro students who have secured rooms within walking distance of the campus.”<sup>84</sup>

Coffman’s treatment of Black students was particularly significant given that the University’s official “Residence Hall Policy” was to ensure that “the advantages that come from life in the halls may be as widespread as possible.” In his biennial report of 1934-36, Coffman wrote: “There is no question that the residence halls provide admirable living conditions.” Citing the benefits of contact between students and faculty, “as well as economic considerations,” the president stated that any student receiving University funds was “expected to reside in University residence halls” unless specifically exempted by the president’s office. It is not likely that the University had sufficient space to house all students affected by this policy, but even so, it is notable that Coffman articulated it at the same time that he was preventing Black students from living in the residence halls.<sup>85</sup>

Rather than welcome Black students into campus housing, Coffman referred them to Gertrude Brown, who had presented Frances McHie’s case to the state legislature in 1929. Brown’s Phyllis Wheatley House was well known for providing education, recreation, and job placement services for a predominantly African-American working-class neighborhood in North Minneapolis, and as a meeting place and “bureau of information on race questions” for African-Americans throughout the Twin Cities. Brown frequently hosted internationally recognized Black artists and intellectuals, including Marian Anderson, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson. Black students must have appreciated the “hospitable and pleasant spot,” but it was not an ideal alternative to living on or near campus. In 1928, the house moved into a former factory nearly five miles from the University. “It was surrounded by houses of every stage of dilapidation and buttressed with junk yards where piles of old tires filled the air with the pungent smell of hot rubber on hot

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<sup>83</sup> Boie, “A Study of Conflict and Accommodation,” 54;

<sup>84</sup> “Report of the Committee on Negro Discrimination,” University of Minnesota Archives, Office of Dean of Students Papers, Box 10, “Negro, 1939-1941” folder, 5.

<sup>85</sup> L.D. Coffman, “The Biennial Report of the President, 1934–1936,” University of Minnesota. (1936), 30, Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/91582>.

afternoons.” Brown also lacked space, and at least once gave up her own bed for a student who was denied housing at the University.<sup>86</sup>

We take from this history the conclusion that Coffman’s policies did not simply reflect the consensus of his era, but in fact took a particular side in a debate that had divided Minnesotans for several decades and reached a breaking point during his tenure. Discrimination against Black students was seen by many at the time as violating state law, and while the University’s housing policy was not tested in court, it at the least contradicted the principles articulated by the Minnesota State Legislature in the preamble to the 1885 public accommodations law. Finally, by instituting and sustaining exclusionary policies and practices, Coffman effectively supported and encouraged segregationists who were discriminating against his own students near campus and against African-Americans across the Twin Cities and the state. At a time when the University was called upon to realize the norms of racial justice enshrined in Minnesota law, Coffman took a stance in favor of policies that many at the time, including the governor and much of the legislature, recognized as unjust and out of step with the democratic and egalitarian values of the state.

### Historical reasons and perspectives on naming

Coffman Memorial Union was under construction at the time of President Coffman’s death. He had coordinated a study of need and forwarded a request to the Board of Regents for a new student union at the end of 1936, which was approved. Nearly half of the cost (\$900,000) was obtained from the federal Public Works Administration, \$450,000 was provided through University reserves, and the remaining \$650,000 was committed through an encumbrance of future University revenue and gifts. In a March 22, 1939, vote of the Board of Regents the building was posthumously named after Coffman.<sup>87</sup>

Archival correspondence shows that Coffman was wary of naming buildings after individuals.<sup>88</sup> In 1927 he reported that in conjunction with the appropriate Board of Regents subcommittee it was decided that

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<sup>86</sup> Warren Grissom, “Memorandum to Minnesota Local 444 of American Federation of Teachers, Professor B. Lippincott,” 1937, University of Minnesota Archives, Benjamin Lippincott Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, 1937; Everts, *Stockwell of Minneapolis*, 277.

<sup>87</sup> On the naming, see University of Minnesota Board of Regents. (1939). Minutes: Board of Regents Meeting and Committee Meetings: March 15, 1939. University of Minnesota. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/45558>. On the costs, see University of Minnesota. (1938). The Biennial Report of the President of the University of Minnesota to the Board of Regents, 1936-1938. Page 74. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/91583>; University of Minnesota Board of Regents. (1938). Minutes: Board of Regents' Meetings and Committee Meetings: June 13, 1938. Pages 336-337. University of Minnesota. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/45543>.

<sup>88</sup> From Coffman to Middlebrook, 17 April 1934, On renaming of "indoor sports building", Box 6, Folder 207 Building, naming of 1925-1934, President's Office, 00000841 University Archives, University of Minnesota; From W.T. Middlebrook To L.D. Coffman, 16 December 1927, Middlebrook on naming, Box 6, Folder 207 Building, Naming of 1925-1934, President's Office, 00000841 University Archives, University of Minnesota; University of Minnesota; From Coffman To Dean W.C. Coffey, 7 May 1927, Coffman on Naming 1, Box 6, Folder 207 Building, Naming of 1925-1934, President's Office, 00000841 University Archives, University of Minnesota; From J.C. Lawrence To W. C. Coffey, 30 April 1929, Box 6, Folder President's Office, 1911-1945 Building, Naming of 1925-1934, President's Office, 00000841 University Archives, University of Minnesota

buildings should be named for function instead.<sup>89</sup> By 1929, the Board seemed to be coming around to a position that naming buildings for individuals might be desirable, but President Coffman's office continued to express doubts about the value of such practice.<sup>90</sup> His care with the naming of Pioneer Hall does, however, indicate that he believed building names held significance.

The building that is now called Coffman Memorial Union has been a student union throughout its use-life. As early as 1939, alumni identified the building as "a much-needed addition for its program of furnishing for all students, regardless of race, creed or color the opportunity to achieve the well-rounded education and understanding regarded as essential by the country's foremost educators."<sup>91</sup> This function is at odds with the actions of President Coffman in perpetuating the exclusion of African-American students. Additionally, a memorial of Coffman written by students in 1938 after his death critiqued his actions suppressing student activity. We saw no evidence of open protest of the naming of the building for Coffman, but we also saw no evidence of any concerted effort to obtain public input on the matter.

The current use of Coffman Memorial Union is as a gathering place for all students. It is particularly known to serve as a home base for several multicultural student groups on the second floor. Many, if not most, of these student groups would have been barred from dormitory housing under Coffman's unwritten policy.

Today, many of these students express feeling unwelcome on campus. The Minnesota Student Association (MSA) Resolution of March 6, 2018, provides a number of reasons for the removal of Coffman's name from the building. Two of these reasons speak particularly to the campus climate and values. First, the resolution notes that the Campus Climate Workgroup and the Bias Response and Referral Network (BRRN) had been established in recent years to increase inclusiveness on campus because this has been an ongoing issue for vulnerable and marginalized students. Second, the resolution notes that the BRRN had reported in its first year 76 incident reports, including 25 ethnic- and religiously-based and 16 race-based instances of discrimination. Thus, discrimination is something with which this campus still must grapple. MSA and the resolution's co-sponsors, including many student groups, believe that a building name change can act as a powerful signal to students that the University supports them.

Numerous other universities are arriving at similar conclusions. Within the past three years, Stanford University, Yale University, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, University of California-Berkeley, and University of Wisconsin-Madison have considered cases relating to the recognition of difficult histories on their campuses. In each case, the institution has engaged in a process similar to that of this committee: considering general principles and university values; conducting in-depth historical research on the historical events or individuals; listening to the contemporary stakeholders, especially students who may be most affected; and weighing options to move forward. In the large majority of cases, deliberations arrived at recommendations for some degree of renaming, though recommendations varied (for example, renaming

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<sup>89</sup> Memorandum by L.D. Coffman, 19 December 1930, Board of Regents thoughts on naming buildings, Box 6, Folder 207 Building, Naming of 1925-1934, President's Office, 00000841 University Archives.

<sup>90</sup> Pres. Coffman to Dean Coffey, May 7, 1927; Pres. Coffman to Dean Leland, May 7, 1929; JC Lawrence, Asst. to Pres. Coffman to Dean Coffey, April 30, 1929; Memorandum by Pres. Coffman, Dec. 19, 1930. All correspondence located in University Archives, President's Office, Folder 207.

<sup>91</sup> Minneapolis Star, April 17 1939, page 1: "3 Appeal for Alumni Aid on Coffman Union."

buildings but not street names at Stanford, or prioritizing building renaming below other actions at Wisconsin). These actions in our view are not due to a casual disregard of history, but rather a fervent desire to recognize and provide correctives for institutional discrimination.

## Arguments for and against Removing Coffman's Name from Coffman Memorial Union

Lotus Coffman dedicated many years to serving the University of Minnesota. As president, he is credited with the significant growth of the University during his term in office. He also introduced significant innovations such as the General College, which created educational opportunities for a wide range of Minnesota students. The question we seek to weigh in the following sections is whether discriminatory policies formulated and implemented under his administration justify the removal of his name from Coffman Memorial Union.

### Arguments for removing Coffman's name

#### *Coffman's deeds and actions*

1. Per the historical narrative provided above, it is evident that President Coffman acted to exclude Black students from campus housing despite the repeated complaints of Black students and their allies, as well as national and local chapters of civil rights organizations and Black organizations and political leaders of the state. Archived correspondence and media reporting shows that he represented this decision in public as being in accordance with students' preferences rather than dictated by a formal policy or rule, but in administrative correspondence he referred to it as a "rule" or "general policy" in which he himself had ultimate discretionary authority.<sup>92</sup> He was also evidently aware of the deep political sentiment and struggle for integrated housing in the Twin Cities area and at other universities, as his files contain numerous letters from individuals, news reports, and information relating to conditions at other universities. These materials most frequently expressed the anger and distress of both Black and white students at his refusal to change course. Although it is unclear whether this housing policy technically violated a state law prohibiting discrimination in public venues, it was contrary to the spirit of the law, opposed by a growing civil rights movement, and seen by many at the time, ranging from Black and white students to the governor, as contrary to the ideals and traditions of the state.
2. Section IV.2 of our report provides detail on the actions of Edward Nicholson as dean of student affairs. Here we note that the atmosphere of surveillance and tracking of students thought to be engaging in political action and protest, which was designed by Nicholson, was approved and facilitated by the Office of the President. Correspondence shows that Nicholson and Coffman did

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<sup>92</sup> Coffman to Harmon 12/14/1934; Coffman to Stokes, 4/1/1935, University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19 "Negro, 1920-1936" (UMedia pages 114-115 and 92 respectively). Pres. Coffman to the All-University Council on Negro Discrimination, August 1, 1935, in University Archives, Office of the President, Administration, Box 20, folder 19, UMedia pg. 67.

coordinate some of their efforts and shared a fear of political action on campus, which was most often correlated with racialized student populations.

#### *University values*

3. At the time of Coffman's actions on housing segregation and student political organizing on campus, there is a clear sense that the values of University students and at least some faculty and administration lay with racial integration and equal rights, as well as the right to engage in open political speech. As is evident in Coffman's writings, he was wary of students engaging in political action and expressed concerns that such action was ultimately driven by radical national organizations pushing propaganda. Based on local media reporting, his actions were out of step with students demands for free expression.
4. Coffman's efforts to maintain housing segregation are in opposition to University values today, which include promoting equity and inclusion. One of the guiding principles in the University's mission statement states the University "provides an atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance." This is a value to which the administration is bound and it is a value broadly upheld by students, as demonstrated by the range of student group co-sponsors of the MSA resolution. Coffman's belief that "The races have never lived together, nor have they ever sought to live together" is plainly at odds with our contemporary values of equity and inclusion. Renaming the student union would present an opportunity to demonstrate the University's commitment to those values.
5. President Coffman's actions are at odds with the University's values today. Fairness and respect, cultivating a diversity of community and ideas, acting with integrity, and fulfilling our land-grant missions are core University values. President Coffman's actions were in breach of these principles. Because this is a land-grant university charged with serving the needs of all members of our state, President Coffman's actions undermined those efforts and contributed to the feeling that many Black residents have had about the University of Minnesota as an unwelcoming space.
6. Removing Coffman's name will signal to Black citizens of the State of Minnesota, and Black alumni, faculty, staff, and students at the University, that the University is deliberately making a break from its discriminatory past. Blacks in the community associate President Coffman's name with efforts, through housing policy, to exclude Blacks from the University. Removing President Coffman's name will demonstrate the University's recognition of and disavowal of President Coffman's actions. It will continue the process of clarifying to African Americans that the University is here to serve all students.
7. Removing Coffman's name will signal the University's commitment to its land-grant mission. This mission rests on serving the state's residents, as well as on taking on and wrestling with the major challenges facing the state and the region. Racial inequality and the prevalence of racial disparities are major issues of concern. Removing Coffman's name will demonstrate that the University is taking account of how its own practices have contributed to these local and regional disparities. Further, it will continue the process of encouraging the University to determine how it should be using its resources and institutional strength to make the University and state more equitable places.

#### *University climate*

8. As detailed above, campus climate at the time of Coffman's actions (particularly in the 1930s) was one of active student protest. The effects of the Great Depression and fear of entanglements in

world war led to high levels of student political engagement. Coffman's administration and actions, particularly through the office of the dean of students (Edward Nicholson) were suspicious of these protests and aimed at suppressing the expression of political views rather than providing venues for respectful debate and discussion.

9. Although not detailed in this report, research conducted by Mark Soderstrom in his 2004 dissertation (and cited above) shows that President Coffman's administration facilitated the active pursuit of eugenics scholarship on campus. Soderstrom makes the important case that many exclusionary and discriminatory practices at the University in the early 20th century occurred under the mantle of liberal progressive values through an adherence to 'scientific' racism despite the widespread challenges to its empirical bases.
10. Today's campus climate is also charged and politically divided, yet it is clear that our contemporary values demand that we air those differences and find ways in which they may be respectfully debated. This is evident from comments submitted by students, faculty, staff, and alumni across the political spectrum regarding the question of renaming. Even those who regard the process to be one of "political correctness" find value in knowing these aspects of campus history, and urge open discussion and education. Many of Coffman's responses to student protest were instead grounded in a denial that any problems of racial inequality and disadvantage existed.
11. Removing President Coffman's name will allow the University to recommit itself to the values of fairness and respect in a University that prides itself on its diversity of community and ideas. It will support the University's efforts to make the campus a more diverse, inclusive, fair, just, and welcoming place. Moreover, changing the name is consistent with our current Campus Climate Initiatives.<sup>93</sup>
12. Across the nation, universities and colleges are engaged in critical conversations about how racism played a role in building their institutions. The University of Minnesota is poised to be a leader in the region on these issues. The only way to become such a leader is for the University to excavate its own past and use what it has learned to build a more equitable institution, one that remembers the names of the students and faculty and community members who fought for equality on its campuses while holding itself accountable for those leaders who effectively excluded students on the basis of their race, religion, or political affiliation.

### *Resources*

13. Many of the public comments objecting to the renaming of buildings specifically cite the waste of resources in such an effort. The Task Force has heard from representatives of the campus facilities/buildings and grounds staff, and are assured that the removal of a building name and/or renaming would not be burdensome or an expensive process, with the exception of the alteration of the facade of the building. Indeed, buildings on this campus have been renamed in the past (for example, from a general name indicating the function of the building to the name of a person), and the use of digital maps will mitigate much of the potential confusion. If the removal of Coffman's name from the facade of the building were to be included, a preliminary estimate suggests the cost would be in the range of \$60,000 to \$100,000.

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<sup>93</sup> <https://campus-climate.umn.edu/about>

14. Public comments also reference the “time and expense” of assembling the Task Force making these recommendations. Certainly, significant time and effort were dedicated to this process, but these were by faculty, staff, and students who chose to devote their time and effort to this work. With the exception of a graduate student research assistant hired to assist the Task Force, no additional compensation was received by Task Force members or supporting staff.

#### *Educational merit*

15. Renaming the student union presents significant educational opportunities, foremost to present a deep and historically grounded study of how racism becomes embedded in an institution. As committee members discussed their readings of the archival materials, we found a multitude of instances in which the public sentiment or issues of concern were very similar to our contemporary concerns and debates. The creation of public history exhibits on campus history, researched and designed by students, could provide excellent professional skill development for students for “real-world” application.

#### *Public perception and politics*

16. Renaming would be viewed favorably by a significant segment of our campus community (students, staff, faculty) as being responsive to the ongoing harm done by commemorating Coffman without attending to his commitment to racial exclusion and his enabling surveillance of students and suppression of their speech. Given the University’s stated commitment to diversity and inclusion, renaming would be seen as a positive action, signaling the intention to become a more welcoming and inclusive campus.

## **Arguments against removing Coffman’s name**

#### *Coffman’s deeds and actions*

1. President Coffman is credited with having directed the formation of the General College, which officially opened in 1932 and remained in operation until 2006. The General College, with its student-centered focus, served as a point of entry for students who were less prepared to succeed within the University system to assess and address their needs before onboarding them to the regular University curriculum and programs. The General College may be thought of as a “junior” college that was embedded within the University, and today it is often credited with having boosted student diversity because it was inclusive of students from poorer, structurally disadvantaged communities.
2. President Coffman oversaw and strongly advocated for a rapid expansion of campus facilities in response to the surge in student enrollment that occurred in the post-WWI years. This work included the building that was later named for him, as well as Memorial Stadium, Northrop Auditorium, and Pioneer Hall. This expansion was accomplished in significant part through private donor fundraising.

#### *University values*

3. In the creation of the General College, Coffman contributed a powerful tool to expand to new constituencies the teaching and learning mission of the University.
4. The University community’s established practice has been that former presidents have been recognized by having a building named after them. This policy implicitly understands and accepts that presidents will have aspects of their record that receive praise and other aspects that receive



censure, and that they may have been highly popular or less popular during their term in office, but that nonetheless they would receive the honor of a building naming.

#### *University climate*

5. Student respondents to the public comments portal who oppose renaming assert that our efforts would be better directed toward research and teaching initiatives that closely examine and question the troubling history of segregation and discrimination rather than building renaming.
6. Campus climate strongly supports access and opportunity, and Coffman's creation of the General College provided both. Given that part of his legacy is the General College (though now discontinued), removing his name removes a visible symbol of that college and those values.

#### *Resources*

7. Resources expended in the renaming process, including the time spent to investigate the actions of specific individuals and the cost of the removal of Coffman's name from the building facade, could be more effectively directed toward the highest University priorities, toward expanding our awareness of our institutional history, and toward supporting students, perhaps particularly students from communities with inadequate educational resources and college preparation (per the General College mission), without time-consuming debates over building names.

#### *Educational merit*

8. There is a tremendous opportunity to direct student learning to the process of investigating the complicated legacy of President Coffman. This Task Force's work examining four building names has necessarily been compressed over a period of months, but more extensive research over a number of years might be conducted in the form of a student-driven process of examining our institutional history. Such an educational opportunity showing the applied nature of historical inquiry would be an invaluable experience for students and it would have a more lasting impact on a student than the renaming of a building.
9. Student respondents to the public comments portal who oppose renaming assert that our efforts would be better directed into education about the troubling history of discrimination, exclusion, and segregation.

#### *Public perception and politics*

10. Actions of this type may alienate portions of the public. To some, efforts to remove names, artwork, statues, or other significant structures will be seen as part of an ideological or political agenda.

## Deliberation and Recommendations

The Task Force recommends removing President Coffman's name from Coffman Memorial Union. We also recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Coffman's complicated legacy. Finally, we recommend adding, in recognition of its role in raising public awareness, a permanent installation of the "A Campus Divided" exhibit in the student union. These exhibits, we believe, should be accorded permanent space within the building whether or not the name is removed.

Our recommendation to remove Lotus Coffman's name from Coffman Memorial Union is guided by consideration of the arguments for and against removing the name as well as the five guiding principles—

Change, Diversity, Preservation, Exceptionality, Deliberation—established by the Coleman Committee. We present the full text describing the five guiding principles below and in section III.2.

## Change

“Change in our campus community occurs continuously as students, faculty and staff advance in their studies and as physical spaces, including buildings, are erected, remodeled and dismantled. Indeed, our own understanding and interpretation of campus history can also change over time. We should not be incapacitated by the idea and actuality of change including considering renaming long-standing building names. Carefully considered changes can be made on campus and yet the University still maintains its history, culture, values and traditions. Changes are sometimes needed to preserve our core values.”

We are living in a moment when colleges and universities across the country are examining their histories. The “A Campus Divided” exhibit captures several critical histories chronicling exclusion, segregation, and antisemitism at the University of Minnesota. This exhibit began to reshape our understanding of campus history, and the extensive historical analysis of the Task Force has continued that work with regard to the role of President Coffman, particularly in the history of housing discrimination on the campus. In order to adhere to our core values today, especially with regard to fairness, respect, and the service mission of a land-grant institution, we believe that changes are sometimes needed to preserve those values.

The Coleman Committee report underscores the fact that institutions such as the University of Minnesota continually undergo change and, most importantly, that “our own understanding and interpretation of campus history can also change over time.” In fact, change does not necessarily mean that the history, culture, values, and traditions must be lost. Although Coffman Memorial Union is a central feature of the campus landscape, and to change its name is a significant step, we believe the institution’s evolution toward greater diversity among students, staff, and faculty, and the strong current institutional support of equity, diversion, and inclusion argue in favor of removing President Coffman’s name from the building. The Task Force believes that change is warranted when, as stated by the Coleman Committee, core values would be preserved. President Coffman missed an opportunity to lead and instead resisted the trends toward inclusion and the pressure on campus and off campus for equal racial treatment. In this case, we believe one appropriate response to President Coffman’s actions in the face of racial injustice is the removal of his name.

## Diversity

“Throughout the history of the University of Minnesota, substantial and positive contributions have been made by many unique individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, as befits a public, land grant university, the diversity of Minnesotans should be a prominent consideration in the process of naming and renaming buildings and significant University assets.”

Promoting a “diversity of community and ideas” is another core value of the University of Minnesota. The Coleman Committee’s articulation of the diversity principle, presented in the previous paragraph, underlines the importance of this value. In the process of examining President Coffman’s actions, the Task Force has been introduced to a new set of historical change makers who demanded the University serve all state residents on an equal basis. Coffman supported policies that undermined the diversity of the University and made it a less hospitable place for students of color. Campus diversity was actively hindered by the authority of President Coffman through the institution and maintenance exclusionary policies. The diversity of ideas was suppressed through the monitoring and reporting of student political activity or perceived political

leanings. Today, the University is becoming more diverse in its student, staff, and faculty, and it collaboratively engages with diverse communities. Particularly given the use of the building today, a consideration of the principle of diversity supports removing Coffman's name from the student union.

## Preservation

"It is incumbent upon us today to acknowledge the full, living history that formed this University community. History can be used to both illuminate and obscure our shared experiences. It is our task to make room in our story for those voices held silent in the shadows of the past and to make certain our future conversations include everyone. Thus, before a decision is made to rename or remove a name, care must be taken that the process does not erase critical, even controversial, historical moments, persons or places since erasure is anathema to the principles of a liberal education. Changing the name of a building, space, or university asset does not and should not mean erasure. The process to name or rename or remove a name should be considered part of the pedagogical mission of the University."

As stated in the concluding sentences of the Coleman Committee's articulation of the principle of preservation, changing the name of a building, space, or university asset does not and should not mean erasure and the naming process can have a pedagogical purpose. As the University of Minnesota examines its history and evaluates the role of President Coffman in that history, it is critical that we not lose sight of important factors. Removing Coffman's name will neither erase his actions nor those of the University around exclusionary and segregated student housing, nor will it erase the positive aspects of his legacy. The Coleman Committee report also notes that "it is incumbent upon us today to acknowledge the full, living history that formed this University community." That acknowledgement serves as the foundation for instructive reflection on our past and its relation to our present, which the Coleman Committee emphasizes as part of the pedagogical function of the University. We see commemorations like namings of buildings as acts that can obscure at least as much as they reveal about our institutional history and we regard this to be the case with respect to Coffman Memorial Union. Students and visitors to the University currently learn little to none of the history of Coffman's presidency that is detailed in this report, yet they know that he was honored through the naming of the building. We argue that this difficult history will be made more public by the renaming process, and we also insist that more action is required than just renaming, which may in time itself be forgotten as an event. To uphold the principle of preservation, we must also find ways to promote and engage in ongoing inquiry, debate, and deliberation about the implications and contemporary significance of our institutional history.

## Exceptionality

"The renaming of a building named to honor an individual's contribution to the University is a serious matter and must be undertaken with great care. Only in exceptional instances, when the values reflected in the current name are in opposition to the values embraced by the University, should renaming or removing a name take place. As stated by our colleagues at the University of Michigan, "it behooves us to understand that it is impossible to hold someone accountable for failing to share our contemporary ideas and values. Instead, the question must be what ideas, values, and actions were possible in a particular historical context." Our colleagues at Yale University note, "Historical names are a source of knowledge. Tradition often carries wisdom that is not immediately apparent to the current generation; no generation stands alone at the end of history with perfect moral hindsight... A presumption of continuity in campus names helps ensure that the University does not elide the moral complexity often associated with the lives of those who make outsized

impressions on the world.” We do anticipate, however, there will be exceptional instances in which renaming is appropriate to reflect a new understanding or awareness regarding a namesake and the principal legacy of the namesake that conflicts fundamentally with the University’s core values.”

Removing the name from a building is a serious matter, as the Coleman Committee’s articulation of the exceptionality principle suggests. The consideration of the name of Lotus Coffman on the student union is not simply about an isolated action or statement that we would today find offensive. Instead, President Coffman engaged in a series of actions over the course of his presidency that perpetuated racial discrimination. His policies and opinions were not only inconsistent with the values of the University today, but they were also inconsistent with those held by many in his own time. There is no doubt that, on racial issues, public opinion and institutional practices in higher education differed in the 1920s-40s from those today. But even in Coffman’s own time he was expected by many within and beyond the University community to act with greater moral imagination than he exhibited over the course of his presidency. As we see in the research, Coffman was aware of the existence of state laws requiring equal rights in public accommodations, the gathering strength of the civil rights movement, the growing opposition to the University’s housing policies voiced by affected students and activists both on and off campus, and the efforts to eradicate discrimination at other institutions of higher learning. President Coffman had a productive legacy in other areas of his administration, and we can and should value these accomplishments, but his exclusionary and discriminatory policies are a significant part of his legacy as well, and a part that had not been much explored and remained unknown to many for decades. During the course of our Task Force work, we heard and read accounts that the University’s exclusionary policies discouraged many African-American families from sending their students to the University of Minnesota, thus setting back progress on diversifying the University and on ensuring the University’s transformative opportunities are accessible to a diverse population. We concur with the Coleman Committee’s guiding principle that name changes should be exceptional. In our assessment, President Coffman failed to fulfill the mission of the University in ways that have had significant and lasting effects, rendering this an exceptional case. His actions diminished the highest ideals and aspirations of the institution and are fundamentally in conflict with our core values today.

## Deliberation

“Consideration of naming and renaming is a complicated issue lacking a universal formula or checklist. Each naming or renaming must be considered on its own via a careful, informed, inclusive, and deliberative process.”

As we stated at greater length in section III.3 on the principle of exceptionality, we do not seek to impose our expectations from today arbitrarily on individuals of the past. Today’s values should nonetheless guide what and who we wish to honor with the distinction of a naming. We also recognize that individuals need to be assessed within the context of their own time and what was imaginable and possible then. We must both measure actions against the norms and practices of their day and evaluate in what way the values they stood for might be in conflict with those of our own times. Individuals operate within institutions and systems that impose constraints on actions, but this is not to say that they are without the ability to make choices, and this is particularly true of those exercising power and discretion in their administrative roles. Retaining a name on a building does not mean endorsing all of the more objectionable and problematic actions of an individual. Likewise, to remove a name from a building, to change a name, does not mean saying the contributions have no value or are worthy of no recognition. Collectively reckoning with our institutional history provides an

occasion for emphasizing that individuals, particularly leaders with significant authority in their roles, are responsible for their own decisions.

The Task Force members have, within the constraints of time and of their charge, conducted thorough research both in the historical archives and in the collection of perspectives on campus values and renaming. In accordance with the principle of deliberation articulated in the Coleman Committee report, this Task Force has considered the naming and potential renaming of Coffman Memorial Union “via a careful, informed, inclusive, and deliberative process.” The Task Force has learned about the significant contributions of Lotus Coffman over his long career at the University. We have also considered the many forces (the law, student organizations, civil rights organizations, community associations, and the press) that supported non-discriminatory and equal access to the University, and the ways in which Lotus Coffman worked to exclude students of color from University housing. We recognize that our recommendation to remove Lotus Coffman’s name from Coffman Memorial Union will not be supported by every constituency, but we believe it is the best course of action.

## **IV.2 Dean Edward E. Nicholson and Nicholson Hall**

### **Introduction**

#### **Context**

The years in which Dean Nicholson served as dean of student affairs were marked by public debates about racial discrimination, including the role race and ethnicity played in public institutions and American society more broadly. This was an era of quotas and discrimination against both Jews and Blacks in educational institutions. “Racial science” and the eugenics movement were prevalent in American universities, including the University of Minnesota, and they confirmed racist and anti-Semitic attitudes and practices. Blacks and Jews were both cast as racially inferior, based on putatively scientific theories, disseminated within and outside of the academy. During the period of Nicholson’s deanship, the University operated a housing bureau over the course of this period which enabled and perpetuated the practices of landlords whose rooming houses excluded students of color and Jews. At this time, Jews were often presumed by administrators and others on campus to be tied to leftist and Communist (“Bolshevik”) circles, and such linkages were also made in other settings both locally and nationally. That Jews were seen as political pariahs, adhering to beliefs that were antithetical to democratic institutions, is one aspect of the antisemitism of the era. Antisemitism in Minneapolis was substantial during the period Nicholson served as dean and in this leadership position he perpetuated the social evolutionary racial hierarchy of his era as he worked to effect and maintain social segregation by race and Jewish identity.

#### **Dean Nicholson’ actions**

Edward Nicholson served as dean of student affairs from 1917 until his retirement in 1941. An examination of Nicholson’s actions shows that antisemitism drove significant aspects of his conduct in office, that he conducted surveillance on student activists, and that he used his official role at the University to promote his own political views and censor political speech of others with whom he disagreed. He reported his surveillance information, targeting Jewish students in particular, to Ray P. Chase, former state auditor (1921-

31) and former U.S. representative (Republican, at large, 1933-35), as part of his coordinated efforts with Chase to advance their political agenda.

## Recommendations

After the opening of the new co-educational union, Coffman Memorial Union, in 1940, the Minnesota Union building on the East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities was converted to classroom instruction and office space and was named for Dean Edward Nicholson in 1945. Based on our review of the legacy of Dean Nicholson, in the conclusion of this section of our report we recommend the removal of Edward Nicholson's name from Nicholson Hall. We also recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Nicholson's complicated legacy. This step, we believe, should be taken whether or not the name is removed from the building. We discuss in section V of this report a series of potential initiatives designed to increase our collective understanding of the University's history and to serve and enhance the opportunities for today's students.

## Overview

The aim of this historical review is to better understand whether Dean Edward Nicholson's actions produced or perpetuated systems of racial inequality or other forms of injustice that were fundamentally at odds with University values during his tenure as dean and today.

In order to explore these questions our Task Force sought to educate itself about:

- The history of Edward E. Nicholson's deanship, with specific attention to his role in monitoring student political activism.
- The societal context within which Dean Nicholson acted, with specific attention to the policies and practices adopted or maintained by administrators at other institutions of higher education with respect to the political activities of students and the extent to which they were challenged and/or revised over time on these campuses.
- The wider climate of opinion in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota at the time, particularly with respect to antisemitism.
- The original reasons for creating and naming the building for Dean Nicholson and the changing purposes and significance attached to the building and its namesake over time.

## Discussion and Analysis

### Standard biographical account of Edward Nicholson's career

The following is a summary biography provided by Erik Moore, head of University Archives:

Edward E. Nicholson was born on February 9, 1873, in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Nebraska. He joined the faculty of the University of Minnesota Department of Chemistry as an instructor in 1895. He was promoted to assistant professor in 1900 and professor in 1915. Also, in 1915, he was made assistant to the dean for the College of Science, Literature and the Arts. In 1917, the Office of the Dean of Students for the University of Minnesota was created by action of the Board of Regents. It was the outgrowth of the work that had been done for several years by Nicholson as chair of the Students' Work

Committee of the College of Science, Literature and the Arts. The Board of Regents confirmed Nicholson's appointment as dean of student affairs on August 1, 1917, a position he retained until his retirement on June 20, 1941. Upon his retirement, students established the E. E. Nicholson Memorial Fund as a means to invest in war bonds and stamps and later to be used for scholarships for students returning to college from military service. Edward E. Nicholson died on June 28, 1949. An obituary for Nicholson appeared in the Senate minutes for the University.<sup>94</sup>

### Historical overview of Nicholson Hall

Constructed in 1890 as the chemistry building, present-day Nicholson Hall became the Minnesota Union after the opening of the new chemistry building (Smith Hall) in 1914. It served as a complementary space to the women's union, Shevlin Hall. A west wing was added in 1923, an east wing in 1925, and an auditorium in 1947. In 1914 it was remodeled into a men's union building and served that purpose until 1940. After the opening of the new co-educational union, Coffman Memorial Union, in 1940, the building was converted to classroom instruction and office space. During World War Two, the "Old Union" was temporarily renamed "USS Minnesota" and "the Battleship" to highlight its use as a training academy for U.S. naval officers.<sup>95</sup>

Nicholson Hall was named in 1945 for Dean Edward E. Nicholson. The President's Report of 1946 addressed the renaming of the building to Nicholson Hall by stating: "Following a now well-established policy of renaming campus buildings after well-known former members of the faculty or staff, the Board of Regents, on recommendation of a faculty committee, renamed the 'Old Union'; Nicholson Hall, thus honoring Dean Edward E. Nicholson, who several years ago retired from the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs."<sup>96</sup> There is little documentation related to the naming decision and no indication it was contested.

In 2006, Nicholson Hall reopened after an extensive renovation and became the campus home for the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature; the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies; the University Honors Program; the Writing Center; and the Center for Jewish Studies.

### Antisemitism in Minnesota, the Twin Cities, and the University

Before exploring Nicholson's record, it is useful to establish the context of antisemitism in the United States and Minnesota at the time.

The pervasive antisemitism in Minnesota at the time of Dean Nicholson's role as dean of student affairs—antisemitism was at a high-water mark from 1930-1945—was part of a larger trajectory of antisemitism in the United States. Antisemitism in the United States has taken many forms, but most significantly, it has been

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<sup>94</sup> "Edward Everett Nicholson, 1873-1949," Minutes of the University Senate: November 1949 - April 1954 (<https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/54516>).

<sup>95</sup> University of Minnesota News Service. (1950). Press Releases, April - May 1950.p 210. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/50976>.

<sup>96</sup> University of Minnesota. (1946). The Biennial Report of the President, 1944 - 1946. Pages 14 and 74. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/91588>.

built on the view of the Jew as an absolute other—seen to some degree through the lens of religion, but far more often through a racial prism.<sup>97</sup>

Across these decades, as restrictions against hiring or selling property to Jews were present, quotas and discrimination against Jews developed in private universities and colleges, professional schools, and other educational institutions. Antisemitism flourished in the Midwest, with groups such as the Silver Shirts promoting conspiratorial views of Jewish control of the world and support for the genocidal aims of the Third Reich.<sup>98</sup>

During this period, newly developed racial theories of social evolution and eugenics were receiving social scientific attention. (See section IV.1 on Coffman.) Thinkers such as Madison Grant, director of the American Eugenics Society, among many others, argued for a Nordic purity in the United States that had to be protected, and provided the rationale for the exclusion of immigrants, the dangers of racial mixing, and the suppression of people of color, Catholics, and Jews.<sup>99</sup>

Minneapolis has been described as a city with widespread antisemitism in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1946, Corey McWilliams wrote that “One might even say, with a measure of justification, that Minneapolis is the capitol [sic] of anti-Semitism in the United States.”<sup>100</sup> For example, the Minneapolis Public School system was notorious for rarely hiring Jews for any position. A 1947 survey, conducted for the city by Fisk University, counted a total of 13 Jewish teachers, elementary and secondary, in the entire 121 schools of the Minneapolis system. The school system employed one Jewish clerk and three Jewish nurses. In addition, the survey found that 60 percent of all retailers and manufacturers in the city made it a practice of not hiring Jews.<sup>101</sup>

Following a marked increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the 1930s in Minnesota, the Anti-Defamation Council of Minnesota was founded in 1938; in 1939 it was renamed the Minnesota Jewish Council, and in 1959 it became the Jewish Community Relations Council, with the express mission of not only responding to

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<sup>97</sup> For an overview of antisemitism in America see Leonard Dinnerstein. *Anti-Semitism in America* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>98</sup> Id.

<sup>99</sup> For an extended discussion on the connections between nativism and antisemitism see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955--republished in 1963, 1975, and 1988). For a discussion of the 1920s and its ideologies of race and extremism, see Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: the Ku Klux Klan and the American Political Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018). On Father Coughlin and populist movements, see Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (NY: Basic Books, 1995). On issues of race, whiteness, and a discussion of Jews, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: The Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>100</sup> Carey McWilliams, “Minneapolis: The Curious Twin,” *Common Ground* (August 1946): 61. McWilliams documented as evidence of this wide-spread antisemitism in Minneapolis the restrictions on Jewish membership in service clubs such as AAA, Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis, and the limited representation of Jews in major industries of Minneapolis (lumber, milling, banking, insurance, etc.). For a more extensive discussion of antisemitism in Minneapolis, see Tim Brady, “For All of its Flaws.” *University of Minnesota Alumni Magazine*, (March-April 2007): 32-35.

<sup>101</sup> Brady, 33-34.



antisemitism, but also serving as a teaching and resource institution. It continues to this day as the JCRC to educate and provide resources to combat antisemitism.<sup>102</sup>

Antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s was not only based in religious discrimination, but even more significantly was part of a racialized discourse prominent on campuses, including the University of Minnesota. The founder of the University's anthropology department, Alfred Jenks, made these connections clear in a lecture at the Minneapolis Women's Club entitled "The Immigrant Jew," in which, among other claims, he asserted that "the Jewish race contains Negro blood."<sup>103</sup> The racialized nature of antisemitism at the time is evident in a letter written on March 27, 1942, to President Coffey and the Board of Regents by an insurance company executive in St. Paul, Theodor Kain, protesting "Jim Crow" housing on campus. In order to establish his credibility and impartiality as an opponent of racial discrimination, Kain refers to himself as an "Aryan, a native-born, white, ex-Protestant born of native-born American parents, and I have never been a member of the KKK nor of any such organization."<sup>104</sup> The fact that Kain uses the term "Aryan" underscores how racialized categories of difference were operative in the early 1940s.

The exhibit "A Campus Divided" details the patterns of racism and antisemitism on campus, in particular in housing and campus life. Jewish students, while seen as "white" in some sectors of the University, were also labeled as "different" in other arenas. Notably, Jewish students were excluded from living in the boarding houses near campus (see section IV.4 on Middlebrook).<sup>105</sup> "A Campus Divided" documents the case of three Jewish students in the dental hygiene program being asked to leave the program in 1939 because local dentists would never hire Jews. The Minnesota Jewish Council attempted to intervene, but the students were not permitted to remain in the program.<sup>106</sup> "A Campus Divided" also tells the story of the visit to campus by Hans Luther, the ambassador from Nazi Germany to the United States, in 1935, and his warm welcome on

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<sup>102</sup> Brady, 34.

<sup>103</sup> Mark Soderstrom p. 83. Soderstrom notes that this lecture did result in complaints to the University about Jenks' extreme views on eugenics and race. Soderstrom also notes that Jenks was not the only one to harbor such views. University figures such as John Black Johnston were members of the American Eugenics Society, and William Folwell, Lotus Coffman, Elias Lyon, and Ada Comstock were all supporters.

<sup>104</sup> Letter by Theodor Kain to President Coffey and the U Regents, reprinted in MSP 4-10-1942 "U Jim Crow Housing Closed Tight" (p. 3, column 3).

<sup>105</sup> One notable case of Jewish exclusion from boarding houses is found in the University archives and documented in the digital *A Campus Divided*, in a letter dated June 2, 1923, from J. J. Bohlander, superintendent of the Montevideo public schools, to R.M. West, registrar at the University of Minnesota. The letter details communication with Phil Calmenson about the difficulty his two daughters, both students at the University, had in finding housing near campus. The Calmenson daughters had been rooming in a house until Mrs. Staples, on behalf of the Housing Bureau, advised their landlady "that she would be unable to recommend her place for rooms because of the fact that too many Jewish girls are rooming there." Bohlander makes clear his own rejection of this behavior, ending his letter with the statement: "I am sure that it has always been the policy of the university that all students should be given the best of attention irrespective of creed or religion."

<http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/?s=Calmenson&sentence>

<sup>106</sup> One of the students, Renee Rappaport, provided testimony to the newly-formed JCRC. In it, she states that the head of the dental hygiene school told her that not only would it be difficult for her and the other Jewish women in the program to find employment, but that even Jewish dentists would not want to hire them because if they have gentile patients, it would be seen as an "over-balance." <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/text/renee-rappaport-testimony-to-jcrc-on-dental-hygiene/>

campus by the German department, where he assured those gathered that “everything was ok,” despite student protests of the Berlin Olympics scheduled for the following year.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, however, newspaper accounts chronicled the anti-Nazi demonstrations and protests in Minneapolis sparked by Luther’s visit.<sup>108</sup>

### Dean Nicholson’s role in political censorship and repression

We now turn from the broad context of antisemitism to the actions of Edward Nicholson during that time. Nicholson’s targeting of Jewish students, while certainly a reflection of the political and cultural climate of the time, nonetheless stands out and reveals a persistent pattern of discriminatory behavior.

The decision to rename Old Union aimed to acknowledge Nicholson’s service as dean of student affairs, but it also obscured important aspects of his career that were well-known and widely criticized at the time by students and faculty at the University and elected officials in city, county, and state governments. During the 1930s, Nicholson monitored student activists and reported their names and alleged actions to his political allies at the state and national levels. These actions went well beyond the authority given to him by the Board of Regents to regulate student publications, printed material, and public speakers, and specifically targeted Jewish students with a presumption of political radicalism based on their racial identity rather than any particular actions or expressions of political beliefs.

In the work of Hyman Berman, professor of history at the University of Minnesota from 1961 to 2004, evidence is presented concerning Dean Nicholson’s policies, which are shown to be built on strains of anti-radicalism, antisemitism, and racism that were deep seated in Minnesota and the United States and an important part of the political environment of the 1930s. “Dean Nicholson was obsessed by ‘Jewish radicalism,’” writes Berman, arguing that this obsession compelled Nicholson to compile an extensive list of what he termed “Jew agitators” among University of Minnesota students and faculty, and to share this list with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, military intelligence, and partisan political activists, ranging from local opponents of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, to open allies of Nazi Germany.<sup>109</sup>

Our assessment of Nicholson’s legacy, therefore, must involve not only his personal bigotry but also his violation of University and broader norms of academic freedom, due process, and free speech.

When Edward E. Nicholson became the University of Minnesota’s first dean of student affairs in 1917, controversy over issues of academic freedom was in its early stages. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was formed in 1915 to protest the political firing of pro-union economists at the University of Wisconsin and Stanford University. In 1917, the University of Minnesota Board of Regents dismissed Professor William A. Schaper from his position in the political science department on charges that “his expressed unwillingness to aid the United States” in the First World War rendered “him unfit and unable rightly to discharge the duties of his position.” Historian Ellen Schrecker points out that the case generated

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<sup>107</sup> *Minnesota Daily*, November 20, 1935.

<sup>108</sup> *American Jewish World*, November 22, 1935.

<sup>109</sup> Hyman Berman, “Political Antisemitism in Minnesota During the Great Depression.” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, American Bicentennial: I (Summer - Autumn, 1976): 259, n. 38.

little outrage even from the AAUP and reflected a broader hostility toward political dissent during the First World War. Not until 1938 did the University apologize and reinstate Schaper with one year of back pay, although he had long since taken a position at the University of Oklahoma.<sup>110</sup> Schaper's reinstatement reflected the limits of academic freedom and free speech in Minnesota and the United States more broadly at the time.

Antisemitism and anti-radicalism were utilized by actors across the political spectrum during this period. In Minnesota, they were fused and mobilized most effectively by Ray P. Chase, a close ally of Edward Nicholson. Chase had been the state auditor from 1921 to 1931, was an unsuccessful candidate for governor in 1930, and served as a U.S. representative from Minnesota (Republican, at large, 1933-35). Nicholson's association with Chase is crucial to understanding the role that Nicholson played in the political sphere both at and surrounding the University of Minnesota. After the Farmer-Labor and Democratic Parties won landslide victories in state and national elections in 1936, Chase founded the Ray P. Chase Research Bureau to, in his words, "block the efforts of the present Governor [Floyd Olson] and his communistic Jewish advisors to perpetuate themselves in power . . . [and] to initiate and promote in Minnesota the Soviet plan of Social Ownership in Key Industries."<sup>111</sup> As part of his efforts to gather documentary evidence that Jews and Communists were part of the "menace" undermining Minnesota's political arena, Chase corresponded with and received information from key representatives of the Silver Shirts, the American Vigilant Intelligence Federation (a fascist group founded in 1927), and Gerald L.K. Smith, a well-known preacher and anti-communist crusader. On campus, Dean Nicholson played a major role in providing Chase with detailed information about "Jew Reds" at the University of Minnesota.<sup>112</sup> In Berman's words, "Ray P. Chase had an active and enthusiastic supporter on the University of Minnesota campus in Dean Edward E. Nicholson."<sup>113</sup>

Dean Nicholson's political alliance with Ray Chase was closely aligned with the antisemitism and racial hierarchy thinking of the 1910s-40s. While he held public office in Minnesota, Chase worked with Nicholson to expose the "aliens" and Communists they perceived as being numerous in the institution. The dossiers Nicholson compiled on "radicals" always designated which students were Jews.<sup>114</sup> Nicholson's pursuit of Jewish "radicals" likely has its origins in the perceived association of Jews with Bolshevism and other radical thought.

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<sup>110</sup> Ellen Schrecker, *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 46.

<sup>111</sup> Berman, "Political Antisemitism," 259.

<sup>112</sup> Berman, "Political Antisemitism," 259.

<sup>113</sup> Berman, "Political Antisemitism," p. 259, fn 38.

<sup>114</sup> In 1941, the director of the University of Minnesota's new student union complained to his counterpart at Cornell University that the presence of Jewish students in the building there worsened the experience of undergraduates—"Your comment that one cannot mention any specific sin that they commit but that in general they are objectionable is very true to life." He noted that "fortunately, their person is diluted with a tremendous amount of non-Jewish students." This language of "dilution" evokes the notion of pure and impure blood common in anti-Semitic rhetoric. This perspective rejected racial others, including Jews. See G.R. Higgins to Foster W. Coffin, "Letter to Cornell University Regarding Coffman Union and Antisemitism" (<http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/letter/letter-to-cornell-university-about-coffman-union-and-antisemitism/>).

Dean Nicholson's active role in promoting his political agenda found one focus in his monitoring of student political activity. The Board of Regents voted on October 19, 1935 to create a general policy of the University with regard to the display and circulation of materials for "advertising and propaganda purposes."<sup>115</sup> Nicholson's actions went far beyond the authority that the Board of Regents gave the University to review, approve, and otherwise control printed materials displayed and disseminated on campus. At a meeting on January 9, 1936, the University Senate Committee on Student Affairs developed and adopted a list of regulations intended to clarify and implement the general policy. These regulations, in part, required all advertising materials to be reviewed and approved by the dean of students prior to public posting; prohibited use of the student post office boxes for dissemination of advertising, political information, and "propaganda" sent to the entire student body; and limited use of campus post office boxes to student groups that were officially recognized by the University and that maintained for inspection a list of their active membership. Reporting in the *Minnesota Daily* suggests the Regents' vote and subsequent regulations were in reaction to conflicts between the University administration and what the paper called "liberal and radical organizations" on campus.<sup>116</sup>

The Regents authorized Dean Nicholson to regulate student publications and certain activities such as the approval of speakers from off campus, but Nicholson utilized that mandate and his contact with Chase to further a political agenda beyond campus as well.<sup>117</sup> Berman indicates that "Nicholson was particularly incensed" that Farmer-Labor governor Elmer Austin Benson (elected in 1936) had appointed Sherman Dryer as the first Jewish Minnesotan to the University's Board of Regents. Nicholson sought, through his connection to Chase, to influence the appointment of Regents, and to ensure that Farmer-Labor party members were not among the new appointees. In a letter to Chase dated January 4, 1937, he wrote that he hoped that Chase could help him "bring influence to bear on the matter of appointment of Regents," and that "it is exceedingly vital that we do so." He then went on to request that Chase "use" his friend Ernest Lundeen (a Farmer-Labor U.S. House representative from Minnesota from 1933-1937 and a U.S. senator from 1937 until his death in 1940) "in any way so that this matter of appointment of Regents might be controlled to some extent."<sup>118</sup>

Building up to the 1938 election, Nicholson used his position to assist Chase's quest to have Republicans regain control of state government. Nicholson informed Chase that Dryer, a "Jew, Communist, Agitator and publicist" and former campus radical who "looked like a typical Jew" was now a speech writer for Benson. Chase compiled dossiers on students who Nicholson identified as leaders of student government, the student

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<sup>115</sup> The Regents voted to direct President Coffman to prepare "a resolution expressing the general policy of the University with regard to the use of University billboards and the distribution of circulars on the campus for advertising and propaganda purposes." Specifically, the Regents declared, "All signs, posters, announcements and other publicity material must be confined to the bulletin boards and the other officially recognized University channels of publicity, and their display must be approved by an officer of the University appointed by the President." President Coffman appointed Dean Edward Nicholson as the "officer of the university" to enforce this policy. University of Minnesota Board of Regents Minutes for Oct. 19, 1935, page 27.

<sup>116</sup> University of Minnesota Archives, "Poster Restriction Rules Announced by Senate Group," *Minnesota Daily*, January 30, 1936, p. 1, 6; <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/text/propaganda-denied-place-in-post-office-boxes-by-senate/>

<sup>117</sup> University of Minnesota, "The Senate Committee Solves the Propaganda Problem," *Minnesota Daily*, January 31, 1936; <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/text/the-senate-committee-solves-the-propaganda-problem>

<sup>118</sup> <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/letter/nicholson-letter-to-chase-about-new-board-of-regents/>

newspaper, or the anti-war movement. Many of these students were labelled by Nicholson in dossiers marked "Jew. Communist." and "New York Jew." Both Jewish and non-Jewish students who led protests against racial segregation on campus were labelled "troublemakers," and others were identified as "Communists" even when they had no party affiliation.<sup>119</sup>

Chase drew on the information provided by Nicholson to produce a "slick anti-Semitic pamphlet" painting Governor Benson as the pawn of Jewish Communists. Entitled "Are they Communists or Catspaws?" this pamphlet contained photographs, altered, of four of Benson's aides, and was filled with anti-Semitic rhetoric. It also attacked Benson and his aides for having invited the African-American poet, Langston Hughes, to campus, labeling Hughes as "anti-Christian." A letter from Chase to Nicholson in 1938 documents that Nicholson was providing Chase with information about Hughes's visit to campus that was used by Chase in "Communists or Catspaws."<sup>120</sup> Republican gubernatorial candidate Harold Stassen sought to distance himself from antisemitism and issued a vague plea for tolerance in a local Jewish newspaper, but did not specifically rebuke Chase or his statements.<sup>121</sup> Berman documents how closely allied Nicholson was with Chase in all of these activities.

The Chase-Nicholson collaboration continued after the 1938 election. In 1940, Nicholson identified a student who led the American Students Union, which "is reported to be a Stalinite [sic] Communist organization," to the F.B.I. He and Chase also shared reports on students with leaders of the Silver Legion of America, a fascist paramilitary organization with a significant following in Minnesota.<sup>122</sup> Writing on University letterhead, in April 1941 Nicholson sent Chase a list of student and faculty names that he believed held dangerous political beliefs, and explained how he surveilled students, tracking their movements around campus. "I probably shall have another name for you shortly," he wrote, referring to a graduate student who had recently arrived on campus:

He disappears from his rooming house every once in a while, sometimes being away for four or five days with never any accounting for the time. There are other questions which have been raised concerning him, and I am trying to make a check-up at the present time. As soon as I have something definite I will keep you posted.<sup>123</sup>

In the same letter, Nicholson indicates that Chase might wish to add the names of the students and faculty he was providing to a longer list that Chase was maintaining. Among the names was that of a member of the

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<sup>119</sup> Hyman Berman, "Political Antisemitism in Minnesota During the Great Depression." *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, American Bicentennial: I (Summer - Autumn, 1976): 259, n. 38.

<sup>120</sup> The letter, dated March 13, 1938, asks Nicholson for information about the sum of money paid to Hughes for his lecture on campus in 1935. <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/?s=Langston%20Hughes&sentence=1>

<sup>121</sup> "Asks Open Hearing for Dean Nicholson," *Minnesota Daily* (January 12, 1937), 2; Berman. "Political Antisemitism," 259-262.

<sup>122</sup> Berman. "Political Antisemitism," 259-260; FBI Report on American Students Union, February 1, 1941, <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/text/fbi-report-on-american-students-union/>; Sarah Atwood, "'This List Not Complete': Minnesota's Jewish Resistance to the Silver Legion of America, 1936-1940," *Minnesota History* 66:4 (Winter 2018), 98-111.

<sup>123</sup> Nicholson to Chase, March 15 and April 7, 1941, Minnesota Historical Society, RPC, Box 44, Folder Jan - May 1941. <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/letter/nicholson-letter-to-chase-giving-names-1941>

Law School who had been advocating for “special recognition for the colored people” on campus by trying to secure a dorm room for a Black student, who Nicholson characterized as “a negress.” The dean assured Chase that “the plan did not succeed.”<sup>124</sup>

Within the wider framework of persistent antisemitism, both in Minneapolis and at the University of Minnesota, Dean Nicholson played a significant role in institutionalizing antisemitism in his official actions and in monitoring and reporting students’ political activity. He conducted surveillance on a number of students whom he suspected of being Communist sympathizers, not all of whom were Jewish, but the lists he kept made particular note of who was Jewish *and* Communist.

### Nicholson as a contested figure in his own time

Nicholson’s actions on campus and in the broader community came under intense scrutiny during his time as dean of student affairs. The most notable event occurred in 1937, when the Minneapolis City Council called for the Board of Regents to demand Nicholson’s resignation as dean. Alderman J.G. Scott made the motion in regard to Nicholson’s alleged interference with a grand jury, claiming that Nicholson had called an informal meeting of the November-December grand jury before the jurors were sworn in, and that the invitations were sent out at the request of Nicholson, in his role as head of the Former Grand Jury Foreman’s Association.<sup>125</sup>

The case caused a great deal of public debate at the time. The *Minneapolis Star* claimed that Nicholson had every right to the actions he took, while the *Minneapolis Tribune* took a strong stance of support of the city council’s vote.<sup>126</sup>

Shortly after the vote in the Minneapolis City Council, the Hennepin County Farmer-Labor Association took the opportunity provided by the public focus on Nicholson to criticize him in a resolution adopted by the convention, but not for the grand jury incident. Instead, the association’s resolution asked that the “legislature pass a vote of condemnation of Dean Nicholson for his repression of students at the University of Minnesota” and demanded that the legislature “effect his removal by any means within its power.”<sup>127</sup> A student organization, the Progressive Party Council, echoed those views, demanding dismissal of Nicholson and declaring that he “had been partial and arbitrary” in the administration of his office.<sup>128</sup>

The *Minnesota Daily* published an editorial on the situation titled, “Keep your Hands off, City Council,” declaring the council’s move to be “completely presumptuous and thoroughly unwarranted.” The *Daily* argued that Nicholson’s role as dean of student affairs should not be confused with his role as a “private

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> “Dean Ignores Ouster Move,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 9, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> “U Paper Lines up Behind Dean in Ouster Plea.” January 9, 1937. *Minneapolis Star*.

<sup>127</sup> “Hennepin F-L Asks Reforms.” January 11, 1937. *Minneapolis Tribune*, p. 4

<sup>128</sup> “Hearing Urged for Nicholson.” *Minneapolis Star*. Jan 13, 1937, p. 15.

citizen with an interest in better government.”<sup>129</sup> Another article in the *Daily* the same day noted that the University administration was “silent” about the city council vote on Nicholson.<sup>130</sup>

The *Daily* also published two letters to the editor in response to the city council’s action.<sup>131</sup> One letter, signed by representatives of the Practical Pacifists club and the Student Patriot League, expresses the opinion that the city council vote is a “smear campaign” by “intolerant radicals” aimed at discrediting the dean. Another letter, by the Minnesota Student Alliance, defended the dean’s right “to pursue his own opinions as a private citizen,” but agreed that “those opinions cannot be allowed to warp his administration of student affairs” and called for the Board of Regents to hold an open public hearing in which all members of the university, including Dean Nicholson, could be heard.” Seeking a “fair investigation” without “any violation of academic freedom,” students urged the Board of Regents to “hold a public open hearing” where “all interested parties including students and faculty” could present evidence and “the dean be given the fullest opportunity to defend his record.” It is not clear whether the Regents held such a hearing. An Associated Press article stated that President Coffman would consider the city council’s demand for Dean Nicholson’s removal, but that Coffman declined to say whether he would bring the matter before the Board of Regents.<sup>132</sup> Coffman’s only comment, as reported in the *Daily*, was, “Well, well. Why don’t they fire us all while they’re at it?”<sup>133</sup>

## Arguments for and against Removing Nicholson’s Name from Nicholson Hall

Edward Nicholson dedicated many years to serving the University of Minnesota. As dean, he is credited with the establishment of what would ultimately become the Office of Student Affairs, which created the foundation for many of the services the University provides for students to this day. The question we seek to weigh in the following sections is whether his targeting and surveillance of Jewish students and of those students and faculty with political views different from his own, and his use of his position to advance his political agenda in conjunction with state politicians, justify the removal of his name from Nicholson Hall.

### Arguments for removing Nicholson’s name

#### *Nicholson’s deeds and actions*

1. Nicholson’s deeds and actions in his long tenure as dean of student affairs warrant removal of his name from the building. He acted consistently to undermine those who held opposing political beliefs from his own. In conducting surveillance of students that he deemed politically “radical,” Dean Nicholson targeted predominantly Jewish and politically left-leaning students. Despite adulatory reviews of his performance as dean, his conduct excited public controversy, leading members of the public as well as the Minneapolis City Council and the Hennepin County Farmer-Labor Association to call for him to step down.

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<sup>129</sup> *Minnesota Daily*, January 9, 1937, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> “U Officials Silent on Council’s Try for Dean’s Ouster,” *Minnesota Daily*, January 9, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/text/letters-to-the-editor-for-and-against-dean-nicholson/>

<sup>132</sup> *LaCrosse Tribune and Leader Press*, Jan 9, 1937, p. 7

<sup>133</sup> “U Officials Silent on Council’s Try for Dean’s Ouster,” *Minnesota Daily*, January 9, 1937, p. 1.

### *University values*

2. Removing Dean Nicholson's name from the building would reinforce the University of Minnesota's core value of embracing a diversity of community and ideas and would emphasize that the University holds to its value of protecting academic freedom. His actions also violate important standards of conduct the University expects of its employees, including acting ethically and with integrity and being fair and respectful to others. The current Regents Policy on Namings, Section II, highlights the important connection between the University's core values and the naming process: "Naming for an individual or organization is an honor that forges a close link between the individual or organization and the University. As such, it is critically important that the integrity, history, behavior, and reputation of the named individual or organization be consistent with the academic mission and values of the University." In Edward Nicholson's role as dean, he did not exhibit the integrity and behavior that we value in administrators. Indeed, Nicholson's antisemitism and his monitoring of student activists is inconsistent with values of equal treatment and freedom of speech that are central to the University of Minnesota's identity and University values today. His use of the resources and powers of his office to advance personal political beliefs and bigotries also violated basic principles of democratic government and public stewardship. Nicholson's actions were contested in his own time and he could have made different choices.
3. Dean Nicholson's actions are at odds with the University's values today. Fairness and respect, cultivating a diversity of community and ideas, acting with integrity, and fulfilling our land-grant missions are core University values. Dean Nicholson's actions were in breach of these principles. The University is a land-grant institution charged with serving the needs of all members of our state, and Dean Nicholson's actions undermined those efforts.

### *University climate*

4. Renaming Nicholson Hall would demonstrate to the campus community and broader public that the University is committed to the principles of free speech and academic freedom and supports a diverse campus free from harassment. To remove Dean Nicholson's name would support the aspirational ideals of the University of Minnesota. It would signal to the many different constituencies on campus and beyond that the University does not condone the racism, antisemitism, and political suppression undertaken by Dean Edward Nicholson.
5. Removing Dean Nicholson's name will allow the University to recommit itself to the values of fairness and respect in a University that prides itself on its diversity of community and ideas. It will support the University's efforts to make the campus a more diverse, inclusive, fair, just, and welcoming place. Moreover, changing the name is consistent with our current Campus Climate Initiatives.<sup>134</sup>
6. Today's campus climate is also charged and politically divided, yet it is clear that our contemporary values demand that we air those differences and find ways in which they may be respectfully debated. This is evident from comments submitted by students, faculty, staff, and alumni across the

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<sup>134</sup> <https://campus-climate.umn.edu/about>



political spectrum regarding the question of renaming. Even those who regard the process to be one of “political correctness” find value in knowing these aspects of campus history, and urge open discussion and education. Many of Nicholson’s actions monitoring and reporting students’ protest and political viewpoints, or their presumed viewpoints, showed disregard for airing differences respectfully.

7. Across the nation, universities and colleges are engaged in critical conversations about how racism played a role in building their institutions. The University of Minnesota is poised to be a leader in the region on these issues. The only way to become such a leader is for the University to excavate its own past and use what it has learned to build a more equitable institution, one that remembers the names of the students and faculty and community members who fought for equality on its campuses while holding itself accountable for those leaders who effectively excluded students on the basis of their race, religion, or political affiliation.

#### *Resources*

8. Many of the public comments objecting to the renaming of buildings specifically cite the waste of resources in such an effort. The Task Force has heard from representatives of the campus facilities/buildings and grounds staff, and are assured that the removal of a building name and/or renaming Nicholson Hall would not be burdensome or an expensive process. Indeed, buildings on this campus have been renamed in the past (for example, from a general name indicating the function of the building to the name of a person), and the use of digital maps will mitigate much of the potential confusion.
9. Public comments also reference the “time and expense” of assembling the Task Force making these recommendations. Certainly, significant time and effort were dedicated to this process, but these were by faculty, staff, and students who chose to devote their time and effort to this work. With the exception of a graduate student research assistant hired to assist the Task Force, no additional compensation was received by Task Force members or supporting staff.

#### *Educational merit*

10. To remove the name of Nicholson would give the University the opportunity to not only reckon with its past and the problematic work of Dean Edward Nicholson, but also to create a forum for discussion and educational programs that address the intersections of racism, antisemitism, and student activism today. Removing his name from the building and providing ongoing educational opportunities to engage with this history in meaningful and productive ways would demonstrate that to rename is not to erase history. Rather, renaming offers an occasion for us to learn more about the history of ethnic, religious, and racial discrimination at the University of Minnesota, as well as opposition to that discrimination, and its impact on the social and political history of the state.
11. The Center for Jewish Studies, a research and curricular center in the College of Liberal Arts, is housed in Nicholson Hall. This presents the University with a unique educational opportunity to engage in substantive ways with the legacy of Edward Nicholson. The Center is committed to providing the broadest possible inquiry into Jewish history and culture from antiquity to the present, with a particular focus on the encounters between Jews and non-Jews in a range of geographical locations. The Center for Jewish Studies also has, as part of its mission, a significant component of

outreach to the wider Twin Cities community. The center has taken a leadership role in educating students and the wider public about the complex layers of Jewish history. As part of its mission, the center could play a significant role in developing new courses and programs on the history of antisemitism that could shed more light on the University's history and on the role of Dean Nicholson. Inquiry into the complex and troubling legacy of Edward Nicholson can serve to illustrate the intersection of antisemitism and racism, which we have seen in tragic church and synagogue shootings in recent years in an especially vivid way.

12. The case of Dean Nicholson makes clear that the students and faculty whom he targeted in his reports as "Jew agitators" (not all of whom were Jewish) have noteworthy stories that need to be told. Distinguished faculty members such as Benjamin Lippincott, Harold C. Deutsch, Ernest Osgood, and Joseph Warren Beach were among those designated as "Jew agitators" in Nicholson's reports to Chase.<sup>135</sup> Removing the name of Nicholson from Nicholson Hall would encourage this fuller and important history to be told.

#### *Public perception and politics*

13. Renaming Nicholson Hall would also make clear that the University is committed to examining its own history in the light of systemic racism and antisemitism. Removing Nicholson's name from Nicholson Hall would send a message to the public that the University not only values racial and ethnic equality and academic freedom, but that it seeks to recognize and redress wrongs done in the past and hold itself accountable.

### **Arguments against removing Nicholson's name**

#### *Nicholson's deeds and actions*

1. Edward Nicholson had a 46-year career at the University of Minnesota, and served as dean of student affairs at the University from 1917 to 1941. A career of that duration is noteworthy, and he was considered a popular figure by many. In his long tenure as dean of student affairs, "Dean Nick," as he was affectionately called, was described as being committed to "having his office in personal touch with all students." Nicholson was a respected member of the University faculty. Within five years of arriving at the University to assume his position as instructor of chemistry, he was placed on the student work committee and went on to chair that committee. This resulted in the creation, by President Northrop, of the new Office of the Dean of Student Affairs. The growth and advancement of this office was Nicholson's lifelong project. He is described as always being interested in students and caring deeply about them. This concern for and about students is one of his lasting legacies. Our modern Office of Student Affairs, which provides in-depth and comprehensive support for students (including services and programs ranging from career development to multicultural community building), is a direct consequence of Nicholson's commitment to student life.

#### *University values*

2. Nicholson cared very deeply about students and their education. As dean of student affairs, he devoted himself to students, and the positive narratives about his work in this capacity suggest that

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<sup>135</sup> See Hyman Berman, "Political Antisemitism," fn 38, p. 259.

many aspects of his attention to student life were valued at the University during his tenure. The Board of Regents Mission Statement describes an appropriate working environment as one that “inspires, sets high expectations for, and empowers the individuals within its community,” and one could see Nicholson’s concern for students in this light.

#### *University climate*

3. It might be argued that the University climate and the political climate, particularly the widespread fears due to the rise of socialism and communism and the Soviet Union, were sufficiently different in Nicholson’s time that we cannot capably and fairly judge the past from our vantage point of the present.

#### *Resources*

4. Resources expended in the renaming process, including the time spent to investigate the actions of specific individuals, could be more effectively directed toward the highest University priorities, toward support for students of color and students in financial need, and toward expanding our awareness of our institutional history, rather than time-consuming debates over building names.

#### *Educational merit*

5. Some would argue that once the name of a controversial figure is removed from the prominent location of a building name, we risk erasing history and losing the pedagogical gains of discussing and evaluating and confronting historical figures in all their complexity.
6. Student respondents to the public comments portal who oppose renaming assert that our efforts would be better directed into education about the troubling history of discrimination, exclusion, and segregation.

#### *Public perception and politics*

7. Actions of this type may alienate portions of the public. To some, efforts to remove names, artwork, statues, or other significant structures will be seen as part of an ideological or political agenda.

## Deliberation and Recommendations

The Task Force recommends removing Dean Nicholson’s name from Nicholson Hall. In addition, whether or not the name is removed from the building, we recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Edward Nicholson’s complicated legacy.

Our recommendation to remove Edward Nicholson’s name from Nicholson Hall is guided by consideration of the arguments for and against removing the name as well as the five guiding principles—Change, Diversity, Preservation, Exceptionality, Deliberation—established by the Coleman Committee. The full text of these principles appears in section III.2 of this report.

### Change

We are living in a moment when colleges and universities across the country are examining their histories. The “A Campus Divided” exhibit captures several critical histories chronicling exclusion, segregation, and antisemitism at the University of Minnesota. This exhibit began to reshape our understanding of campus history, and the extensive historical analysis of the Task Force has continued that work with regard to the role

of Dean Nicholson, particularly in the history of surveillance of students on the campus. In order to adhere to our core values today, especially with regard to fairness, respect, and the service mission of a land-grant institution, we believe that changes are sometimes needed to preserve those values.

The Coleman Committee report underscores the fact that institutions such as the University of Minnesota continually undergo change and, most importantly, that “our own understanding and interpretation of campus history can also change over time.” In fact, change does not necessarily mean that the history, culture, values, and traditions must be lost. The political and cultural climate of racism and antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s at the University of Minnesota mirrored the larger culture of the time, particularly in Minneapolis. Yet we are now living in a different era. To change the name of Nicholson Hall would be a way to preserve the value of creating a campus of diversity of community and ideas, and the core value of academic freedom that is at the very center of our University community. It would also enable further reflection on the connections between campus history and our values and continuing inequities in the present moment.

### Diversity

Promoting a “diversity of community and ideas” is another core value of the University of Minnesota. As stated in the Coleman Committee report, “Throughout the history of the University of Minnesota, substantial and positive contributions have been made by many unique individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, as befits a public, land grant university, the diversity of Minnesotans should be a prominent consideration in the process of naming and renaming buildings and significant University assets.” In the process of examining Dean Nicholson’s actions, the Task Force has been introduced to a new set of historical change makers who demanded the University serve all state residents on an equal basis. Nicholson engaged in actions that undermined the diversity of the University and made it a less hospitable place for students of diverse races and religions. As is evident in section III.1 of this report, the value of diversity is intrinsic to the University of Minnesota and is reiterated several times in Board of Regents documents on core University values, standards of conduct, and appropriate working environments. Dean Nicholson’s targeting of African-American and Jewish students and those he deemed radicals, in his long tenure as dean, not only does not reflect this commitment to diversity, but undermines it.

### Preservation

The Coleman Committee report states, “[c]hanging the name of a building, space, or university asset does not and should not mean erasure. The process to name or rename or remove a name should be considered part of the pedagogical mission of the University.” As the University of Minnesota examines its history and evaluates the role of Dean Nicholson in that history, it is critical that we not lose sight of important factors. Removing Nicholson’s name will neither erase his efforts or the University’s efforts concerning student surveillance, nor will it erase the positive aspects of his legacy. The Coleman Committee report also notes that “it is incumbent upon us today to acknowledge the full, living history that formed this University community.” That acknowledgement serves as the foundation for instructive reflection on our past and its relation to our present. Preserving a name must, then, serve this purpose of acknowledgement and reflection. Yet preserving the name of Nicholson Hall would be unlikely to encourage such a process of reflection, which (as the Coleman Committee report notes) is part of the pedagogical function of the University. Erasure of campus history is antithetical to the values of the University. We believe that removing the name of Nicholson does not constitute erasure. Rather, it acknowledges and brings to the forefront

troubling but important aspects of the history of the institution. To remove the name of Nicholson is to enable greater engagement with the history that he represents through his actions conducted as part of his official duties and position at the University.

## Exceptionality

Removing the name from a building is a serious matter, and the Coleman Committee adopted the University of Michigan's premise that "it is impossible to hold someone accountable for failing to share our contemporary ideas and values. Instead, the question must be what ideas, values, and actions were possible in a particular historical context." Our colleagues at Yale similarly state, "no generation stands alone at the end of history with perfect moral hindsight." The Coleman Committee report further states that "only in exceptional instances, when the values reflected in the current name are in opposition to the values embraced by the University, should renaming or removing a name take place." Dean Nicholson's actions persisted over time and were in fundamental conflict with the core values of respect and fairness to all members of the University. Dean Nicholson's role in fostering and perpetuating a culture of political repression of ideas strikes at the heart of University value of supporting a diversity of ideas.

Our consideration of the name of Edward Nicholson on Nicholson Hall is not about a single action or viewpoint that we would today find offensive. Instead, Dean Nicholson engaged in a series of discriminatory actions over the course of his term as dean that targeted students. His actions were based largely in his hostility to the perceived racial "otherness" of Jews. His use of his University position and his access to student and faculty information to further his political ends was a deep violation of trust. In his own time, he faced opposition to his actions, including from groups off campus such as the Hennepin County Farmer-Labor Association, which faulted him for his "repression" of students. Dean Nicholson had a productive legacy in other aspects of his administration, and we value and are indebted to the work he did to establish the Office of Student Affairs as a vital and important resource on campus. We concur with the Coleman Committee's guiding principle that name changes should be exceptional. In our assessment, through his racial/religious exclusionary actions and his political surveillance of members of the University community, Dean Nicholson's actions failed to fulfill the mission of the University in ways that fundamentally conflict with our core values today, so much so that we deem this to be an exceptional instance in which name removal is warranted.

## Deliberation

As we stated at greater length in section III.3 on the principle of deliberation, we do not seek to impose our expectations from today arbitrarily on individuals of the past. Today's values should guide what and who we wish to honor with the distinction of a naming. We also recognize that individuals need to be assessed within the context of their own time and what was imaginable and possible then. We must both measure actions against the norms and practices of their day and evaluate in what way the values they stood for might be in conflict with those of our own times. Individuals operate within institutions and systems that impose constraints on actions, but choices are nonetheless still available to individuals, particularly those exercising power and discretion in their administrative roles. Retaining a name on a building does not mean endorsing all of the more objectionable and problematic actions of an individual. Likewise, to remove a name from a building, to change a name, does not mean saying the contributions have no value or are worthy of no recognition. Collectively reckoning with our institutional history provides an occasion for emphasizing that individuals, particularly leaders with significant authority in their roles, are responsible for their own decisions.

The Task Force members have, within the constraints of time and of their charge, conducted thorough research both in the historical archives and in the collection of perspectives on campus values and renaming. In accordance with the principle of deliberation articulated in the Coleman Committee report, this Task Force has considered the naming and potential renaming of Nicholson Hall “via a careful, informed, inclusive, and deliberative process.” The Task Force has learned about the contributions of Edward Nicholson during his years of service at the University. We have also considered the ways in which his actions targeted students, particularly Jewish students, for political surveillance and reporting. We recognize that our recommendation to remove Edward Nicholson’s name from Nicholson Hall will not be supported by every constituency, but we believe it is the best course of action.

## **IV.3 Comptroller and Vice President William T. Middlebrook and Middlebrook Hall**

### Introduction

#### Context

Racial inequality was a pervasive feature of the Minnesota landscape in the mid-twentieth century. Although the Minnesota Legislature was among the first states to enact civil rights legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodations after federal legislation in this area was struck down by the Supreme Court,<sup>136</sup> the first five decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the proliferation of restrictive racial housing covenants throughout the Twin Cities, targeting African Americans, Jews, and other minorities. These groups and their allies pushed the state’s preeminent public higher education institution, the University of Minnesota, to recognize their rights to equal access to all of the University’s facilities, including campus housing. Because restrictive covenants and rental housing discrimination limited the access of students of color and Jewish students to housing near campus, access to adequate accommodations became a pressing educational concern. For these students as well as those advocating on their behalf, equal access to campus housing was considered synonymous with obtaining equal educational opportunity. During the first half of the twentieth century, the University mostly barred African Americans from campus dormitories in the face of protest on the part of students and civil rights organizations at the local and national level, with the presidency of Guy Stanton Ford constituting a notable exception to this rule. The

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<sup>136</sup> In the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883), the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 to be unconstitutional, ruling that the federal government did not have the authority to prohibit discriminatory acts between private individuals, such as a business refusing to serve customers of a particular race. In response, the Minnesota State Legislature adopted an Equal Accommodations Act in 1885 and further expanded the reach of its civil rights laws in 1897, 1899, 1905 and 1943. The 1885 act guaranteed equal public accommodations to “all citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude,” and was amended in 1943 to also prohibit discrimination based upon “national origin or religion.” Act of March 7, 1885, ch. 224, s 1, 1885 Minn.Laws 295, 296; amended by the Act of April 23, 1897, ch. 349, ss 2-3, 1897 Minn.Laws 616; Act of March 6, 1899, ch. 41, s 1, 1899 Minn.Laws 38, 38-39; Minn.Rev.Laws ch. 55 (1905); and Act of April 23, 1943, ch. 579, s 7321, 1943 Minn.Laws 831, 832.

University also operated a housing bureau over the course of this period which enabled and perpetuated the practices of landlords whose rooming houses excluded students of color and Jews.

### Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook's actions

William T. Middlebrook was one of the most powerful figures in the University for over three decades. He served as comptroller for the University from 1925 to 1943, and as vice president for business administration from 1943 until his retirement in 1959. For much of his career, he also served as secretary of the Board of Regents. He dedicated much of his career and his administrative acumen to building and managing the physical structure of the University, including student housing, which fell under his purview as vice president for business administration. Yet he used the considerable discretion he held in this position in ways that operated to discriminate against Black students. As comptroller, he identified means of excluding African-American students from University housing and also explored the feasibility of creating housing to segregate Blacks. As vice president, he oversaw and coordinated efforts to construct a new rooming house (the "International House") that was intended to provide segregated housing for Black students. And amidst a shifting civil rights environment both locally and nationally, and despite strong protestations from the NAACP, he would not agree to add a non-discrimination covenant in a University property sale in 1959. In sum, during the years he served as a University administrator he did not use his authority and influence to secure equal access to all racial and ethnic groups.

### Recommendations

The vision to create a West Bank campus for the University of Minnesota Twin Cities can largely be credited to Middlebrook, and it would become the location of Middlebrook Hall, a dormitory that, at the request of the Committee on University Honors and on the recommendation of the president, was dedicated to Middlebrook in 1966 before it was constructed. Based on our review of his actions as comptroller and vice president, in the conclusion of this section of our report we recommend the removal of William Middlebrook's name from Middlebrook Hall. We also recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Middlebrook's complicated legacy. This step, we believe, should be taken whether or not the name is removed from the building. We discuss in section V of this report a series of potential initiatives designed to increase our understanding of our institutional history and to serve and enhance the opportunities for today's students.

## Overview

The aim of this historical review is to better understand whether William T. Middlebrook's actions produced or perpetuated systems of racial inequality that were fundamentally at odds with University values during his tenure as comptroller and vice president and University values today.

In order to explore these questions our Task Force sought to educate itself about:

- The history of William T. Middlebrook's tenure as comptroller and vice president for business affairs of the University of Minnesota, with particular attention to his oversight of provisions for student housing.

- The societal context within which Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook acted—specifically how other institutions of higher education at the same time promoted or challenged discriminatory housing policies and practices.
- The social context of opinion and practice in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota, particularly with respect to housing.
- The original reasons for creating and naming the building for Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook and the changing purposes and significance attached to the building and its namesake over time.

## Discussion and Analysis

### Standard biographical account of William Middlebrook's years in office

Most accounts of William T. Middlebrook credit him with playing a critical role in the physical expansion of the University of Minnesota to serve the needs of students, faculty, and staff during his 34 years of service (1925-59), first as comptroller and then as vice president for business administration. His obituary in the University Senate minutes for 1973-74 concludes with the following statement: "When the history of the University of Minnesota is rewritten and updated, the name of William T. Middlebrook will surely be included in that small and select company known as the 'Builders of the Name.'" His efforts made it possible for the University to accommodate the rapid growth of its student population, and he became known for his "open door policy," because he endeavored "to keep education within the grasp of all"—his strategies for managing the University's finances "were never designed to exclude a single student."<sup>137</sup>

University Archivist Erik Moore provides the following brief account of Middlebrook's life:

William T. Middlebrook was born in Vergennes, Vermont, in 1891. Middlebrook attended Dartmouth College, where he earned his B.A. and M.C.S. degrees. Middlebrook was first appointed comptroller for the University of Minnesota at the July 16, 1925, meeting of the Board of Regents. Middlebrook held this position until 1943, when he was appointed vice president for business administration under an administrative reorganization by President Coffey. During his tenure at the University, Middlebrook concurrently served as secretary to the Regents. In his role as comptroller and later vice president for business administration, Middlebrook was tasked with finding funding for the first men's dormitory (Pioneer Hall) and would have participated in meeting the rapidly developing needs of the campus as it experienced the post-war boom. Middlebrook retired as vice president emeritus for business administration effective June 30, 1959. William T. Middlebrook died in Pompano Beach, Florida, on February 16, 1974.

As comptroller and vice president, Middlebrook worked to make the University as affordable as was practicable in order to maintain educational access. This "open door policy" was partly an effort to minimize tuition and partly an effort to help students earn wages to work themselves through college. He understood that many students came to the University in the 1930s as "refugees from the Depression," and he was

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<sup>137</sup> Juanita Pacifico Opstein, "William T. Middlebrook to Retire: 'Open Door Policy' to Remain," *Gopher Grad* 58, no. 2 (November 1958), 6.



determined that tuition not rise beyond the average for the Big Ten. He insisted that students earn the same wages for campus jobs as non-student workers did.<sup>138</sup>

White political and educational leaders saw the University as a means to create social mobility, but only with certain groups in mind. Legislators were “concerned with the university as a means of socio-economic access to people, to young people particularly, but also access to success for older people, too, [in] the extension activity.”<sup>139</sup> In the culture of Minnesota (and the rest of the United States) at the time, not naming the race of the people they were talking about implicitly signaled that they were talking about whites.<sup>140</sup> Thus the open door, promising an open, accessible institution for all, meant in practice inclusion for some, but not for all. Middlebrook’s open door policy was inspiring, but it had limits in its application.

Another important aspect of Middlebrook’s legacy is his dedication to academic excellence through his support of the faculty. He acted on the conviction that “the business of higher education is a different business,” warning that the standardization of the academic workplace would “stifle if not ruin our kind of business.” Salaries and sabbatical leaves both gained his attention, and he recognized both were crucial for attracting and retaining excellent faculty and encouraging the distinction of their research. He worked to improve fringe benefits such as insurance, retirement, and medical leaves. In the 1930s, the group life and disability insurance policy went into effect, and a retirement plan was implemented. Both were under his leadership as comptroller. And just as he focused on student housing, he also dedicated his efforts and University resources to faculty housing, developing the University Grove neighborhood near the St. Paul campus.<sup>141</sup>

### **Middlebrook and student housing at Minnesota during the presidency of Lotus Coffman**

William Middlebrook is celebrated for opening the doors of the University to students. Less well known are his efforts to exclude African-American students from University housing during the presidencies of Lotus Coffman and Walter Coffey, efforts that have been brought to light in the exhibit “A Campus Divided” and in the research conducted by this Task Force. In his capacity as comptroller during Coffman’s presidency, Middlebrook supported that administration’s general policy of excluding African-American students from dormitories; and as comptroller and vice president for business administration under Coffey he supported that president’s efforts to segregate campus housing.

Here we detail known instances in which Middlebrook supported or actively took steps to implement Coffman’s and Coffey’s discriminatory policies and practices.

In 1933, the University had recently built a dormitory for the female students of the nursing program. That program admitted Ahwna Fiti, an African-American student (not the program’s first), and housed her in the

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<sup>138</sup> Opstein, 6.

<sup>139</sup> Clarke A. Chambers, “Interview with David Berg,” November 7-8, 1994. Transcript in Digital Conservancy. <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/48989/bergDavid.pdf?sequence=1>, page 11.

<sup>140</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the “White” Problem in American Studies.” *American Quarterly* 47 (1995), 369.

<sup>141</sup>Opstein, 6-8.

newly built Nurses Home, where students were required to live. In an October 10 letter to President Coffman, Comptroller Middlebrook recommended—over the objection of Medical School Dean Elias Lyon, but in line with the efforts of Dean of Women Anne Dudley Blitz to keep Black students out of the University dormitories—that Ahwna Fiti be excluded from the new Nurses’ Home.<sup>142</sup> In this letter, Middlebrook explicitly referenced “a general University policy relative to the housing of colored students in Pioneer Hall and Sanford Hall” and registered concern that allowing Fiti to remain in the newly constructed Nurses’ Home, which “could properly be looked upon as part of the dormitory system,” would “create a precedent which might be embarrassing to us at Pioneer Hall and Sanford Hall.” Middlebrook went on to inform Coffman that he had accordingly made arrangements so as to “avoid this by allowing the colored girl the regular maintenance allowance for room of \$10.” Middlebrook concluded by expressing his “hope” that if “the policy is reconsidered, the possible effect upon Sanford Hall and Pioneer Hall of a change will be given due weight.”<sup>143</sup>

Administrators at the University of Minnesota were influenced by the policies and practices of other institutions of higher learning, particularly when they were subject to legal challenge. Middlebrook, along with administrators at peer institutions, had been watching the progress of an Ohio case, *State ex rel. Weaver v. Board of Trustees of the Ohio State University*. In the case, a student, Doris Weaver, had taken legal action against Ohio State University, alleging racially discriminatory action in connection with a home economics course that involved residency in the “home management house” with a group of students and a supervisor. The Ohio State Supreme Court ruled in favor of the university in 1933, on the grounds that Weaver had been offered separate but equal accommodations, satisfying the standard set out by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).<sup>144</sup>

A copy of a January 31, 1934 memo circulated by Ohio State University’s business manager to Middlebrook as well as administrators on other campuses containing the decision of the Ohio Supreme Court in the *Weaver* case indicates that University leadership was less than certain that their housing policies would survive constitutional scrutiny. A handwritten note on the cover page of the copy of the memo that survives in the University archives reads as follows: “This case [*Weaver*] cannot apply to Minnesota’s residence Hall specifically for if rejected at Pioneer, Sanford or Comstock respondents [sic] would have to be ‘substantially similar’ facilities to all races--& what would they offer that could be ‘similarly & equally well equipped & furnished’.”<sup>145</sup> Although it is unclear who authored the note on this memo addressed to Middlebrook, it

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<sup>142</sup> Middlebrook to Coffman, 10 October 1933, President's Office, Box 20, Folder 19, page 63, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archive, <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/1554307>.

<sup>143</sup> W. Middlebrook to L.D. Coffman, 10 October 1933, Administration. Alphabetical. President’s Office, Box 20, Folder 19, page 63, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archives.

<sup>144</sup> *State v. Board of Trustees of Ohio State University*, 126 Ohio St. 290 (1933).

<sup>145</sup> From Carl E. Steeb To W. T. Middlebrook et al, 31 January 1934, Hand written note on applicability of Ohio State University Court Case, Box 10 Folder ODS: Negro, 1939-41, Dean of Students, 0000-0994 University Archives, University of Minnesota. The quoted language is drawn from the decision in *state v. Board of Trustees of Ohio State University*, 126 Ohio St. 290 (1933).

suggests awareness at the highest levels of University leadership, including Middlebrook, that even by the “separate but equal” standard of *Plessy*, the University was falling short.<sup>146</sup>

The housing policy at the University of Minnesota was subject to a thoroughgoing challenge by students in 1935, in the form of a report submitted by the All-University Council Committee on Negro Discrimination, an integrated campus group at Minnesota that protested dormitory segregation on moral, educational, and legal grounds. The students argued that the University’s housing policy violated the Minnesota public accommodations law on the books at the time.<sup>147</sup> It is unclear whether courts would have interpreted the legislation to include University housing as part of public accommodations, but that is an area worthy of additional research. In any case, the All-University Council Committee’s argument indicates that whether the housing policy Middlebrook supported and sustained was in conformity with Minnesota law was a point of contestation at the time.

According to historian Mark Soderstrom’s research, Middlebrook shared an analysis of the report with President Coffman soon after the report was submitted. The analysis attempted to rebut an array of arguments the students made, noting “The present University policy does not encourage prejudice but itself avoids those very situations from which prejudice arises...We are of the opinion, based upon our own collective experiences, that an attempt to house and feed Negro students and white students in common dormitories and dining halls would result not in good will but in an enhancement of racial prejudice.”<sup>148</sup>

In 1936, Comptroller Middlebrook wrote to Catharine McBeath, the University housing director, that “President Coffman has had an insistent demand from certain quarters to provide rooming facilities for negro men students. Is there any reason why the property at 520 Beacon St., S.E., may not be used for this purpose if it is used for rooming house purposes only?”<sup>149</sup> The contemplated possibility of a segregated housing facility for African-American men would later be realized, though at a different address, with the opening of the University of Minnesota’s “International House” in 1942, discussed in further detail in section IV.4 of this report.

An additional important aspect of the student housing landscape during this period was the limited options for students of color and Jewish students in private housing. Following a 1932 directive from the Regents, the University required all students to live in University-approved rental housing (unless they lived with relatives

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<sup>146</sup> Soderstrom, “Weeds in Linnaeus’s Garden,” William Middlebrook to L.D. Coffman, June 4, 1935, University Archives, as cited in Soderstrom dissertation 270-71, footnotes 9 & 10. A copy of the Ohio case had been sent to Middlebrook (with a cc to Coffman) by Carl E. Steeb, the business manager at Ohio State in January of 1934 (From Carl E. Steeb To W. T. Middlebrook et al., 31 January 1934, Box 20, Folder 19, Page 51. University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archive.) Soderstrom also notes that the analysis letter from Middlebrook shared with Coffman quotes the Ohio State case (Soderstrom, 270).

<sup>147</sup> Report of Council Committee on Negro Discrimination, 1934-1935, Dean of Students 0000-0994, Box 10, Folder ODS: Negro, 1939-41, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>148</sup> Soderstrom, “Weeds in Linnaeus’s Garden,” 270-71.

<sup>149</sup> William Middlebrook To Mrs. Catharine McBeath, 25 May 1936, Box 20, Folder 19, page 135, Office of the President, UMedia Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

or owned their own home).<sup>150</sup> The exclusion of students of color from University housing was particularly onerous given that the University tolerated their exclusion from fraternities and sorority houses. The University also had a Housing Bureau that maintained a listing of approved private market rentals. Among those to whom the University granted approvals were landlords who discriminated on the basis of race, religion, and ethnicity. This meant that students who were excluded from whites-only dormitories and whites-only fraternities and sororities also faced exclusion from University Housing Bureau-approved whites-only private rentals off campus (Jews were in this excluded group). In 1934 and 1935, 58 out of 62 campus-area rooming houses refused to house African American students. Dr. Mabell McCollough, director of the University Housing Bureau, stated in 1958 that “the practice of racial discrimination” by University-approved landlords “has serious community and political consequences.”<sup>151</sup>

Well past the years of the Coffman presidency, the Housing Bureau’s acceptance of listings from landlords who refused to rent to students of color, Jewish students, and foreign students was strongly opposed by African-American and Jewish organizations.<sup>152</sup> The Urban League, the NAACP, and the Jewish Federation joined students in objecting to the University listing as “approved housing” residences who denied equal access. In 1960, in response to these protests, the Board of Regents declared that private rentals listed by the Housing Bureau should no longer discriminate on the basis of race, religion, or national origin.<sup>153</sup>

### **Middlebrook and student housing at Minnesota during the presidency of Guy Stanton Ford**

During the year President Coffman took a leave of absence, from 1937-38, Acting President Guy Stanton Ford sent a letter to Middlebrook. Dated December 20, 1937, it concerned African American access to campus housing. In the letter, Ford declared an end to the ban on African-American students from University housing: “Our classrooms are freely open to any qualified students who conform to the purposes and procedures of an institution of learning. The same policy applies to our facilities.” He informed Middlebrook that he was putting this declaration in writing “so that if it is raised with you or the supervisor of dormitories

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<sup>150</sup> Board of Regents minutes, November 5, 1932, no. 30: “Students, whether graduate or undergraduate, while attending the University must have their places of residence approved by the proper authorities of the University. If, in the opinion of the Board of Regents or its representatives, the conditions of any such place are not conducive to study, health, or morals, it may, at its discretion, insist that students vacate such residence and occupy rooms that are approved by the Board.”

<sup>151</sup> University of Minnesota Office of the Dean of Students, Student Housing Bureau, Dr. Mabell G. McCollough, director, Student Housing Bureau, to E.G. Williamson, dean of students, “A Comprehensive Review of Efforts over the Past Decades to Develop Adequate Housing Programs for Students,” Folder 1.8-200-1, box 24, Dean of Students Records, 0000-0994, University Archives.

<sup>152</sup> George F. Conger to J.L. Morrill, M.M. Willey, and W.T. Middlebrook, June 8, 1946, in folder “Housing, Student. Thatcher Hall, 1946-47” in box 112, President’s Office, University Archives.

<sup>153</sup> “A Proposed Regents’ Policy on Discrimination in Private Housing”, Undated, Box 24, Folder 1.8.200.1 Housing Discrimination General 1960-69, Dean of Students, 00000994 University Archives, University of Minnesota: On December 9, 1960, the Board of Regents passed the following policy: “The regents of the University of Minnesota deplore discrimination on the basis of race, religion, [or] nationality. In line with this policy they declare that housing facilities should be available to students regardless of race, religion, or nationality. This policy presently governs in all housing facilities operated by the University. The Regents wish it to govern in all housing facilities offered to students by private owners.” Id.; University Regents Take Proper Stand, Minneapolis Spokesman Editorial, 16 December 1960, Box 24, Folder 1.8.200.1 Housing Discrimination General 1960-69, Dean of Students, 00000994 University Archives, University of Minnesota.

the obvious will be on record.” Ford’s letter stated “the Board of Regents has never taken any action excluding negroes from housing facilities controlled by it.”<sup>154</sup> In a cover note accompanying a copy of this letter, the director of Enterprises and Facilities emphasized that Ford “indicates the policy that should be followed relative to the admission of negroes to the University dormitories.”<sup>155</sup>

Three weeks after Ford’s letter, an African American woman student tried to gain admittance to one of the University’s “cooperative cottages,” one of the University-run housing options. The white women students in the eight cottages took a vote and voted 60-44 against admitting the Black student. The *Daily* asked Ford “for a clarification of the administration’s policy as to whether or not Negroes are permitted to room in University-controlled houses and dormitories.” President Ford replied on January 31, 1938, noting in his response that “There is a place for consecrated intolerance of men’s ignorance and moral wantonness for they are curable by men’s own wills. There is no place for intolerance based on the things about them that they cannot change by any act of their own.” Ford also noted that the vote by the women students in the cottages might incorrectly be interpreted by interested parties and the public as a statement of or reflection of University policy. He provided the *Daily* with a copy of what “the university files show to be the only statement on the matter”—the letter to Middlebrook. The *Daily* published Ford’s letter to Middlebrook along with Ford’s letter to the editor in its February 1, 1938 edition.<sup>156</sup>

Ford’s action earned him praise from the *Minnesota Spokesman* in its February 4, 1938 issue, which stated that it “brings to a satisfactory solution a problem that long has vexed University authorities and been the source of much bitter embarrassment for Negro students of this institution.”<sup>157</sup> Noting President Ford’s comments about there being no place for intolerance based on things about people that they cannot change, the *Spokesman* added:

The dean [Guy Stanton Ford] might have said that the attitude of many of these young white women who voted to bar colored girls from opportunities offered by this tax supported institution, has its base in some equally prejudiced minds of higher University officials who have encouraged them to believe they belong to some specially endowed group, instead of declaring with final emphasis that the University and all it has to offer is the common possession of all Minnesota people without regard to color or creed and those not satisfied with this fact are privileged to go elsewhere.

Many students, however, express a very different attitude and cordially welcome any minority group into fullest fellowship and opportunity.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> To Middlebrook from Guy Stanton Ford, 20 December 1937. Folder ODS: Negro, 1938-41, Dean of Students, Box 10, University Archives, University of Minnesota. The letter was published in the *Minnesota Daily*, February 1, 1938: 1, 4, and in *The Minneapolis Spokesman*, February 4, 1938, p. 6. The latter is reproduced in “A Campus Divided.”

<sup>155</sup> J.C. Poucher to Leora Cassidy and C.C. Plank, December 30, 1937, Dean of Students records, folder ODS: Negro, 1939-41, Box 10 of 32-0000-0994, University Archives.

<sup>156</sup> “U. Policy Permits Negroes to Use Housing Units”, *Minnesota Daily*, February 1, 1938: 1, 4.

<sup>157</sup> “Negroes May Utilize Housing and Dormitory Facilities of the University,” *Minnesota Spokesman*, February 4, 1938, page 2.

<sup>158</sup> “Negroes May Utilize Housing and Dormitory Facilities of the University,” *Minnesota Spokesman*, February 4, 1938, page 2.

Ford does not expressly indicate why he chose to provide a copy of his December 20, 1937 letter to Middlebrook to the *Minnesota Daily* or whether he specifically saw Middlebrook as integral to facilitating the University's racially exclusionary housing. However, this may be, it is striking that Ford elected to publicize University policy in this way. A president would have a number of other means of signaling a change in policy—for example, he could have submitted a letter to the *Minnesota Daily* that was directed toward the paper's editors or toward the general reader. Instead, Ford chose to take the unusual step to submit to a newspaper a letter written to Middlebrook to announce his change in strategy.

The fact that the situation in the cooperative cottages occurred after Ford's December 1937 letter to Middlebrook may indicate that other University officials had not been made aware of the University's new stance. Indeed, in a January 31, 1938 letter to Dean of Women Anne Blitz--the same date as his letter to the *Minnesota Daily*--Ford expresses his dismay over both the outcome and the method of handling the situation and notes that regardless of the views of the occupants of the cottages, University policy of non-discrimination must be followed. With the letter to Blitz, Ford enclosed a copy of the letter he had earlier sent to Middlebrook.

After the shift in policy by President Ford, we saw no evidence in the archival record that Middlebrook sought to avoid implementing Ford's directive published in the *Minnesota Daily*. Indeed, Middlebrook understood the importance and value of access to campus housing. In January 1940, as part of his long-term mission to build more housing on campus, Middlebrook wrote to President Guy Stanton Ford with data demonstrating that students living in dormitories outperformed all other students.<sup>159</sup> This awareness makes his moves that facilitated exclusionary housing policy all the more problematic.

### **Middlebrook and student housing at Minnesota during the presidency of Walter Coffey**

Middlebrook continued to serve as comptroller during the presidency of Walter Coffey. During this period, he was an individual of substantial authority and influence. Indeed, a 1957 memorandum on the "Governing of the University of Minnesota" characterized Middlebrook as the "effective head of the institution" from 1939 to 1944.<sup>160</sup> This period included President Coffey's attempt to segregate student housing through the opening of the International House in 1942.

At the beginning of Coffey's presidency, Middlebrook wrote to several college presidents inquiring about their policies in regard to housing white and non-white students together. He noted, "At Minnesota it has not been our practice to do so and up until the present time the problem has been avoided."<sup>161</sup> This statement is striking coming four years after Acting President Ford had publicly communicated to Middlebrook that "our classrooms are freely open to any qualified students" and that "the same policy applies to our facilities." That Middlebrook spoke in these terms about how the University avoided "the problem" may suggest at least one

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<sup>159</sup> W.T. Middlebrook to Guy Stanton Ford, January 22, 1940, folder "Housing. Southeast Mpls Problem, 1937-43," box 112, President's Office, University Archives.

<sup>160</sup> University of Minnesota (1957). "Memorandum on the Governing of the University of Minnesota: A Preliminary Report. University of Minnesota." Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/126923>, page 29.

<sup>161</sup> Middlebrook to W.H. Cobb et al, 26 September 1941. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 54. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

reason why President Ford chose to provide his letter to Middlebrook about nondiscriminatory housing to the *Minnesota Daily*.

Of the seven universities Middlebrook contacted in 1941, five had by that point taken steps to integrate their housing facilities (University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, Ohio State University, University of Illinois, and the University of Colorado).<sup>162</sup> There were exceptions. The State University of Iowa excluded Blacks from dorms.<sup>163</sup> At the University of Nebraska, the “caucasian race” occupied the dorms and the university would consider constructing or providing a separate building in the future for students of color.<sup>164</sup> The University of Colorado allowed any woman into the dorms, yet also relied partly upon their “Cosmopolitan club opening international houses to provide for minority groups of men and women”.<sup>165</sup> Overall, however, universities had moved to integrate their campus housing, showing Middlebrook and President Coffey that their actions were not aligning with peer institutions and practices.

Even with this information in hand, Comptroller Middlebrook and President Coffey did not embark on a path to encourage integration at the University. Instead, they pursued the option of creating an International House. Section IV.4 of this report, on President Walter Coffey, shows the International House, seen as a potential place to house African-American male students, was the president’s initiative. Middlebrook aided Coffey in these efforts. He conducted the interviews in 1942 that determined that whites and Japanese Americans were staying at International House without permission. Along with Director Vernes Mohns, Middlebrook required all the non-Black students to leave. This action made clear that the “International House” had been an attempt to create segregated housing for Black students.<sup>166</sup>

### Developing the campus and the establishment of the West Bank campus

Space and facilities were Middlebrook’s two constant concerns at Minnesota, from the moment he arrived in 1925 to the end of his career, when state legislators asked his office to undertake a major study of the University’s building needs in the years ahead, up to 1970. Indeed, over his long career he had gained enough expertise in this area to publish a book on the subject, *How to Estimate the Building Needs of a College or University* (1958). In this work, he observed that “there is a dire need for additional University-owned

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<sup>162</sup> “Negro Students”, Administration. Alphabetical. President's Office. Negro, 1939-1942, Box 20, Folder 21, page 58, UMedia Archive, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>163</sup> From W.H. Cobb University of Iowa To W.T. Middlebrook et al., Administration. Alphabetical. President's Office. Negro, 1939-1942, Box 20, Folder 21, page 58, UMedia Archive, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>164</sup> From W.H. L.E. Gunderson University of Nebraska To W.T. Middlebrook, Administration. Alphabetical. President's Office. Negro, 1939-1942, Box 20, Folder 21, page 62, UMedia Archive, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>165</sup> “Negro Students”, Administration. Alphabetical. President's Office. Negro, 1939-1942, Box 20, Folder 21, page 58, UMedia Archive, University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>166</sup> Mark Soderstrom, “Weeds in Linnaeus’s Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900-45,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004, 276; Vernes Mohns, “Statement of Facts Pertaining to Rooming House at 623 Washington S.E.,” 14 April 1942. Negro 1939-1941. Office of the Dean of Students (Box 10). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries; and Willey to Coffey, “Statement on the Negro housing problem for the Board of Regents meeting,” memo, 29 June 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

housing facilities on the Minneapolis and St. Paul campuses. The tremendous increases in enrollments that will take place in a few years will make the problem even more acute.”<sup>167</sup> From its founding, the University had been entirely east of the Mississippi River, and it was Middlebrook who realized that the building of a Washington Avenue bridge would make land across the river available to the University.

Middlebrook successfully presented this plan to the state legislature, and in 1958 the University began purchasing about seven and one-half square blocks (17 acres) of land to form the core of the new campus on the west bank of the Mississippi River.<sup>168</sup> The West Bank campus would ultimately become the location of Middlebrook Hall, the dormitory that was dedicated to Middlebrook in 1966, before it was constructed, at the request of the Committee on University Honors and on the recommendation of the president. As a coeducational facility housing undergraduate and graduate students, one that was built with the stated intention of socializing students in a multicultural, multiracial environment, it might well have been viewed as a fitting tribute to Middlebrook’s “open door policy.”<sup>169</sup> The University today benefits significantly from the campus expansion that Middlebrook’s plan enabled.

The historical record also reveals that Middlebrook’s signature project for expanding University space and access was a subject of political contestation. As University of Minnesota doctoral student Ellen Manovich shows in her 2016 dissertation, the area we now know as the West Bank campus and Cedar Riverside was once a densely populated part of Minneapolis’s Sixth Ward, an area characterized by “older housing and low-income, transient, non-white residents.”<sup>170</sup> As the original European immigrant population moved away from the center of the city, Manovich explains, city planners grew concerned about the “newer, poorer migrants, including more African Americans” who moved into the area.<sup>171</sup> In the face of these common demographic shifts in the mid-twentieth century, planners and universities in a number of cities often collaborated in a response that they called “urban renewal” or “urban redevelopment.” The Twin Cities joined many cities around the country in pursuing the “renewal” path. Such redevelopment dislocated white working-class and non-white communities to make space for institutions like universities, middle-class housing, and parkways and highways to facilitate transportation between suburbs and cities. Manovich finds that “residents actively protested the University of Minnesota’s location of its West Bank campus in their neighborhood.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> William T. Middlebrook, *How to Estimate the Building Needs of a College or University: A Demonstration of Methods Developed at the University of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 81.

<sup>168</sup> University of Minnesota. (1958). *Biennial Report of the President and of the Board of Regents, 1956 - 1958*. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/91594>, page xii.

<sup>169</sup> “Middlebrook Hall: Combining Contemporary Concepts of Architecture and Student Living,” *University of Minnesota Alumni News* 69:3 (November 1969): 10-13.

<sup>170</sup> Ellen Manovich, “Is This a Real Neighborhood?”: Universities, Urban Development, and Neighborhood Change in the Twentieth Century United States.” Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 2016. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/181774>, page 198.

<sup>171</sup> Manovich, 79.

<sup>172</sup> Manovich, 80-83.



## The University and race and fair housing in the Twin Cities

The issue of student housing cannot be isolated from the larger issue of race and fair housing in the Twin Cities. In 1959, at a time when a movement for equal access to housing was powerful in the United States and Minnesota, and when the University was under significant pressure to discontinue the Housing Bureau's listings of properties not available to African-American, Jewish, or international students—the Board of Regents would mandate this policy change the following year—the University sold a 38-acre parcel of land in South Minneapolis. The land had been donated to the University in the 1920s by William Henry Eustis.<sup>173</sup> On January 12 1959, three local NAACP leaders (the heads of the state, St. Paul, and Minneapolis branches) sent a telegram to Vice President Middlebrook and Regent Ray Quinlivan to ask that he insert a covenant in the sales contract that “would prevent discrimination in the resale or use of the Eustis property because of race, color, creed or national origin of the prospective users.”<sup>174</sup> They noted that the University had declined to include such provisions in a previous land sale to a developer. The result was that when the homes on that land went up for sale, “One of the first prospective buyers was a Negro member of the University faculty who was rejected because of race. (We) strongly feel [that the] University has [the] responsibility to exercise community leadership in [the] movement to end discrimination in housing.”<sup>175</sup>

Writing in response to NAACP leaders in a letter dated January 13, 1959, Middlebrook refused to place the requested covenant on the sale, stating that Eustis had given the University the tract of land “for the location of a rest home for crippled children.” Middlebrook went on to explain that medical developments had since “indicated the desirability of home post-operative care” and so the University had obtained the leave of court to sell the land and use the proceeds “to care for more crippled children.” Once the Regents had secured a real estate agent to handle the listing, he continued, “the University, of course, did not designate any particular purpose for which the land was to be used.” To this, Middlebrook added: “I trust that the officers of the NAACP are aware of the sincere anti-discrimination policies and endeavors of the University in the use and management of its own facilities and the desire of the University to meet its responsibilities to the public in this regard.” But he suggested the University's hands were tied when it came to the request for the insertion of a non-discriminatory covenant: “In the judgment of our real estate representatives and in our own judgment, the introduction of any restrictive clause would adversely affect the salability and even sale price. To the extent that it did it would, in our judgment, be contrary to the trust responsibilities placed on the University by Mr. Eustis for it would limit University ability to care for crippled children of the state.” Accordingly, Middlebrook concluded “[t]he University may not, in light of its responsibilities, accede to your request.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> From Middlebrook To Reverend Densil Carty Chairman Minnesota Conference NAACP, 13 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>174</sup> From Reverend Densil Carty (Chairman Minnesota Conference NAACP Leonard Carter President to University of Minnesota, 12 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota

<sup>175</sup> From Reverend Densil Carty (Chairman Minnesota Conference NAACP Leonard Carter President to University of Minnesota, 12 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota

<sup>176</sup> From Middlebrook To Reverend Densil Carty Chairman Minnesota Conference NAACP, 13 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

In further correspondence on January 16, 1959, the NAACP leaders declared that Middlebrook's claim that a non-discrimination covenant might lower the sales value of the land was a "myth originated and promulgated by bigots to frighten people into opposing equal opportunity in housing."<sup>177</sup> In fact, they argued, "Land values drop only where panic selling is promulgated by the unscrupulous in order to make a quick profit by playing on people's fears." (This process, called "blockbusting," is well known in studies of housing and race in America.<sup>178</sup>) Were Middlebrook to consult with members of the University's sociology department, "you will be advised that your stated position is untenable," they pointedly informed him, underscoring its objectionable nature: "Instead of using the moral influence of the University of Minnesota to contribute to the real purpose toward equal opportunity for housing in our city and state, you participate in the perpetuation of this false and vicious myth. This in our opinion is inexcusable and unworthy of your position and the institution you represent."<sup>179</sup> In a separate letter the same day, NAACP leaders suggested that the successful bidder on the Eustis tract might be amenable to entering a voluntary arrangement with the University to add "a covenant eliminating discrimination in its sale or use," submitting this would be "a significant mile stone on the road to equal opportunity for housing," for in so doing the University "would exhibit moral leadership worthy of its great position in the community." They added that the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority had already adopted this practice with respect to land used by both government and private individuals.<sup>180</sup>

In a letter dated January 23, 1959, Middlebrook reasserted that the University could not have inserted the requested covenant before placing the property on the market and further indicated that the bidding process had concluded on January 15, 1959, the sale was now final, and encumbrances could no longer be placed on the land.<sup>181</sup> The Board of Regents, at its February 13, 1959 meeting, "voted to affirm the position that such inclusion would be prejudicial to the trust responsibilities of the Regents."<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> From Denzil Carty, Leonard Carter, and Douglas Hall To Middlebrook, 16 January 1959, responding to refusal of inserting a covenant, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>178</sup> Amine Ouazad, "Blockbusting: Brokers and the Dynamics of Segregation," *Journal of Economic Theory* 157 (May 2015): 811–841; Amada Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

<sup>179</sup> From Denzil Carty, Leonard Carter, and Douglas Hall To Middlebrook, 16 January 1959, responding to refusal of inserting a covenant, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>180</sup> From Denzil Carty, Leonard Carter, and Douglas Hall To W. T. Middlebrook and Marvin H. Anderson, 16 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>181</sup> From Middlebrook To Reverend Denzil Carty, Leonard Carter, and Douglas Hall, 23 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota. Iric Nathanson writes about this incident in "Another Troubling Piece of the U's History: Rejecting Fair-Housing Protections for a South Minneapolis Neighborhood in the 1950s," minnpost.com, October 6, 2017, at [www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/10/another-troubling-piece-us-history-rejecting-fair-housing-protections-south](http://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/10/another-troubling-piece-us-history-rejecting-fair-housing-protections-south).

<sup>182</sup> From W.T. Middlebrook to T.L. O'Hearn, 27 February 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota.

## Arguments for and against Removing Middlebrook's Name from Middlebrook Hall

Over the course of a long career, William Middlebrook did much to open the doors of the University of Minnesota to an expanding student population. The 1957 memo on University governance mentioned above stated that “the Vice President for Business Administration, Mr. Middlebrook, is considered by most members of the faculty at the University as the key figure in the decision-making process,” that he was the “effective head of the institution” from 1939 to 1944, and that even after that, “any examination of the governing process at the University of Minnesota will indicate that he significantly influences most decisions made by the president and the board.”<sup>183</sup> The alumni publication, *Gopher Grad*, concurred, noting in a 1958 article on Middlebrook's retirement that “he nudged the University toward its greatest potential capacities” and that he was “one of the most influential men on campus.”<sup>184</sup> *Gopher Grad* also noted that his “33-year economic policy was never designed to exclude a single student.”<sup>185</sup> David Berg, who had a long career in central administration, recalled that Middlebrook was the dominant force in University administration. “Middlebrook ran the university until he quit, until he was gone. In my experience, he was more powerful than the presidents he served.”<sup>186</sup> The question we seek to address in the following sections is whether actions taken by Middlebrook as a University administrator justify the removal of his name from Middlebrook Hall.

### Arguments for removing Middlebrook's name

#### *Middlebrook's deeds and actions*

1. As comptroller and vice president for business, William Middlebrook was a man of action and financial management, not a man who made prominent pronouncements on policy. For this reason, in evaluating his record, one should examine his words less than the administrative actions he took and the way that he used finances to include or exclude people. Middlebrook's administrative decisions and actions and his use of finances worked over several decades to exclude students of color from University housing. Middlebrook employed his administrative power on behalf of racial and ethnic exclusion and segregation at a time when voices on campus, in the state, and nationwide called for inclusion, desegregation, and justice.

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<sup>183</sup> University of Minnesota (1957). “Memorandum on the Governing of the University of Minnesota: A Preliminary Report. University of Minnesota.” Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/126923>, page 29.

<sup>184</sup> Juanita Pacifico Opstein, “William T. Middlebrook to Retire; ‘Open Door’ Policy to Remain,” *Gopher Grad*, Vol 58, no. 2 (November 1958), 4.

<sup>185</sup> Juanita Pacifico Opstein, “William T. Middlebrook to Retire; ‘Open Door’ Policy to Remain,” *Gopher Grad*, Vol 58, no. 2 (November 1958), 4.

<sup>186</sup> Clarke A. Chambers, “Interview with David Berg,” November 7-8, 1994. Transcript in Digital Conservancy. <https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/48989/bergDavid.pdf?sequence=1>, page 15. Also see Stanford Lehmborg and Ann M. Pflaum, *The University of Minnesota 1945-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 39-40.

2. In 1933, when Middlebrook recommended over a dean's objections that nursing student Ahwna Fiti be excluded from the new Nurses' Home, he took a lead role in excluding this Black student from University housing and using University funds to do so. This example shows that there were on-campus leaders expressing a more inclusionary viewpoint, toward which Middlebrook, an influential campus leader, could have lent his support. Taken along with other correspondence with President Coffman, this episode suggests Middlebrook worked to provide arguments that gave the University cover to pursue housing practices that were the subject of protests locally and from national organizations.<sup>187</sup>
3. The provision of student housing on campus is one of the accomplishments Middlebrook is most remembered for, and this is one reason a dormitory was named after him. By working to exclude students of color from dormitories, Middlebrook was working to deny them what he himself deemed to be educationally valuable, notably when he wrote to President Ford with an analysis showing that students in campus housing outperformed other students academically. His actions facilitating the exclusion of students of color from University housing excluded them from something he valued very highly and touted as important to educational success.
4. In 1959, fair housing was one of the most important issues in the civil rights movement in the North and protests were growing about the University's Housing Bureau including listings from landlords who discriminated by race and national origin. This issue and these protests occurred in a period that saw concerted efforts to promote and codify fair employment and housing practices both locally and nationally. While the U.S. Supreme Court had declared racial covenants unenforceable (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948), covenants remained in use in many parts of the nation until the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act in 1968. By the 1940s, organizations like the NAACP were actively campaigning against such practices and working to secure legislative reforms. In 1955, the city of Minneapolis combined two recently-developed agencies to create the Fair Employment Practices Commission, which would gain enforcement powers several years later and extend its authority into housing and also education, public services, and public accommodations. The Minnesota State Legislature prohibited use of racial restrictions in warranty deeds in 1953 and enacted a Fair Employment Practices Act in 1955, which was followed by a Fair Housing Act in 1961, and a comprehensive Human Rights Act in 1967.<sup>188</sup> Amidst this shifting national and state tide, Middlebrook refused to include a non-discrimination covenant in the sale of the Eustis property despite the urging of NAACP leaders.<sup>189</sup> Middlebrook's response to the NAACP provided no evidence to support his assertions regarding salability of the property if it contained a non-discrimination covenant, despite being challenged on that point in the NAACP's letters. The letters from the NAACP pointedly suggested that Middlebrook could consult with faculty in the University's Department of Sociology to learn whether non-discrimination covenants actually affected sales adversely. In the

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<sup>187</sup> Soderstrom "Weeds in Linnaeus's Garden," 266-67.

<sup>188</sup> "An act relating to restrictive covenants in any written instrument affecting real estate," chapter 480 H. F. No. 210, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1953/0/Session+Law/Chapter/480/pdf/>.

<sup>189</sup> From Middlebrook To Reverend Denzil Carty. Leonard Carter, and Douglas Hall, 23 January 1959, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota

language of the NAACP leaders, Middlebrook exercised his authority in such a way that the University did not “exhibit moral leadership worthy of its great position in the community.”<sup>190</sup>

5. With power comes responsibility, and Middlebrook did not use his power to ensure equal access to University housing for students of color. As noted above, contemporaries considered him a powerful and independent force on campus, with a 1957 memo on University governance making that point explicitly. Given Middlebrook’s power, it is not plausible to suggest that he was merely following the orders of the University’s presidents, especially from the 1940s to the end of his term of service to the University. As vice president for business affairs, he supervised University Services, which ran University housing.<sup>191</sup> If, as his obituary in the University Senate minutes concludes, William Middlebrook will be remembered as one of the “Builders of the Name” of the University, that memory of him must entail an accounting of his role in excluding students from University accommodations. If students of color could gain admission to the University but could not obtain adequate housing on or near campus, they did not enjoy equal access to a University education. When Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook worked to support and implement discriminatory housing policies and practices, he played a role in denying students equal educational opportunities.
6. During the period Middlebrook served as comptroller and vice president for business administration, the University’s rationale for its housing policy was opposed by local and national civil rights organizations as well as students on campus, and a number of peer institutions were moving in the direction of integration. In this time and place, Middlebrook took a side: along with other University officials he interpreted the University’s housing practices to be in conformity with *Plessy*--a decision then strenuously contested on the local and national levels--even though within the University administration there was doubt about whether the campus housing policy was in conformity with *Plessy*, as the handwritten note scrawled on the Ohio State memorandum indicated. He operated as an administrator to first exclude and then segregate Black students who sought to live on or near campus.

#### *University values*

7. Apart from the question of whether the University housing policy furthered by Middlebrook can be said to have met the requirements set out in *Plessy* and its progeny, his efforts to formulate, implement, and justify racial segregation in the provision of housing was not in tune with the spirit of Minnesota law, nor with the visions of racial equality as they were articulated by a substantial number of students and faculty on campus at the time. Middlebrook was accorded and exercised discretion, and in part he used that discretion to sustain racially discriminatory housing policies on the University’s campus during the period he served in the capacity of comptroller and vice president for business administration. These actions undermined the “diversity of community and ideas” that

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<sup>190</sup> From Denzil Carty, Leonard Carter, and Douglas Hall to Middlebrook, 16 January 1959, On the construction company, Box 15, Folder Minn Hospital, 838 Regents Supplements, University Archives, University of Minnesota

<sup>191</sup> University of Minnesota (1957). “Memorandum on the Governing of the University of Minnesota: A Preliminary Report. University of Minnesota.” Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/126923>, pages 10-11.

is among the University of Minnesota’s core values and the statement in the Regents standards of conduct that “The University is committed to tolerance, diversity, and respect for differences.”

8. Middlebrook’s actions do not conform to the University’s mission statement as it currently stands, in particular the expressed commitment to provide “an atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance.” This is a value to which the administration and university employees are bound by Regent policy. The Minnesota Student Association resolution with its large set of co-sponsoring organizations explicitly references this text from the mission statement, suggesting that this is a value broadly shared by students.
9. Middlebrook did not act in accordance with “the standards of his time.” The requirements of law and morality were contested during his years as an administrator with respect to campus housing policies, which reflected and contributed to an intensifying struggle for civil rights both within and beyond the state of Minnesota. Some people favored integrated student housing and considered it important to educational access and human dignity. Others favored whites-only housing at the University. Nonetheless the law set a standard of separate *but equal* facilities, which administrators recognized might not be true of the housing provisions during the years Middlebrook served the University. Opting to evade these legal problems, Middlebrook looked into purchasing a “rooming house” in which to place African-American students. That is to say, during his tenure he made the choice for segregation in the face of opposition from students and stakeholders in the state at large, a choice directly contravening University values today and the values expressed by many individuals during his time.
10. Removing Middlebrook’s name will signal the University’s commitment to its land-grant mission. This mission rests on serving the state’s residents, as well as on taking on and wrestling with the major challenges facing the state and the region. Racial inequality and the prevalence of racial disparities are major issues of concern. Removing Middlebrook’s name will demonstrate that the University is taking account of how its own practices have contributed to these local and regional disparities. Further, it will continue the process of encouraging the University to determine how it should be using its resources and institutional strength to make the University and state more equitable places.

#### *University climate*

11. Removing Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook’s name will allow the University to recommit itself to the values of fairness and respect in a University that prides itself on its diversity of community and ideas. It will support the University’s efforts to make the campus a more diverse, inclusive, fair, just, and welcoming place. Moreover, changing the name is consistent with our current Campus Climate Initiatives.<sup>192</sup>
12. Across the nation, universities and colleges are engaged in critical conversations about how racism played a role in building their institutions. The University of Minnesota is poised to be a leader in the region on these issues. The only way to become such a leader is for the University to excavate its own past and use what it has learned to build a more equitable institution, one that remembers the

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<sup>192</sup> <https://campus-climate.umn.edu/about>

names of the students and faculty and community members who fought for equality on its campuses while holding itself accountable for those leaders who effectively excluded students on the basis of their race, religion, or political affiliation.

#### *Resources*

13. Many of the public comments objecting to the renaming of buildings specifically cite the waste of resources in such an effort. The Task Force has heard from representatives of the campus facilities/buildings and grounds staff, and are assured that the removal of a building name and/or renaming Middlebrook Hall would not be burdensome or an expensive process. Indeed, buildings on this campus have been renamed in the past (for example, from a general name indicating the function of the building to the name of a person), and the use of digital maps will mitigate much of the potential confusion.
14. Public comments also reference the “time and expense” of assembling the Task Force making these recommendations. Certainly, significant time and effort were dedicated to this process, but these were by faculty, staff, and students who chose to devote their time and effort to this work. With the exception of a graduate student research assistant hired to assist the Task Force, no additional compensation was received by Task Force members or supporting staff.

#### *Educational merit*

15. There is educational merit in impressing upon students, and the University community more broadly, that individuals, particularly leaders with great power such as William Middlebrook, are responsible for their own decisions. In the context of large and complex institutions such as the University, individuals must still make choices in accordance with principles and be held accountable for their consequences.

#### *Public perception and politics*

16. Renaming would be viewed favorably by a significant segment of our campus community (students, staff, faculty) as being responsive to the argument that a building naming is one of the University’s highest honors. Middlebrook was not merely a capable administrator with a long history at the University. While such a career would be laudable, it would not tend to earn oneself the honor of a building naming. Middlebrook Hall being named after Middlebrook was a reflection of the large impact of his work in expanding the campus and his influence in guiding the University through wars, economic crisis, and enrollment troughs and spikes. Middlebrook was in a position, and had the campus influence and reputation, to challenge racial exclusion. Particularly in a campus dormitory that houses students from diverse backgrounds, renaming would be seen as a positive action to signal the campus community’s commitment to being more welcoming and inclusive.

### **Arguments against removing Middlebrook’s name**

#### *Middlebrook’s deeds and actions*

1. William Middlebrook served the University for decades, helping the University to grow and to thrive. Students, faculty, and staff continue to benefit from the significant expansion of the campus and its facilities that took place under his management as comptroller and as vice president for business administration. He is remembered for his dedication to building an institution with an “open door” that would meet the needs of an expanding student population, faculty, and staff. That “open door”

was understood to make the University available to students of limited financial means and returning veterans from World War II. Removal of his name from Middlebrook Hall might reduce public awareness of this significant legacy.

2. Middlebrook's efforts to exclude African Americans from University housing in the 1930s, although unacceptable today and to those who raised objections at the time, were not out of step with the practices and policies of administrations at Minnesota's peer institutions during the 1930s. Similar practices of exclusion have been documented across Midwestern flagship universities, and it is expected that Middlebrook would have been in communication with those administrations about their practices.

#### *University values*

3. Middlebrook, through the open-door policy, worked to keep education as affordable as possible to give students access to the opportunities that higher education provided. Expanding housing was a great focus of Middlebrook's efforts, reflecting his priority to preserve access to higher education as a means for men and women to achieve "personal development," "vocational achievement," and "public service."<sup>193</sup> As Middlebrook said in 1953 in an address to the Central Association of University and College Business Officers, "We must not forget that we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to the 'raw material' of higher education—students. Ours is not the task of teaching them, but we can aid in attracting them through loans, scholarships and work opportunities and we can help to keep them stimulated and contented with pleasant and reasonable living, eating and social conditions."<sup>194</sup>
4. Middlebrook showed a dedication to academic excellence through supporting higher faculty salaries and sabbatical leaves, both of which help recruit and retain top faculty, as did the development of the University Grove neighborhood with faculty housing. He also worked to enhance the provision of important employee benefits, including retirement and life insurance.

#### *Resources*

5. Resources expended in the renaming process, including the time spent to investigate the actions of specific individuals, could be more effectively directed toward the highest University priorities, toward support for students of color and students in financial need, and toward expanding our awareness of our institutional history, rather than time-consuming debates over building names.

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<sup>193</sup> Opstein, 10.

<sup>194</sup> William T. Middlebrook, "Janus, God of Gates and Doors," p. 5. University of Minnesota News Service. (1953). Press Releases, April - August 1953. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/51311>.



### *Educational merit*

6. Student respondents to the public comments portal who oppose renaming assert that our efforts would be better directed into education about the troubling history of discrimination, exclusion, and segregation.
7. Renaming a building focuses attention on individuals rather than institutions, and while individual decisions play an important role in discrimination and racism, institutional practices and structures play an equally or even more important role. Taking the name off a building focuses on the individual rather than the institution.
8. Some would argue that once the name of a controversial figure is removed from the prominent location of a building name, we risk erasing history and losing the pedagogical gains of discussing and evaluating and confronting historical figures in all their complexity.

### *Public perception and politics*

9. Actions of this type may alienate portions of the public. To some, efforts to remove names, artwork, statues, or other significant structures will be seen as part of an ideological or political agenda.

## Deliberation and Recommendations

The Task Force recommends removing Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook's name from Middlebrook Hall. In addition, whether or not the name is removed from the building, we recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about William Middlebrook's complicated legacy.

Our recommendation to remove William Middlebrook's name from Middlebrook Hall is guided by consideration of the arguments for and against removing the name as well as the five guiding principles—Change, Diversity, Preservation, Exceptionality, Deliberation—established by the Coleman Committee. The full text of these principles appears in section III.2 of this report.

### Change

We are living in a moment when colleges and universities across the country are examining their histories. The “A Campus Divided” exhibit captures several critical histories chronicling exclusion, segregation, and antisemitism at the University of Minnesota. This exhibit began to reshape our understanding of campus history, and the extensive historical analysis of the Task Force has continued that work with regard to the role of William Middlebrook in the history of housing discrimination on the campus. The Coleman Committee report underscores the fact that institutions such as the University of Minnesota continually undergo change and, most importantly, that “our own understanding and interpretation of campus history can also change over time.” In fact, change does not necessarily mean that the history, culture, values, and traditions must be lost. In this case, our research leads us to conclude that removal of the name from Middlebrook Hall is a change that we believe preserves core University values. Middlebrook's efforts to build up the University, with particular and notable success in the area of housing, are indelibly marred by the fact that he also used his authority and discretion to exclude African Americans from University housing or, if necessary, to create segregated facilities. As the Coleman Committee report suggests, in order to adhere to our core values today, especially with regard to fairness, respect, and the service mission of a land-grant institution, changes are sometimes needed to preserve those values.

## Diversity

Promoting a “diversity of community and ideas” is another core value of the University of Minnesota. As stated in the Coleman Committee report, “Throughout the history of the University of Minnesota, substantial and positive contributions have been made by many unique individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, as befits a public, land grant university, the diversity of Minnesotans should be a prominent consideration in the process of naming and renaming buildings and significant University assets.” In the process of examining Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook’s actions, the Task Force has been introduced to a new set of historical change makers who demanded the University serve all state residents on an equal basis. Middlebrook supported policies that undermined the diversity of the University and made it a less hospitable place for students of color. As comptroller in the 1930s, William Middlebrook actively developed methods of excluding African-American students from dormitories. For decades to come, students of color as well as ethnic and religious minorities continued to face discrimination in University housing and also (with University knowledge and approval) in private housing that was on the University’s approved list for student rentals. During the course of our Task Force work, we heard accounts that this history discouraged many African-American families from sending their students to the University of Minnesota, thus setting back progress on diversifying the University and on sharing the University’s transformative opportunities with a diverse population. Given his authority, William Middlebrook must be considered as having responsibility for these forms of discrimination. In discussing the principle of diversity, the Coleman Committee report states that “the diversity of Minnesotans should be a prominent consideration in the process of naming and renaming buildings and significant University assets.” Given that Middlebrook’s actions limited or reduced diversity on campus, removing his name from Middlebrook Hall is appropriate as an action that sustains the University’s value of promoting a “diversity of community and ideas.”

## Preservation

The Coleman Committee report states, “[c]hanging the name of a building, space, or university asset does not and should not mean erasure. The process to name or rename or remove a name should be considered part of the pedagogical mission of the University.” As the University of Minnesota examines its history and evaluates the role of Comptroller and Vice President Middlebrook in that history, it is critical that we not lose sight of important factors. Removing Middlebrook’s name will neither erase his efforts or the University’s efforts around exclusionary and segregated student housing, nor will it erase the positive aspects of his legacy. The Coleman Committee report also notes that “it is incumbent upon us today to acknowledge the full, living history that formed this University community.” That acknowledgement serves as the foundation for instructive reflection on our past and its relation to our present. Preserving a name must, then, serve this purpose of acknowledgement and reflection. Yet preserving the name of Middlebrook Hall would be unlikely to encourage such a process of reflection, which (as the Coleman Committee report notes) is part of the pedagogical function of the University. Indeed, the retention of this building name, coupled with the existing ways Middlebrook figures in the University’s own rendering of its history, might be read as a form of selective memory, if not erasure. In contrast, renaming this building creates an opportunity to fulfill this principle, as elaborated in the Coleman Committee report: to “make room in our story for those voices held silent in the shadows of the past and to make certain our future conversations include everyone.” And, as the University learns new things about its institutional history, the University can respond in ways that preserve that fuller and more inclusive history; that encourage critical inquiry about those moments when we have not been true to our mission; and that recognize hidden voices.

## Exceptionality

Removing the name from a building is a serious matter, and the Coleman Committee adopted the University of Michigan's premise that "it is impossible to hold someone accountable for failing to share our contemporary ideas and values. Instead, the question must be what ideas, values, and actions were possible in a particular historical context." And, as the Coleman Committee report notes, Yale University's Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming wrote that "a presumption of continuity in campus names helps ensure that the University does not elide the moral complexity often associated with the lives of those who make outsized impressions on the world." For this reason, "Only in exceptional instances, when the values reflected in the current name are in opposition to the values embraced by the University, should renaming or removing a name take place." In regard to William Middlebrook, there is a significant gap between his actions as a University administrator and our present ideas and values. Middlebrook's actions are inconsistent with our current ideas and values. They were also inconsistent with important strands of thought in his own time. In the historical context of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, multiple "ideas, values, and actions" were available, possible, and discussed on campus, in the Twin Cities, and in Minnesota. Indeed, among students, faculty, and community members, many Minnesotans spoke out for integration and equal access for all people. They often did so in the name of equal rights and accommodations laws that earlier generations of Minnesotans had passed. Thus, more inclusive policies and practices were possible in this historical context and supported by historical example. William Middlebrook held an elevated leadership position with considerable power and discretion in the areas of housing and fiscal matters over a period of decades and he had a productive legacy in many respects and we can and should value these accomplishments. By his contemporaries he was seen as one of the most significant and powerful administrators at the institution, one who held substantial authority and discretion in such matters as finance, housing, and the University's physical growth. Middlebrook's support and facilitation of discriminatory policies and practices is a critical part of his legacy that warrants removing his name from Middlebrook Hall.

## Deliberation

As we stated at greater length in section III.3 on the principle of deliberation, we do not seek to impose our expectations from today arbitrarily on individuals of the past. Today's values should guide what and who we wish to honor with the distinction of a naming. We also recognize that individuals need to be assessed within the context of their own time and what was imaginable and possible then. We must both measure actions against the norms and practices of their day and evaluate in what way the values they stood for might be in conflict with those of our own times. Individuals operate within institutions and systems that impose constraints on actions, but choices are nonetheless still available to individuals, particularly those exercising power and discretion in their administrative roles. Retaining a name on a building does not mean endorsing all of the more objectionable and problematic actions of an individual. Likewise, to remove a name from a building, to change a name, does not mean saying the contributions have no value or are worthy of no recognition. Collectively reckoning with our institutional history provides an occasion for emphasizing that individuals, particularly leaders with significant authority in their roles, are responsible for their own decisions.

The Task Force members have, within the constraints of time and of their charge, conducted thorough research both in the historical archives and in the collection of perspectives on campus values and renaming. In accordance with the principle of deliberation articulated in the Coleman Committee report, this Task Force

has considered the naming and potential renaming of Middlebrook Hall “via a careful, informed, inclusive, and deliberative process.” The Task Force has learned about William Middlebrook’s years of service in building the University. We have also considered the many forces (the law, student organizations, community organizations, and the press) that supported non-discriminatory and equal access to the University, and the ways in which William Middlebrook worked to exclude students of color from University housing. We recognize that our recommendation to remove William Middlebrook’s name from the West Bank campus undergraduate dormitory will not be supported by every constituency, but we believe it is the best course of action.

## IV.4 President Walter Castella Coffey and Coffey Hall

### Introduction

#### Context

Racial inequality pervaded the Minnesota landscape in the mid-twentieth century. Although the Minnesota Legislature was among the first states to enact civil rights legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodations after federal legislation in this area was struck down by the Supreme Court,<sup>195</sup> the first five decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the proliferation of restrictive racial housing covenants throughout the Twin Cities, discriminating against African Americans, Jews, and other minorities, that operated to segregate the Twin Cities. Black students and their allies, however, pushed the state’s preeminent public higher education institution, the University of Minnesota, to recognize African Americans’ rights to equal access to all of the University’s facilities, including campus housing. As racial covenants barred African Americans from communities proximate to the University and confined them to neighborhoods distant from campus, access to campus housing became a pressing educational concern. Equal access to campus housing was synonymous with obtaining an equal educational experience. Only in 1937, after years of student activism, did President Guy Stanton Ford officially declare that the University of Minnesota prohibited housing discrimination against any state resident. The University also operated a housing bureau before and during Coffey’s presidency which enabled and perpetuated the practices of landlords whose rooming houses excluded students of color and Jews.

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<sup>195</sup> In the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883), the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 to be unconstitutional, ruling that the federal government did not have the authority to prohibit discriminatory acts between private individuals, such as a business refusing to serve customers of a particular race. In response, the Minnesota State Legislature adopted an Equal Accommodations Act in 1885 and further expanded the reach of its civil rights laws in 1897, 1899, 1905 and 1943. The 1885 act guaranteed equal public accommodations to “all citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude,” and was amended in 1943 to also prohibit discrimination based upon “national origin or religion.” Act of March 7, 1885, ch. 224, s 1, 1885 Minn.Laws 295, 296; amended by the Act of April 23, 1897, ch. 349, ss 2-3, 1897 Minn.Laws 616; Act of March 6, 1899, ch. 41, s 1, 1899 Minn.Laws 38, 38-39; Minn.Rev.Laws ch. 55 (1905); and Act of April 23, 1943, ch. 579, s 7321, 1943 Minn.Laws 831, 832.

## President Coffey's Actions

In 1941, President Coffey (1941-1945) succeeded Ford, after serving as dean of the Department of Agriculture (1921-1941). Coffey was viewed as a student-oriented leader who extended the reach of the Department of Agriculture across the state and stewarded the University through the war. Coffey's wartime administration also coincided with a critical period of social struggles for civil rights and equal access at the University. President Coffey and his administration shifted course from the democratic vision of the University that students fought for during the 1930s and President Ford officially adopted in 1937. The "A Campus Divided" exhibit and additional archival and published sources reveal the role President Coffey played in establishing segregated housing in 1942. President Coffey and his administration supported policies that attempted to segregate and exclude Blacks, ensuring that the University he presided over was a less equitable institution than the one he inherited from President Ford.

## Recommendations

Built in 1907 and named for Walter Castella Coffey in 1949, Coffey Hall is located on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Based on our review of the legacy of President Coffey, we recommend the removal of Walter Coffey's name from Coffey Hall. We also recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Coffey's complicated legacy. This step, we believe, should be taken whether or not the name is removed from the building. We discuss in section V of this report a series of potential initiatives designed to increase our understanding of our institutional history and to serve and enhance the opportunities for today's students.

## Overview

The aim of this historical review is to better understand whether President Walter Castella Coffey's actions produced or perpetuated systems of racial inequality or other forms of injustice which were fundamentally at odds with University values during his tenure as president and today.

In order to explore these questions, our Task Force sought to educate itself about:

- The history of Walter C. Coffey's presidency and his career at the University of Minnesota, with specific attention to the creation of segregated housing on the Twin Cities campus;
- The societal context within which President Coffey acted – specifically how his actions were received on campus as well as in terms of how other institutions of higher education at the time promoted or challenged segregationist policies and practices;
- The social context and racial attitudes in the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota during Coffey's presidency, particularly with respect to housing practices and segregation;
- The original reasons for creating and naming the building for President Coffey and the changing purposes and significance attached to the building and its namesake over time;

## Discussion and Analysis

What follows is a brief introduction to the way the University of Minnesota currently represents President Coffey and an overview of how the administrative building on the St. Paul campus came to be named Coffey

Hall. Drawing on the “A Campus Divided” exhibit and additional archival and published sources, this report recounts in some detail Coffey’s efforts to segregate campus housing. President Coffey had a long and distinguished career as the dean of the Department of Agriculture for two decades before assuming the office of the presidency. As president of the University of Minnesota, Coffey sometimes spoke euphemistically for racial and religious tolerance, but when it came to clear and explicit statements about the University’s racial policies he tended toward silence. The tensions between Coffey’s democratic language and his actions as president with respect to non-white students—namely, his willingness to set up shadow systems that perpetuated unequal educational access—are powerful examples of how racism evolved at the University of Minnesota during the 1940s.

### **Standard biographical account of the deanship and presidency of Walter Castella Coffey**

Walter Castella Coffey was born on February 1, 1876 in Hartsville, Indiana. He studied at the University of Illinois for his BS (1906) and MS (1909) degrees before taking a position in their Department of Animal Husbandry. Recruited to the University of Minnesota by President Coffman, Coffey served as the dean of the Department of Agriculture (today the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences) from his arrival in 1921 until his transition into the University presidency in 1941.<sup>196</sup> He is credited with the active recruitment of several eminent faculty members to expand the Department of Agriculture’s areas of expertise and improve its competitiveness with other land-grant institutions.<sup>197</sup> As dean, Coffey also spearheaded several state and national agricultural improvement initiatives, including national drought relief efforts during the Great Depression. Coffey deeply believed in the duty of land-grant universities to serve their communities by sharing knowledge and expertise. While serving as dean he greatly expanded the extension and outreach work of the Department of Agriculture. These efforts strengthened the connections between the University and each county within the state, revitalized the Minnesota Experiment Station for agricultural research, and renewed the public’s faith that the University of Minnesota was firmly dedicated to the advancement of the state, the nation, and the world.<sup>198</sup>

Coffey unexpectedly became president of the University in 1941, after the chosen successor to President Guy Stanton Ford declined the position.<sup>199</sup> As president, Coffey reorganized the University’s central administration, splitting the vice presidency into two distinct positions for academic affairs and business operations. Another major accomplishment of Coffey’s presidency was the successful adjustment of the University campuses to the significant changes in enrollment and employment caused by World War II.<sup>200</sup> Due to his successful leadership during the war years, the Board of Regents extended Coffey’s presidency beyond the original term for which he was hired. Coffey retired from the University in 1945 after the

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<sup>196</sup> University of Minnesota: University Senate. (1954). Minutes: University Senate: November 1954 - June 1958. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/54517>.

<sup>197</sup>James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951): 403-404. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/51020>.

<sup>198</sup>James Gray, *The University of Minnesota: 1851-1951* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951): 397. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/51020>.

<sup>199</sup> “Coffey is New President” *Minnesota Daily* 21 February 1942: 1, 2.

<sup>200</sup> “Enrollment Drop to Cut ‘U’ Revenue,” *The Minneapolis Star* 13 March 1942: 13.

conclusion of the war. He remained active in the University and Twin Cities communities until his death on January 31, 1956. One of his final contributions was leading the funding drive for a student union on the St. Paul campus.<sup>201</sup>

### Historical overview of Coffey Hall

On November 16, 1949, the St. Paul Campus Administrative Building was dedicated to Walter Coffey. The building was constructed with state funds between 1905 and 1907, and upon its opening for the 1907 fall term housed farming equipment, a library and several auditoriums, and administration of the Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Experiment Station. By 1949, the Agricultural Extension Service was also located in the building, and plans were being made to relocate the agricultural library collection to allow for the employment of the additional administrative staff needed to manage the increased student population on the St. Paul campus. At the dedication ceremony, speakers including both University administrators and rural Minnesotans commended Coffey's actions, behavior, and attitude in his roles as dean and president.<sup>202</sup> Today Coffey Hall houses the St. Paul branch of Boynton Health Service; the administration of the College of Continuing and Professional Studies (CCAPS) and the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS); several CFANS student services offices, including the Offices of Alumni Relations, Diversity and Inclusion, and International Programs; and the dean and administration of the University of Minnesota Extension program.<sup>203</sup>

### President Coffey and the history of housing discrimination and segregation at the University

In 1937, President Guy Stanton Ford reversed President Coffman's policy of exclusion (see section IV.1 on Coffman in this report). President Ford clarified to his administrators and the wider University community that all residents of the state of Minnesota had an equal right to campus housing. What is missing from standard accounts of Coffey's presidency is his efforts to create segregated housing at the University of Minnesota in 1942. President Coffey's actions—his closure and, after pressure from 1200 students who signed petitions and their support from community groups, his eventual reopening of the International House rooming house located at 623 Washington Avenue S.E.—were a retreat from President Ford's nondiscriminatory housing policy. Three months after the closure of the rooming house, public and student pressure forced the Coffey administration to concede that should white students choose to live in the International House at 623 Washington Avenue, University administrators would not prevent the house's integration. Simultaneously, however, the Coffey administration worked to exclude Black men from campus dormitories by actively discouraging them from requesting to live in Pioneer Hall. They did this even as they

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<sup>201</sup> "Bombs Open Drive for 'U' Building," *The Minneapolis Star* 2 March 1954: 26.

<sup>202</sup> Coffey Hall dedication program, November 19, 1949. Coffey Hall. Information Files Collection. University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>203</sup> University of Minnesota campus maps (2019). Retrieved from <http://campusmaps.umn.edu/coffey-hall>.

acknowledged, in internal memos and correspondence, that Black students had an equal right to all University facilities.<sup>204</sup>

President Coffey is frequently heralded for his stewardship of the University through the war years, his patriotic determination to marshal the University's systems to win the war, and his frequent speeches about the University's central role in upholding democracy.<sup>205</sup> However, students and community members saw Coffey's attempts to segregate University housing as a major test of his wartime claims. They asserted that the true test of democracy in a nation at war against Hitler and fascism was best judged by the fair and equal treatment of its own citizens, African Americans included.<sup>206</sup>

President Guy Stanton Ford (1937-1941) served as president during President Coffman's illness, after Coffman's passing, and prior to President Coffey's assumption of the office.<sup>207</sup> In 1937, President Ford effectively opened University housing for Black Minnesotan families and their students. (On-campus housing was for in-state students.) Ford's new commitment to open housing on campus for state residents regardless of race was a significant departure from Coffman's policy. On December 20, 1937, Acting President Ford explained in a letter to Comptroller William T. Middlebrook,

I could not conceive of the responsible officers of this State University supported by all classes taking discriminatory action based on creed or color or political faith. Our classrooms are freely open to any qualified students who conform to the purpose and procedures of an institution of higher learning. The same policy applies to our other facilities. In granting any privileges or opportunities to applicants the Regents and the administration will give precedence, other things being equal, to residents or the children of residents of the state.<sup>208</sup>

This policy shift was shared with the University community through the *Minnesota Daily* on February 1, 1938, in an article titled "U. Policy Permits Negroes to Use Housing Units: Ford Clarifies Dormitory Stand in Letters to the Daily."<sup>209</sup> President Ford was clear that these policy changes were in line with his own personal beliefs,

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<sup>204</sup> Dick Griggs to Coffey, 11 May 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries. Regent Griggs was a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota. In this short letter, Regent Griggs wrote, "It appears to me that if a showdown is forced, we have no choice but to take the position that the negro has equal rights with others, regardless of what embarrassment it may occasion."

<sup>205</sup> Coffey, Walter Castella, 1876-1956. Speeches. War Problems. 1941-1946. Office of the President (Box 477). University Archives. University of Minnesota; Speeches. Colleges and Universities. 1942. Office of the President (Box 477). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>206</sup> See assorted letters in, Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries; and Harold Field, "Letter to the Editor: Opposes Negro Discrimination," *Minnesota Daily* 24 April 1942: 1.

<sup>207</sup> President Coffman took a year's leave of absence from July 1937 through July 1938 due to a heart attack; he died in September 1938.

<sup>208</sup> "U. Policy Permits Negroes to Use Housing Units: Ford Clarifies Dormitory Stand in Letters to the Daily," *Minnesota Daily* February 1, 1938: 1. See also, "All Facilities Open to all Eligible Students," *Minnesota Daily* 4 February 1938: 1.

<sup>209</sup> While President Ford in this letter suggests that he is merely clarifying a policy, review of the available sources finds that it is more accurate to describe his actions as a policy reversal. It is true that the Board of Regents did not have a written discriminatory housing policy that President Ford reversed. Ford's declaration of a nondiscriminatory housing policy was,



but he also maintained that the policy was one that any president of the University should uphold, writing, “[t]his policy and these principles happen to be those I adhere to personally but I should adhere to them as an obligation of the acting president of the University of Minnesota even if I disagreed with them.”<sup>210</sup>

We saw no evidence that President Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy was challenged by the student body, but there is evidence that this policy met with resistance from portions of his administration. When President Ford encountered obstructionists, he restated the University’s policy with respect to open housing.<sup>211</sup> The official policy of the University of Minnesota when President Ford finished his term was that University housing was available to all state residents without regard to “creed or color or political faith.” When scholars from the Carnegie Study of the Negro American reached out to the University of Minnesota about the treatment of African Americans on the campus in April 1940, Assistant to the Dean of Student Affairs Harvey Stenson replied that the University of Minnesota did not discriminate against students in any of its facilities. Rather, he asserted, “The University of Minnesota can be considered a very democratic institution. We do not in any manner discriminate against racial groups in any of our programs. There have been questions arise over a period of years [sic] as to the desirability of having racial distinctions, but these have been ironed out and today a very democratic system prevails.”<sup>212</sup>

There is no record of how many Black students lived on campus during President Ford’s tenure. But the impending closure of the boarding facilities at the Phyllis Wheatley House, a settlement house offering off-campus rooms to Black students attending the University of Minnesota, created new concerns about the possible surge in demand for on-campus housing from Black students. President Ford, in the same letter to Comptroller Middlebrook published in the *Minnesota Daily*, anticipated that a large increase in “colored resident students seeking dormitory privileges” might create new challenges that could possibly “defeat the cooperation and mutual respect we are working to secure.” Still, Ford anticipated that the Board of Regents would be able to deal with it in a way “that obviates the friction and prejudice we want to avoid and ... without the type of discrimination that denies the ideals of both democracy and of the University.”<sup>213</sup> Dean Malcolm Willey, attempting to gauge the impact of the closure, wrote to the Phyllis Wheatley House and learned that three of the thirteen black students living there were Minnesota residents (and therefore

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however, a reversal of “general University policy” as described by Comptroller Middlebrook, who suggested that it was the practice of university administrators to exclude African American students from campus dormitories during the presidencies of Coffman and Coffey. W. Middlebrook to L.D. Coffman, October 10, 1933, Administration. Alphabetical. Negro, 1921-1936. (Box 20, Folder 19), page 63, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archives. It was also the case that Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy was greeted as a policy reversal by Blacks. The banner heading the February 4, 1938 issue of the *Minneapolis Spokesman* proclaimed “Dean Ford Ends ‘U’ Housing Ban.” African Americans experienced President Coffman’s policies as a ban, while President Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy granted Black students access to spaces they were previously barred from.

<sup>210</sup> “U. Policy Permits.”

<sup>211</sup> Guy Stanton Ford to Miss Blitz, 31 January 1938. Negro Students. Dean of Women (Box 1). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>212</sup> Harvey W. Stenson to the Carnegie Study of the Negro American, 23 April 1940. Negro 1939-1941. Office of the Dean of Students (Box 10). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>213</sup> “U. Policy Permits,” 4.

eligible for on-campus housing). It would fall to the Coffey administration to think about how to meet the residential needs of these Black male students.<sup>214</sup>

President Coffey did not hold to the University's now five-year-old nondiscriminatory housing policy when two Black students took up residence in the University's new rooming house in the spring of 1942 (International House, located at 623 Washington Avenue S.E.) Instead, President Coffey and his administration attempted to establish a segregated black rooming house as a solution to the housing needs of Black male students.<sup>215</sup> The Coffey administration's efforts, first, to redefine the rooming house as Black housing, and, later, President Coffey's refusal to clarify the University's position on fair and open housing, were greeted with a series of protests across the University of Minnesota campus and beyond that often noted the contrast between the president's public support for ideals of democracy and the treatment of Black students on campus.<sup>216</sup>

The name "International House" led some members of the University to imagine this new rooming option would bring together people of diverse international and cultural backgrounds under one roof. University administrators, however, viewed it more narrowly as Black student housing. In 1942, International House opened with only two Black residents, far less than the twelve students administrators anticipated.<sup>217</sup> When it was discovered that a white student and three Japanese Americans had moved into the rooming house, effectively integrating the University rooming house, members of the Coffey administration, specifically Director of Pioneer Hall Vernes Mohns and Comptroller William Middlebrook, concluded they had not been authorized to live there and told them to leave (see section IV.3 on Middlebrook in this report). These actions clarified for Black students that International House was not an effort to create a space for students of diverse backgrounds. Rather, it was an attempt to accommodate Black students in a new segregated space. The Black residents moved out and President Coffey closed the rooming house.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Willey memo 16 April 1940. In this memo Willey summarizes his lunch conversation with a member of the Phyllis Wheatley House board. She was "concerned in part about the unfavorable attitude with respect to the University held by many negroes and wanted to learn if possible what factual basis there was for the antagonism." She also explained that the settlement house was about to undergo renovations that would mean the 21 rooms currently available to boarders (paying \$15 per month plus services) would no longer be available to University of Minnesota students.

<sup>215</sup> International House and the rooming house located at 623 Washington Avenue refer to the same location and are used interchangeably throughout this report.

<sup>216</sup> "Statements Issued in Housing Dispute," *Minnesota Daily* 2 April 1942: 1. Central to this dispute was the fact that two students, one Black Garland Kyle and the other white (Russian) David Binevitch, were encouraged by Vernes Mohns, director of Pioneer Hall, to solicit possible residents for the new rooming house on Washington Avenue. According to the *Daily*, Kyle believed the rooming house would be integrated. Director Mohns acknowledged that he met with these two students and encouraged them to find residents to live in the new house. In this article, Mohns is said to have admitted that he originally led the two men to believe the facility would be integrated, stating, "Yes, that arrangement was made at first. But it was not made after the house was redecorated." In this same article, Mohns is quoted as saying the house "'has always been a strictly Negro house.'"

<sup>217</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem for the Board of Regents meeting," memo, 29 June 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>218</sup> Mark Soderstrom, "Weeds in Linnaeus's Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900-45," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004, 276; Vernes Mohns,

It is not obvious why African Americans at the University would reside in an International House. In order to understand how and why University administrators came to see an International House as a residential space for Black students, a brief history of the broader International House movement and the evolution of this idea at the University of Minnesota is helpful.

### **A brief history of the International House at the University of Minnesota**

The International House movement was an effort to create housing and recreational facilities that promoted international tolerance, peace, understanding, and intercultural exchange among diverse, international, and national populations. In 1924, John D. Rockefeller funded the construction of the first International House in New York.<sup>219</sup> As early as 1929, President Coffman was interested in exploring the possibility of building an International House for the growing number of foreign students attending the University of Minnesota.<sup>220</sup> A small committee worked on this issue in 1929-30 and returned to President Coffman with the recommendation that foreign students did not need an International House, but would be best served by placement in regular dormitories.<sup>221</sup>

The Coffman Administration continued to collect information on international students in the early 1930s and began to consider how an International House might fulfill certain needs, create new opportunities, and manage what University administrators called “the Negro problem.” Dean E.M. Freeman of the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics served as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Students in 1931 and used his position to advocate for new housing options as well as specialized advisers for international students.<sup>222</sup> The college attracted the most foreign students at the University throughout this decade and was well aware of the challenges international students faced.<sup>223</sup> As early as June 1931, a report on the specific needs of foreign students identified housing as “particularly difficult for the darker skinned

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“Statement of Facts Pertaining to Rooming House at 623 Washington S.E.,” 14 April 1942. Negro 1939-1941. Office of the Dean of Students (Box 10). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries; and Willey to Coffey, “Statement on the Negro housing problem for the Board of Regents meeting,” memo, 29 June 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>219</sup> Foreign Students, International House, 1939-1940. President’s Office (2). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>220</sup> Coffman to J.C. Lawrence, et al., 17 July 1929. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>221</sup> J.C. Lawrence to President Coffman, memo, 30 November 1929. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>222</sup> In the early history of the University, departments were established in Medicine and Agriculture to oversee the schools and colleges within those units. The Department of Agriculture was led by a dean who oversaw the College of Agriculture, which also had a dean. The School of Agriculture was a secondary education program that also reported to the Department of Agriculture, not the College. Likewise, the extension and experiment stations also reported to the Department of Agriculture. Walter Coffey served as dean of the Department of Agriculture, and Dean Freeman reported to him as dean of the College of Agriculture.

<sup>223</sup> The Department of Agriculture attracted the most international students (102) followed by Engineering (71). See “The Academic Records of Foreign Students at the University of Minnesota, 1929-1940,” 1942. Foreign Students, 1937-1945. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

racess.”<sup>224</sup> In 1934, Dean Willey expressed interest in creating an International House, though for him it would be best used to strengthen the connections between the University and its European peers.<sup>225</sup> Then, in 1935, in a letter to Theodore Christianson, president of the All-University Student Council, President Coffman (then under considerable pressure to clarify the University’s policy with respect to race and housing) proposed that an International House might also offer a solution to the problem of Black student housing at the University of Minnesota.<sup>226</sup>

President Coffman’s letter also served as an invitation for the All-University Student Council to investigate the issue in conjunction with the Office of the President. Coffman’s letter led to the formation of the International House Committee. Student Gladys Sinclair served as its chair. Sinclair and her committee took this charge seriously, engaging in a concerted effort to reach out to universities with International Houses to learn about their policies, programs, and vision. The committee also conducted surveys at the University of Minnesota to gauge interest in the formation of such a house.<sup>227</sup> The committee’s final report endorsed the idea of building an International House, stating that it would

provide a wholesome environment in which a foreign student may acclimate himself to American ways and customs, and vastly more important, it will offer an American student an opportunity to learn of the problems and ways of other nations. Such a house will provide living facilities for the male students from other countries and will be a focal center for social and intellectual gatherings not only for students, but also for faculty members and residents of the Twin Cities. Thus, an International House belongs in the University family for its prime function will be educational.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> “Report of the Committee on Assistance for Foreign Students,” 4 June 1931. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>225</sup> Willey to Coffman, 7 March 1934. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>226</sup> Coffman writes, “I think instead of starting a controversy on whether or not one or a half dozen Negroes should live in Pioneer Hall, that we might actually do something constructive.” He continued, “For a number of years, I have been of the opinion that we should consider seriously the possibility of providing an International House. I have had the matter looked up two or three times, not very thoroughly I think, but there didn’t seem to be much sentiment in favor of it. The University of Minnesota has for years, as you perhaps know, had one of the largest foreign enrollments of any university in the country. International Houses have been built at Columbia, Chicago, and California (Berkeley). I do not for the moment know what they cost, nor what policies have been adopted for their administration. I think, however, that these buildings are open to all students regardless of race.” See Coffman to Theodore Christianson, 5 September 1935. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>227</sup> See correspondence in Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>228</sup> International House Report, May 1936, President’s Office 00000841, Box 14, Folder: Foreign Students International House 1929-1940, University Archives, University of Minnesota

The Committee further concluded: "Obviously, there would be no discrimination against anyone because of race, color, or creed. As expressed before, it is hoped that the resident group will be well balanced between foreign and local students."<sup>229</sup>

It is largely due to President Coffman that the International House idea was bound up with "the Negro housing problem" at the University of Minnesota. As the International House Committee considered the feasibility of an International House at the University, it is clear from those who responded to their surveys or sent letters of endorsement that there was an awareness that Coffman was conflating the projects of internationalism and race relations. The commingling of these issues both generated praise and raised concerns among certain University constituencies. Clarence Chaney from the Urban League saw the building of an International House at the University of Minnesota as possibly meeting the "urgent need for the proper housing of all foreign students and students of every race and color," and Rabbi Albert Minda of Temple Israel praised the International House as a model "that individuals regardless of their backgrounds, can live together on the basis of common human ideals and profit by the unique gifts of personality and culture which each group has to give." The one self-identified "Negro" student survey respondent also looked favorably on the International House idea.<sup>230</sup> Others, however, worried that "it would be a mistake to try to solve or settle a negro problem on the campus at the expense of an international house." They raised concerns that the International House would "introduce a source of constant disputes and dissension" or that the types of Americans (i.e., students of color) most likely to live in an International House would not be the types of Americans most international students would be interested in living with.<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, the International House Committee delivered a report to President Coffman that affirmed a vision of an International House as a model of integrated affordable housing for domestic and international students at the University of Minnesota.

On June 3, 1936, President Coffman informed the committee that their report was received with "keen interest" by the Board of Regents, but that absent funding "there was no way at the present time to provide a building which the report calls for."<sup>232</sup>

The issue of building an International House in Minneapolis disappears from the record until it is resurrected in the fall of 1941, when two students, one Black (Garland Kyle) and the other white and sometimes described as Russian (David Binevitch), seeking an affordable rooming option near the University, were advised by Director Vernes Mohns that the property on Washington Avenue could be renovated by winter of

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<sup>229</sup> "International House Report," May 1936, p. 1, 3. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>230</sup> See correspondence in, Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>231</sup> See survey responses in Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries. In one such response, Charles Mowal writes, "It is true that some Americans are to live in the proposed International House. But the Americans a foreign student is most interested in meeting are just those who probably would not be interested in living in an International House."

<sup>232</sup> Coffman to International House Committee, 3 June 1936. Foreign Students-International House, 1929-1940. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

1942 for interested students. From several accounts, it is clear that the students saw this new rooming option as an effort by the University to fulfill the mission of an International House as described by the International House Committee in 1936. Referring to Garland Kyle's understanding of the space, the *St. Paul Recorder* recounts, "It was the opinion of this man that the house was to be an International House similar to houses on other northern campuses. With that in mind, white students as well as colored students were contacted with the hope that a cosmopolitan tone could be obtained."<sup>233</sup> Administrative memos from 1942 confirm

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<sup>233</sup> "University Fails Again in Housing," *St. Paul Recorder* 27 March 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): 75. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. While the students and the press routinely described the rooming house on Washington Avenue as an International House, the Administration more often referred to the rooming house by its address (623 Washington Avenue). In his one statement about the closure of the rooming house to the *Minnesota Daily*, President Coffey also referred to the facility as "International house" ("Student Protest Rally is Today," *Minnesota Daily* 14 April 1942: 1). However, in the mid-1950s when the University was again exploring the construction of an International House, administrators stated that Minnesota did not and had never had an International House on its campus. There is clearly a great distance between the lavish Rockefeller-funded International Houses that were constructed at midcentury and the small rooming house on Washington Avenue at the University of Minnesota. The University of Minnesota did not invest in an International House or attract investors of the sort that funded these projects at other universities. At the same time, there was a moment when President Coffman and students at the University envisioned an International House as a specific type of integrated campus housing. Moreover, there is evidence that this vision was communicated to and adopted by the students who lived in or tried to gain residency at 623 Washington Ave. This sentiment is confirmed by Judge [Edward Foote] Waite, who relates to Dean Willey what Robert Thornton and Garland Kyle told him when they sought his counsel. Willey relays this information to Coffey, writing, "Judge Waite said that in the original conversations leading to the establishment of the house, Mr. [J.C.] Poucher [Director of Service Enterprises] had stated to the Negroes that it would be an international house, from which they had assumed that space in it would be given to a foreign student, whether Japanese, Philippino, Chinese, or what not. In fact, in the original planning a Russian student had been involved and they had thought he was going there, but later he made other plans. The house had not been filled up as an international house in the winter quarter because of the lateness of opening, but Mr. Thornton thought it would fill up as an international house if given time. The fact that a white student had been ordered from the premises led them to raise the question of whether the house was not, in fact, designed for the segregation of negroes." Willey to Coffey memo 24 March 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 69. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. Relating another conversation with Charles W. Washington, secretary of the Minneapolis Urban League, to President Coffey, Willey writes, "Mr. Washington said that there seems to be a general understanding now that the house on Washington Avenue was originally conceived as an embryo international house and that its facilities would be available both to negro and other students. Whether this was an erroneous impression arising from misunderstanding or whether certain intimations were made to this effect when the house was originally being planned he did not know. But of the fact that the notion of an international house was abroad he is certain.... It is Mr. Washington's opinion that the establishment of an international house in which negroes could get facilities with other students if they wished them, would go a long way toward healing some of the bad feeling that now exists." Willey to Coffey, 22 April 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro, 1939-1942. (Box 20, Folder 21): page 111. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. Finally, in one list of student demands penned by the Student League for Civil Rights, alongside asking the University administration to go "on the record as definitely opposed to discrimination in University facilities on account of race, color, or creed," they also asked to "Reopen the house at 623 Washington Ave. S.E. as an International House as originally planned." Leonard Lecht et al. to Sir, 22 April 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro, 1939-1942. (Box 20, Folder 21): page 105. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. In short, there was a complicated politics around the use of the term International House that this report will not resolve. Moreover, it is fitting that a Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History finds new stories that elucidate the long and complicated history of building names at the University. This history reminds us that naming is a political act and that different stakeholders can use names to make or undermine claims about spaces.

that Black and white students worked tirelessly to ensure that rooms were, in fact, available to all students, regardless of race or nationality.<sup>234</sup> Those same records also capture the very different view the Coffey administration had of International House. They imagined it “as a residence for colored people near the campus” and as an opportunity to move the only Black student living in Pioneer Hall, Moses Blackwell, to this new rooming house. In fact, only when administrators learned that Garland Kyle had convinced Blackwell to move into the rooming house, did the University begin renovations. Director Mohns writes: “They reported that Mr. Blackwell agreed to accompany them to the proposed new quarters when completed; and, with the agreement so stated as a basis, the house was completely remodeled to be used as a dormitory.”<sup>235</sup> When these two visions clashed, the Coffey administration first responded to students’ efforts to integrate the house by removing the non-black students and closing the rooming house, which community members interpreted as President Coffey’s reversal of Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy. After several months, President Coffey relented in the face of student protests, at once integrating the rooming facility and creating a shadow policy that continued to seek the exclusion of Black male students from Pioneer Hall.<sup>236</sup>

### The closure of International House (623 Washington Ave) & student and community responses

Members of the Coffey administration, at first, framed the opening and closing of International House as a response to the need for affordable rooms for Black male students attending the University. President Coffey would later work just as hard to claim, on those few occasions when he spoke about the matter, that race had nothing to do with either the opening or closing of the International House. Students and community members, however, viewed this episode as evidence of the University’s and the Coffey administration’s failure to live up to either the values of democracy they believed universities ought to promote or, as President Coffey so frequently touted, the values of democracy and equality in a nation fighting a war against fascism.

One of the earliest statements from the Coffey administration following the closure of International House comes from Vernes Mohns, director of Pioneer Hall. In a fascinating document (April 16, 1942) titled “Statement of Facts Pertaining to Rooming House at 623 Washington S.E.,” Mohns offers an official account of the opening and closing of the rooming house. A few things stand out in his account. First, he is clear that the

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<sup>234</sup> Vernes Mohns, “Statement of Facts Pertaining to Rooming House at 623 Washington S.E.,” 16 April 1942. For more on the persistent need for more affordable housing for all students, see “Report of the All-University Housing Committee,” 30 January 1939. Housing, Southeast Mpls. Problems, 1937-1943. President’s Office (Box 112). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>235</sup> Vernes Mohns to Coffey, memo, 24 March 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 67. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. In this memo, Mohns also states that the “dormitory” would be called “Men’s Cooperative Boarding House.” The only newspaper quote that we have recovered from President Coffey on the matter, however, refers to the space as “International house.” This report refers to this rooming house either as International House or by its location, 623 Washington Avenue S.E.

<sup>236</sup> In the midst of protests over the closure of International House, President Coffey received a letter from a student at Harvard about their International House (Club), which prompted President Coffey to write to Harvard’s President James B. Conant about their International House and the admission of “members of the negro race” into that facility. Coffey to Conant, 21 May 1942. Foreign Students, 1937-1945. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

property was reserved for Black students and to the extent non-Black students were residing there, Mohns reasoned, the house was not serving its function and should thus be closed. Second, it is clear from his statement that the rooming house was being used in ways that the Coffey administration had not anticipated. It was being used by students to test Coffey's housing policy as well as to create an integrated living space in line with the ideals of the broader International House movement. Mohns notes that white members of the Civil Rights Committee regularly requested rooms to rent in the house and held meetings in that space.<sup>237</sup> He also indicates that Japanese Americans sought out residence in the rooming house. Mohns writes (likely to President Coffey and for administrative purposes),

since the house was originally set up for the purpose of accommodating the colored students, we did not see any reason in diminishing the available space for colored students and for defeating the very purpose for which the house was established. Because of our refusal to allow these white boys to reside in the house, much unfavorable publicity appeared in the papers regarding race discrimination.

He continues, "As a result of this, since the house apparently was not going to be fulfilling the purpose for which it was established, the statement was made that the house would be closed. This, of course, immediately brought forth an additional storm of protest."<sup>238</sup> According to the *Minnesota Daily*, "Mohns declared the house 'has always been a strictly negro house. It was set up to solve partially the problem of housing colored students in southeast Minneapolis, always bearing in mind that there is no problem in housing white students [in this area]. Of course, Negroes can go to Pioneer Hall. The house is for Negroes who cannot afford Pioneer Hall.'"<sup>239</sup> That is, the University created a segregated housing room facility in response to the fact that Black students were excluded from the private rooming market adjacent to the University. It did not go unnoticed by critics of the University's new approach, who understood that the University also oversaw the private boarding market for students, that the University used its willingness to contract with private landlords that refused to rent rooms to Blacks as a justification for building segregated housing.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Mohns refers to the Civil Rights Committee, but it is not clear exactly who the membership of this group is or if this was an official campus group.

<sup>238</sup> Vernes Mohns, "Statement of Facts Pertaining to Rooming House at 623 Washington S.E.," 16 April 1942. In the upper left corner of the memo the words "keep handy" appear. In the upper right hand corner, the handwritten words "Ret. to Pres. Coffey" are crossed out.

<sup>239</sup> "Statements Issued in Housing Dispute," *Minnesota Daily* 2 April 1942: 1.

<sup>240</sup> "University Fails Again in Housing," *St. Paul Recorder* 27 March 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 75, respectively. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. In a letter that was sent to President Coffey, Comptroller Middlebrook, and Director Poucher as well as the *Minnesota Daily*, which was signed "The Negro Students of the University of Minnesota," the students decried the "short-lived" "International House." The students asserted, "we do not want to be patronized. We want no special laws made for us; we want no special privileges that are unavailable to others; we want no one to lean over backwards to assume our difficulties." They concluded their letter, "we respectfully beg your leave to give you back your house. Beautifully furnished as it is, however, sincere were your motives on our behalf, we feel that the sacrifice thereof is small as compared to the humiliation we should undergo by a tacit endorsement of racial discrimination on



Where Mohns affirmed that the rooming house was for Blacks only, Garland Kyle, one of the two Black residents living in the house and a leader of the protests against the closure of International House, contested Mohns' account. Kyle stated "Had I known that the house was to be labelled for Negroes only, I would not have gone in."<sup>241</sup> According to the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, Kyle "understood ... that the house was open to any male student."<sup>242</sup>

Garland Kyle and the wide range of allies who challenged the University's closure of International House consistently used the backdrop of the Second World War to both demand equal treatment for Blacks and urge the University to live up to the values President Coffey espoused in his many pro-democracy and pro-brotherhood-of-man speeches throughout the war.<sup>243</sup> Kyle, for example, connected his right to integrated housing to African Americans' military service. He also supported student resolutions that stressed the hypocrisy of asking students to die for democracy while not supporting democratic principles for students on campus.<sup>244</sup> Graduate student Harold Field specifically positioned himself as a draftee in his letter of protest. He wrote, "To me the words 'preserve democracy,' suggest a connotation of pickling in brine our status quo. With the University administration's actions against racial equality on this campus, I am now sure that my connotation is the correct one."<sup>245</sup> When J. Nudell "register[ed] a protest against your [Coffey's] recent action in closing the house at 623 Washington Ave. S.E., as a cooperative house for all races, colors, and creeds," he explained,

I feel justified in this request for the maintenance of democracy. About three weeks ago I enlisted in the Service, and will be called to serve tomorrow or the next day. As an individual who offers all to save democracy I should like to see it maintained at home while I and millions of others will defend it at the front. It will be an easy task for us to fight if you will only fight for the same principles at home.<sup>246</sup>

This view of the University was echoed by students at other institutions. Taylor Boggs, a Harvard University student, wrote to Coffey, "The situation appears to be a most regrettable one in view of the struggle in which we are all now engaged, but even more so because it occurred in one of our major universities." Boggs goes

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this campus." Administration. Alphabetical. Negro, 1939-1942. (Box 20, Folder 21): page 80-1. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>241</sup> 'U' Students Hear Protest Against Housing Situation, *Minneapolis Spokesman* 4 April 1942, p1 c6, Microfilm, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>242</sup> 'U' Students Hear Protest Against Housing Situation, *Minneapolis Spokesman* 4 April 1942, p1 c6, Microfilm, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>243</sup> Coffey, Walter Castella, 1876-1956. Speeches. War Problems. 1941-1946. Office of the President (Box 477). University Archives. University of Minnesota; Speeches. Colleges and Universities. 1942. Office of the President (Box 477). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>244</sup> Betty Alexander, "U Students Hear Protest" *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 17 April 1942; and "Negro Discrimination on Campus Charged," *Minnesota Daily* April 1, 1942: 1.

<sup>245</sup> Harold Field, "Letter to the Editor: Opposes Negro Discrimination," *Minnesota Daily* 24 April 1942: 1.

<sup>246</sup> J. Nudell to Coffey, 29 April 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 132. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

on to describe “the increasing futility in trying to carry on a real struggle for democracy when such racial discriminations are practiced from the University of Minnesota to India and China.”<sup>247</sup> Louis Gross, chairman of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League, maintained, “In these days when Americans are spending blood and treasure to make real in the world the principles of equality and freedom, it would be a sorry indictment of our effort if we fail to make those principles real in our own community.”<sup>248</sup> Members of a Negro History Study Club located in Chicago wrote, “A segregated house is a Hitler House in America. Don’t be a Hitler, be an American! Practice what you preach.”<sup>249</sup> While Coffey is often celebrated for his stewardship of the University through the war, students and activists pointed out the limits of his democratic vision when it came to the equality of Blacks on campus.

### President Coffey’s silence & the decision to reopen International House and discourage Black students from living in University dorms

This series of incidents—from the determination that non-blacks could not reside in the house to the closure of International House, followed by President Coffey’s refusal to respond to student and community inquiries about the University’s housing policy with respect to race—provoked protests across the campus as well as an outcry from local organizations disappointed by the University’s failure to accommodate Black students on an equal basis. On April 14, 1942, Coffey refused to comment on the University’s actions, his silence being a means of neither confirming nor denying the University’s housing policy with respect to race.<sup>250</sup> He is quoted in the *Minnesota Daily* as stating, “The matter of closing the International house was discussed informally at the last meeting of the Board of Regents and no action resulted. The Negro problem is an involved one and I have no statement to make on it at this time.”<sup>251</sup> The following month, the *Minnesota Daily* noted that President Coffey continued to maintain his silence.<sup>252</sup> African-American freshman John H. Herriford, in a letter to the president, indicted both Coffey’s silence as well as his claim that there was a “Negro problem”

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<sup>247</sup> Boggs to Coffey, 17 May 1942. Foreign Students, 1937-1945. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>248</sup> Louis Gross to Coffey, 1 May 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 138. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>249</sup> Negro History Study Club to The President’s Office, 26 July 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>250</sup> “Student Protest Rally is Today,” *Minnesota Daily* 14 April 1942: 1. “Civil Rights League Leaders Want to See President Coffey--in Person,” 16 April 1942. Representatives of major student groups repeatedly sought meetings with Coffey. He denied all of their requests, citing a busy schedule, to which they responded they would “send official representatives at whatever time you [Coffey] may designate.” Fabian Club et al. to Coffey, 25 May 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 155. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. See also, Fabian Club et al. to Coffey, 1 May 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 136. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. See also, Leonard A. Lecht et al. to Sir [Coffey], 22 April 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 105. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>251</sup> “Student Protest Rally is Today,” *Minnesota Daily* 14 April 1942: 1.

<sup>252</sup> “Coffey will not address groups on discrimination,” *Minnesota Daily* 7 May 1942: 4.

instead of a “prejudice problem.”<sup>253</sup> President Coffey’s silence was met with student rallies, protests, petitions, and demands that he clarify the University’s policy. The Student League for Civil Rights alone collected 1200 student signatures calling for “an officially stated University policy opposing any discrimination in University facilities on account of race, color, or creed.” According to the *Daily*, “The All-University Council, representing the entire student body, ha[d] gone on the record supporting such a statement of policy.”<sup>254</sup>

President Coffey and his administration would have known that President Ford had gone on the record about this issue five years earlier. In 1937 and 1938, Coffey, then dean of the Department of Agriculture, had already been working at the University for nearly two decades. That is, he was a witness to the student protests of the 1930s against then-President Coffman’s exclusions of Black students from campus housing. President Coffey was well aware of President Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy for Black Minnesotan students and he was aware of how his actions departed from that policy.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> John H. Herriford to Coffey, May 19, 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>254</sup> “Student Protest Rally is Today,” *Minnesota Daily* 14 April 1942: 1; “Willey to Get Rights Petition,” *Minnesota Daily* 21 April 1942.

<sup>255</sup> As early as 1926, we have a letter to then-Dean Coffey about whether an African-American student in Home Economics should be granted residency. In this letter, the division chief specifically asks Coffey, “Will you give us the benefit of your judgement, which we may take for granted reflects President Coffman’s judgement also?” There is no record of Dean Coffey’s response. McNeal to Coffey, 13 December 1926. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 3, respectively. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. In 1938, this question crosses Dean Coffey’s desk a second time. Interestingly, the letter notes Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy, but still asks Dean Coffey for clarification on the matter and even encourages Coffey to reach out to Ohio State University, which he does to learn more about their policy, even though President Ford had already clarified the policy. In this correspondence we only have the letter to Dean Coffey about the housing policy of the home management house and the reply to Coffey’s letter from Ohio State University. Both are telling and quoted at length below. As mentioned earlier, President Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy was not embraced by all portions of his administration. That is attested to both by the constant inquiry into the question of where Black students can live and by Dean Coffey’s determination to write a letter to Ohio State University that appears to make reference to the Supreme Court case that Ohio State University won in 1933, which permitted the use of segregated housing on that campus. Moreover, these letters demonstrate that both as dean and as president Coffey had a long history of engagement with the question of race and housing at the University. He was not blindsided by this issue in his first year as president. The April 27, 1938 letter from Chief of Division Wylie B. McNeal informs Coffey as follows: “We have a negro girl specializing in dietetics in this college. Next year some time she will apply for her residence in the home management house. Since that is a requirement shall I assume that she must go in like any other person? I noticed in a Daily sometime this winter that Dean Ford says negroes may live in the dormitories. If that tradition has been broken down I see no reason why the negro should not go in the home management house.” McNeal then asks Dean Coffey to reach out to Ohio State University about how “they solved the problem a few years ago, if they did.” McNeal to Coffey, 27 April 1938. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 4, respectively. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. What remains of the correspondence with Ohio State is their response to Coffey, where Dean Cunningham “admits that the racial question is a difficult one to handle on the campus of a Land Grant College” and then explains that their two male dorms are “highly selective...and the race problem has not presented itself.” Cunningham imagines “that should a colored boy be found eligible...from a scholastic standpoint and [have]...personal habits and bearing that would not be objectionable” then he would probably be accepted “to show that stern discrimination did not exist.” He then refers to the Supreme Court case that he believes Dean Coffey to be inquiring about and explains that he interprets that ruling as putting “matters of this kind...entirely at the disposal of the Board of Trustees of the

Some critics referred specifically to Ford's policy while criticizing Coffey's silence. An article in the *St. Paul Recorder* titled "University Fails Again on Housing" concluded, "Under Guy Stanton Ford there was no equivocation with discrimination. We had hoped that under President Coffey that we would continue the fine example set by President Ford but, alas, it seems not so."<sup>256</sup> Student protester Milton Frank read the very letter that Ford wrote to Middlebrook and published in the *Minnesota Daily* in 1937, emphasizing Ford's assertion that all University facilities were "OPEN." Students stressed that a "segregated house for Negroes" was diametrically opposed to Ford's "IDEALS BOTH OF DEMOCRACY AND OF THE UNIVERSITY."<sup>257</sup> Education senior Robert William Iverson was even more clear about what was at stake when he wrote to the editor of the *Minnesota Daily*, "the establishment of an official 'Jim Crow' house is indeed a radical departure, for it ushers in an officially sanctioned policy of segregation... The University has forged the first link in a vicious chain which we thought existed only in the South."<sup>258</sup> Cecil Newman, founder of the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, and civil rights activists referenced President Guy Stanton Ford's nondiscriminatory housing policy, describing Ford as a man who did not "shrink from his duty as head of our great state institution."<sup>259</sup>

Other organizations, including the Minnesota State Federation of Teachers, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and Twin Cities Workers Defense League, sent President Coffey resolutions, petitions, and letters demanding that he make a statement affirming the University's nondiscriminatory policy.<sup>260</sup> One such resolution read: "Whereas, the United States as one of the nations is engaged in an all-out war effort dedicated to the democratic cause in the interests of the people of all nations and races ... Therefore, be it resolved that the Minnesota State Federation of Teachers urge that the University of Minnesota adopt a clear-cut statement of policy extending equal rights and facilities to all students without respect to race or color."<sup>261</sup>

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University." (See also the Coffman and Middlebrook Reports about this case.) John F. Cunningham to Coffey, 26 May 1938. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 5, respectively. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>256</sup> "University Fails Again in Housing," *St. Paul Recorder* 27 March 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 75, respectively. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>257</sup> "Students to Protest Negro Discrimination" and "Letter to the Editor: Advocates International House," *Minnesota Daily* 7 April 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 79, respectively. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive, <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/1554820>; From Guy Stanton Ford (Acting President) To Middlebrook, 20 December 1937, President's Office, Box 20, Folder 20, pp. 146-147, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archive, <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/1554308>; U. Policy Permits Negroes to Use Housing Units President's Office, Box 20, Folder 20, pp. 149-150, University of Minnesota Libraries, UMedia Archive, <http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/1554308>.

<sup>258</sup> Robert William Iverson, "Deplores Official 'Jim Crow' House," *Minnesota Daily* 1 April 1942.

<sup>259</sup> Betty Alexander, "U Students Hear Protest" *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 17 April 1942.

<sup>260</sup> The following persons/organizations sent letters and resolutions to Coffey: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (122), Minnesota State Federation of Teachers (124), Eleanor Hirsch, Twin City Workers Defense League (127), Bill Sutherland, Executive Director of Youth Committee for Democracy (133), Cosmopolitan Club at the University of (146), Albert Zubin to Coffey, 14 May 1942 (150). Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21). University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>261</sup> Minnesota State Federation of Teachers. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 124. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

While President Coffey refused to comment in the face of mounting on- and off-campus protest, Dean and Assistant to the President Malcolm Willey drafted a memo for President Coffey to prepare him for his upcoming meeting with the Board of Regents. This June 29, 1942 memo, written by Willey and adopted by Coffey, is described as “running notes” to be used before the Board of Regents with respect to the “Negro housing problem” on campus.<sup>262</sup> The Willey/Coffey memo is interesting for a number of reasons. In sharp contrast to Director Mohns’ initial statements about the racial grounds upon which International House was opened and closed, this memo makes a series of arguments about the non-racial, racial, and economic basis of Coffey’s actions. It demonstrates Coffey’s and Willey’s willingness to rationalize Coffey’s actions as specifically not based upon race, while discouraging the Board of Regents from making any clear “pronouncement of policy” with regard to race across all student housing. The memo is also clear that the continuing agitation on the part of the students and the broader community brought this issue to a head and the University needed to pursue one of two options, “1) either it must be said that negroes cannot have use of any University facilities, meaning specifically the housing facilities on a nonsegregated basis; or 2) some provision for nonsegregated negro housing must be offered.”<sup>263</sup> This second option is the one that Coffey encouraged the Board of Regents to pursue. “[N]onsegregated negro housing,” a clear rejection of Ford’s 1937 written policy that Black students have free and open access to all University facilities, was an effort by the Coffey administration to steer Blacks and interested non-Blacks to a University-run rooming house at 623 Washington Avenue while ensuring that Blacks were actively discouraged from residing in campus dorms, like Pioneer Hall.

The Willey/Coffey memo makes a set of economic arguments to justify Black students’ absence from University dorms. Specifically, the memo describes International House as the best housing option for Black students “who for the most part is unable to pay the rates prevailing in the dormitory.” Here President Coffey claims that Black students do not reside in Pioneer Hall simply because they cannot afford to, not because of a racial bar, though cost could be considered as serving in practice as a racial bar. However, the University operated International House at a loss due to its low occupancy (only two Black residents lived there when they had planned for twelve) and refused to reach capacity through integration. The University opted to create a new segregated housing facility even if segregated housing was, in effect, more expensive for the University than integrated housing.<sup>264</sup>

The memo further argues that race did not play a role in the closure of International House. At the same time, the outcry against President Coffey’s actions was used to justify not experimenting with interracialism in campus housing. The memo denies that the white and Japanese-American residents of International House were removed due to race, but does use race to explain Coffey’s closure of the house. The memo asserts, “Any experiment in interracial cooperation is doomed to failure if it is started when feelings run high, and when it becomes the center of an issue. On this ground, and this alone, it was decided that the house should be closed.” President Coffey’s actions precipitated this crisis, but according to the logic of the memo it is the student-led protests against housing discrimination that become the rationale for not supporting integrated

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<sup>262</sup> Willey to Coffey, “Statement on the Negro housing problem for the Board of Regents meeting,” memo, 29 June 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>263</sup> Willey to Coffey, “Statement on the Negro housing problem,” 2.

<sup>264</sup> Willey to Coffey, “Statement on the Negro housing problem,” 1.

housing rather than President Coffey's efforts to segregate Black students in the International House in the first place. The memo states: "The ejection of the white student at once precipitated a hue and cry. The issue of Black-Crowism was raised, and various individuals and organizations, became aggressively active in demanding that the University administration, including the Regents, state a policy with respect to use of University facilities by negroes."<sup>265</sup>

The Willey/Coffey memo also describes silence as the best strategy for dealing with the crisis President Coffey's actions provoked. It calls for a strategy of "doing nothing and saying nothing publicly until such time as feeling had subsided, and the whole question could be viewed more objectively." Moreover, all calls from students and community members for a clarification of the University's policies with respect to race and housing are deployed as evidence of the protesters' lack of objectivity and as a rationale for remaining silent.<sup>266</sup>

Two possible solutions are outlined. First, the International House could be reopened with an explicit preference for Black students. Under this plan, if whites applied to live in the house designated for Blacks, they could do so on a voluntary basis, but no white students would be forced to live in integrated housing. The memo further concludes that if the rooming house does not meet the needs of Black students then it can be closed, since the University "does not wish to enter the room house field except to meet the needs of students who cannot otherwise find adequate and convenient accommodations." The second option that President Coffey presented to the Board of Regents was a policy of "exclusion." The memo notes, however, that pursuing this option would not be wise given that "there are country-wide movements designed to check discrimination against negroes and these movements have the backing of important leaders in public life, nationally and locally."<sup>267</sup>

Finally, the memo is clear that reopening the rooming house on Washington Avenue was their "best argument" against the charges of discrimination leveled against President Coffey and the University. It also notes that Black students lived in university dormitories throughout the country "without any problems arising."<sup>268</sup>

This last point about the success of integration efforts in campus housing on similar campuses is important. The responses to a letter written by Comptroller Middlebrook in the first months of President Coffey's administration revealed to Middlebrook and Coffey how out of step their efforts to construct segregated University housing in a midwestern university were with that of peer institutions. Although they gathered this information well before the International House first opened, they did not use it to encourage serious integration at the University of Minnesota either before or after the 1942 International House situation.

At the beginning of President Coffey's term, Comptroller Middlebrook wrote a letter to several college presidents seeking information on their housing policy with respect to integration. Middlebrook concludes

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<sup>265</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 1.

<sup>266</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 1.

<sup>267</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 1.

<sup>268</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 1.

that letter, stating, “At Minnesota it has *not* been our practice to do so and up until the present time the problem has been avoided.”<sup>269</sup> Middlebrook’s ability to make this claim may offer some clue as to why President Ford originally thought it necessary to circulate his letter to Middlebrook about nondiscriminatory housing in such an open format as the *Minnesota Daily*. As the Willey/Coffey memo points out, nearly all of the institutions Middlebrook surveyed had integrated their housing facilities, with the exception of the State University of Iowa, where Blacks were excluded from dorms, and the University of Nebraska, where the “caucasian race” occupied the dorms and they might consider building a separate colored dorm in the future, if needed. The five remaining flagship institutions—the University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, Ohio State University, the University of Illinois, and the University of Colorado—had all adopted nondiscrimination policies, integrated their dorms, and described the current generation of students as less prejudiced. In their cumulative experience, campus housing had been integrated without incident. Middlebrook prepared a short summary of their responses to have on hand for “ready reference at [the] Regents’ meeting” in October of 1941.<sup>270</sup>

Colorado provides an interesting case regarding its vision about the new International Houses that were being established on their campus. Colorado had integrated its dorm for African American female students but claimed no African American males sought dormitory housing. W.E. Brockway, business manager of the University of Colorado, stated in his letter to Middlebrook in October 1941,

This year the Cosmopolitan Club is opening an International House for men and one for women. The houses in both cases belong to the University and are rented to the organizations. It is their plan to provide living facilities for both men and women belonging to the minority groups. If this plan succeeds we think all negro applicants for the dormitories can be taken care of by this organization.<sup>271</sup>

In some respects, Minnesota’s strategy parallels the Colorado experience. Director of Pioneer Hall Vernes Mohns shared in one of his brief accounts (in March 1942) of the opening and closing of International House drafted for President Coffey that he reached out to the only Black student living in Pioneer Hall (Moses Blackwell) to see if he would consider moving into the new International House. Mohns wrote:

Mr. Moses Blackwell, upon being notified of the completion of the remodeling, agreed to move to the house under the following condition: that his father be notified in writing that his presence at Pioneer Hall was undesirable and that housing at 623 Washington Avenue S.E. was the only available housing for colored people in South East Minneapolis. Mr. Blackwell is still residing at Pioneer Hall.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Middlebrook to W.H. Cobb et al., 26 September 1941. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 54. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>270</sup> Assorted letters to Middlebrook et al. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): pages 55-62. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>271</sup> W. E. Brockway to Middlebrook, 10 October 1941. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 59. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>272</sup> Vernes Mohns to Coffey, memo, 24 March 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 67. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

From the start the Coffey administration imagined International House as a solution to the problem of Black housing in University dormitories. Moreover, when President Coffey reopened the rooming house at 623 Washington Avenue in the fall of 1942, his administration still worked to have that house fulfill the mission of removing Black students from University dormitories.

Rather than a move back toward President Ford's nondiscriminatory housing policy and the broader values of equal opportunity and democracy, the Willey/Coffey memo portrays reopening the rooming house as an effort to discourage Blacks from living in the dorms even when other universities (and the University of Minnesota, under President Ford) had adopted university wide integration policies without incident. Indeed, the memo concludes by clarifying that the primary purpose served in reopening the rooming house is the diversion of Black students from University dorms (like Pioneer Hall) into University rooms (like International House, 623 Washington Ave). It states:

This proposal begs for the moment the question of negroes in the other university housing facilities, but the existence of such a house will make far less likely the request by any number of negro students for admittance to the other dormitories, and will divert any concerted movement on the part of outside organizations to make an issue of negro housing at the University by backing negro applications for admission to Pioneer Hall.<sup>273</sup>

Historian Mark Soderstrom maintains that the University, on the advice of legal counsel, began to quietly desegregate its housing facilities in 1942.<sup>274</sup> The Willey/Coffey memo lends some support for this assertion, noting that if a Black student insisted on applying for on-campus housing "the student will have to be admitted."<sup>275</sup> Consistent with their quiet approach, the memo also notes that "The procedure here suggested is calculated to obviate the necessity of any public statements, and is a means of meeting a problem with the least possible public attention." President Coffey's determination to not take a clear public stand on the University's housing policy with respect to race and to not clarify for African Americans their right to freely access all University facilities were two constants throughout the housing controversy.<sup>276</sup>

On July 10, 1942, on President Coffey's recommendation, the Board of Regents voted to reopen the rooming house at 623 Washington Avenue (International House). During President Coffey's meeting with the Board, he recalled a meeting with the NAACP-affiliated Citizens' Committee during which they raised their concerns that the taxpayer-funded University of Minnesota was discriminating against taxpaying Black students. Following the Board's decision, President Coffey reached out to the Citizens' Committee. In Coffey's letter to the committee four days after the Board of Regents' vote, he assured the committee that "at the beginning of the coming college year, the University will operate a rooming house for men to which both colored and

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<sup>273</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 2-3.

<sup>274</sup> Mark Soderstrom, "Weeds in Linnaeus's Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900-45," (dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004), 279.

<sup>275</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 3; see also Dick Griggs to Coffey, 11 May 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries. Regent Griggs was a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota. In this short letter, Regent Griggs wrote, "It appears to me that if a showdown is forced, we have no choice but to take the position that the negro has equal rights with others, regardless of what embarrassment it may occasion." Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 3.

<sup>276</sup> Willey to Coffey, "Statement on the Negro housing problem," 2-3.



white students will be admitted." Coffey continued, "As stated to you in our conference, it is my hope that colored students will be given prior opportunity to room in the house but it will very definitely be available to students of both races."<sup>277</sup> The Citizens' Committee shared the sentiments expressed in President Coffey's letter with the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, which published an article on July 31, 1942 titled, "Coffey 'U' Prexy Reverses Stand on Housing Bar."<sup>278</sup>

Although President Coffey reversed himself on the integration of International House, there continued a broader strategy of an informal racial bar on Black men's access to University dorms.

One month later, on August 31, 1942, Dean and Assistant to the President Willey elucidated the process by which the University would direct Black students toward the rooming house at 623 Washington Avenue while discouraging them from seeking accommodations in University dormitories. Willey notes in this memo that he has met with several University officials to discuss the reopening of the rooming facilities at 623 Washington Ave (International House):

I went over carefully the position at which we have arrived, and indicated clearly that it is our wish that the proposed manner of handling the problem be given a sympathetic and fair trial. We shall, through letter and interview, through Dean Williamson, point out to Negro students that there are problems they will face if they go into dormitories; that for men we have the rooming facilities at 623, and urge their utilization, but that in the face of insistence that dormitory reservations be made, they will be made subject to policies that apply to all students. It is agreed that any questions arising will be brought by Mr. [J.C.] Poucher [Director of Service Enterprises] to the office.<sup>279</sup>

Notwithstanding the Board of Regents' vote and President Coffey's comments to the Citizens' Committee, the administration continued to urge Black students to live in 623 Washington and avoid the "problems" they may face from white students in University dorms.<sup>280</sup> In describing the approach taken by the administration in this memo, Willey makes no commitment to protecting Black students from the hostility they may

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<sup>277</sup> Coffey to Citizens' Committee, 14 July 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>278</sup> "Coffey 'U' Prexy Reverses Stand on Housing Bar," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, 31 July 1942.

<sup>279</sup> Willey, Office Memorandum "to discuss the opening of 623 Washington Avenue," 31 August 1942. Negro 1939-1942. Office of the President (Box 20). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries. There is also a set of notes "Assuming resumption of operation of the rooming house at 623 Washington," which contains the question, "Should colored applicants at Pioneer Hall be housed here [623 Washington Ave.]" The handwritten response is "urged," See Untitled Notes, 18 August 1942. Administration. Alphabetical. Negro 1939-1942 (Box 20, Folder 21): page 165. University of Minnesota Libraries. UMedia Archive.

<sup>280</sup> At the same time as the International House episode, there is a series of correspondence about housing several African-American women over the summer in Comstock and Sanford Halls. There had been a history of housing one or two Black women during previous summer sessions, but this case of four Black women raised some concerns and administrators looked to Coffey for a final decision. In an April 22, 1942 memo to Middlebrook, Poucher wrote: "These applications appear to indicate that we might expect to have a big increase in these students, and if this is so, I am not at all certain what the effect will be. Too many of them I am certain would have a detrimental effect. The admission of these students, however, is the immediate question." Coffey wrote to Middlebrook on April 23, 1942, directing him to admit the four Black female students who "applied for residence for the summer [only] at Sanford and Comstock Halls." Coffey to Middlebrook, 23 April 1942 (115).

encounter but rather uses said dangers to assure Black students that their placement in 623 Washington is a form of protection. The focus on “problems” stands in contrast to Comptroller Middlebrook’s own research that Blacks lived in campus dorms across the country without incident. The memo further makes clear that the only way Black students will gain access to broader University housing options is if they insist upon access. Black students were not invited to consider themselves “subject” to the same housing policies in terms of access and would only “be made subject to policies that apply to all students” if they fought for equal access to all University housing on a nondiscriminatory basis.<sup>281</sup>

## President Coffey, Dean and Assistant to the President Malcolm Willey, and the history of race and international students at the University

A closer look at the archival record reveals that there is considerable work that remains to be done with respect to the ways the University of Minnesota, its presidents, and its administrators shaped the meaning and practice of race and internationalism at the University and across the state.

In the process of exploring President Coffey and his administration’s closure of International House, we also gain initial insight into the plight of Japanese Americans at the University of Minnesota during President Coffey’s tenure. Director Mohns, Dean Willey, and President Coffey mention the removal of the Japanese Americans from International House and note that those young people were not students at the University of Minnesota at the time. Their statement is accurate, but it is also the case that the University of Minnesota denied Japanese Americans admission for much of the war. Only one college or university in Minnesota, St. Olaf College, admitted Japanese-American students throughout the war.<sup>282</sup> During the war, faculty and administrators at west coast institutions “worked to have students transfer to campuses east of the exclusion zone.”<sup>283</sup>

Faculty- and University-led efforts to place their Japanese-American students in midwestern and eastern universities was one of the reasons that President Coffey conferred with the other university presidents about their policies. On March 18, 1942, President Coffey queried the presidents of 16 midwestern colleges as to their treatment of German refugees and their “policy with respect to American-Japanese students.”<sup>284</sup> Specifically, Coffey inquired about each school’s “willingness to accept, as graduate students, Americans of Japanese extraction who may be forced to leave the restricted areas on the west coast.”<sup>285</sup> Summarizing the

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Beyond the Barbed Wire: Japanese Americans in Minnesota accessed online 3 January 2019, <https://pages.stolaf.edu/jam/>

<sup>283</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *Storied Lives: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999): 31.

<sup>284</sup> Although Willey writes of the “German refugee problem,” we believe that what is meant here are the Jewish refugees from Germany. The only substantial population of refugees during the war from Germany to the United States were Jewish refugees.

<sup>285</sup> Coffey to Robert M. Hutchins, March 18, 1942, Alien, Japanese-Americans, 1942-44. President’s Office (Box 50). University Archives. University of Minnesota. President Coffey took the lead in asking “that the US Office of Education Wartime Commission take steps to formulate some plan whereby those students [Japanese Americans] might be admitted by several colleges and Universities. If this is done it will aid in eliminating the fear that a large number will seek admission to one or two institutions.” Coffey went on to identify an additional benefit to the universities: “It will also enable these institutions to establish a good public relationship in working out their own policy.” While this request appears to be a call to action in support

responses he received in a letter to Dr. Fred Kelly, executive director of the Office of Education Wartime Commission, Coffey noted that opinions varied, “but they were heavily weighted on the side of exclusion.” He then described the difficulties that any one university would face if it accepted Japanese Americans, since such a policy might encourage a “minor migration.” Rather, he advocated for the government to set a policy whereby Japanese Americans would be “widely dispersed and no one institution could possibly be criticized, particularly if the request for the acceptance of these students were to come from a federal agency.” President Coffey wrote to Kelly that “Here at the University of Minnesota I have taken the position that we will not admit the students until some plan has been formulated [by the federal government] governing their distribution.”<sup>286</sup> The University was not alone in adopting this approach, but some institutions, including the University of Colorado and Grinnell College, responded quickly to their west coast colleagues’ pleas to support the continuing education of these American citizens.<sup>287</sup>

In an April 1942 memo to President Coffey, Dean Willey advises not admitting Japanese-American citizens until there is a “national policy enunciated by the Army.”<sup>288</sup> While awaiting the federal government’s response, administrators adopted a stance that though Japanese Americans are citizens, the Army “distrusts” them and the Army’s internment policy of nonselective removal necessitates that “the loyal citizen must suffer with any that may be disloyal.” Until the Army can identify which Japanese Americans fall into which category, the memo asserts it is too much to ask universities to take on that burden. There is a recognition that Japanese Americans are facing extreme hardships, but Willey sees this hardship as an inevitability of war. Willey states, “Refusal to accept these students will interrupt their educational courses, but this is not greater hardship or injustice than is being inflicted on thousands of white American citizens who are being removed from college and placed in the army. The mere fact that an individual is a citizen does not insure

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of Japanese-American students’ inclusion and diffusion, it was also a mechanism that allowed, even encouraged, universities to take no action before the government had a plan in place, thus slowing the pace of Japanese Americans’ transfers and admission to academic programs. See also A.W. Christensen UMN and R.W. O’Brien UWash, “Statement of the Rapporteurs of the Group Meeting Held on Wednesday Evening April 29th on the Educational Problems of the Nisei,” 30 April 1942. Foreign Students, 1937-1945. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>286</sup> Coffey to Fred Kelly, 8 April 1942. Alien, Japanese-Americans, 1942-44. President’s Office (Box 50). University Archives. University of Minnesota.

<sup>287</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *Storied Lives: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999): 31.

<sup>288</sup> Willey to Coffey, Memo concerning the problems of aliens at the University, and particularly the Japanese, 3 April 1942. Alien, Japanese-Americans, 1942-44. President’s Office (Box 50). University Archives. University of Minnesota. On this point, Willey writes, “We also discussed the problem of the German refugee. Acceptance of the above position would lead to what might be regarded as a logical inconsistency: refusal to admit American citizens, but willingness to accept aliens (German refugees). There is a difference in the situations, however, in that the German refugee problem is one that has existed for a matter of years, and has been and is being met largely on an individual basis. Whereas the present Japanese problem rises full-blown and involves not individual cases, but what will almost certainly be mass movements of large numbers of people; and these movements will be focused upon any educational institution that admits these Japanese citizens freely.” It is interesting to note that this memo, which purports to be about “aliens,” with the exception of exempting German aliens, very quickly evolves into a set of justifications for rationalizing the exclusion of Japanese American *citizens*, who are described as “the present Japanese problem” and “Japanese citizens.” Ibid.

that he will be exempt from hardship.”<sup>289</sup> Willey also worries that admission of these students will lead to a problematic “flow.” He writes, “It is not probable that the people of Minnesota would look with favor upon an infiltration of Japanese stock into this state.”<sup>290</sup> Anticipating a surge in “anti-Japanese feeling...as we become more involved in the war,” the Coffey administration did not believe the University had the capacity or the responsibility to serve Japanese-American citizens.<sup>291</sup>

In late September 1942, President Coffey reached out to Secretary of War Stimson for an update on the government’s policy on Japanese-American students within as well as outside of the relocation zone. What he learned was that the University of Minnesota was not yet approved to admit Japanese-American students from the relocation zone and would not be approved for at least another year, but could accept Japanese Americans outside of the relocation zone. However, when Japanese-American students were deemed eligible to attend classes on the St. Paul campus, the Coffey administration stated that the Navy opposed this policy due to the proximity of the two campuses and military training taking place across them. As historian Gary Y. Okihiro notes, the doctrine of “military necessity” became a rationale for maintaining Japanese-American exclusion and justifying their limited admission and employment before all restrictions were finally lifted in fall 1944 (the University had received approval in November 1943 to admit and employ Japanese Americans with security clearances).<sup>292</sup>

At the same time that Japanese Americans were largely excluded as students from the University of Minnesota, we learn in one of President Coffey’s speeches on war programs at the University that large numbers of Japanese Americans were coming into the state through the Division of Agricultural Extension at the University of Minnesota. Under Public Law No. 45, Congress “made the agricultural extension services in the various states responsible for the recruitment, training, and placement of agricultural workers.” Among those placements, according to Coffey, were several hundred workers coming in from outside the state, namely “672 Japanese-Americans, 750 Mexicans, and 200 Italian war prisoners.”<sup>293</sup> The University was an active recruiter of the labor of Japanese-American internees, who worked alongside Mexican Braceros and Italian prisoners of war. While President Coffey is well known for stewarding the University through the war years, we know little about what this looked like on the ground or its impacts on a diverse range of American

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<sup>289</sup> Willey to Coffey, Memo concerning the problems of aliens at the University, and particularly the Japanese, 3 April 1942. Alien, Japanese-Americans, 1942-44. President’s Office (Box 50). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>290</sup> Willey to Coffey, Memo concerning the problems of aliens at the University, and particularly the Japanese, 3 April 1942. Alien, Japanese-Americans, 1942-44. President’s Office (Box 50). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>291</sup> Willey to Coffey, Memo concerning the problems of aliens at the University, and particularly the Japanese, 3 April 1942. Alien, Japanese-Americans, 1942-44. President’s Office (Box 50). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

<sup>292</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *Storied Lives: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999): 86-88.

<sup>293</sup> W. C. Coffey, “The War Program of the University,” Address given before Service Clubs of Minneapolis, Minnesota, October and November, 1943, 9-10. Coffey, Walter Castella, 1876-1956, Speeches. War Problems. Office of the President (Box 477). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

citizens, especially for those citizens deemed “alien” and put to work alongside foreign workers (Braceros and prisoners of war).<sup>294</sup>

## Arguments for and against Removing Coffey’s Name from Coffey Hall

Over the course of a long career, Walter Coffey did much to connect the University with rural Minnesota, to transform administrative structures, and to mobilize the resources of the University to support the war effort. The question we seek to weigh in the following sections is whether discriminatory policies formulated and implemented under his administration, which were primarily designed to segregate and exclude Black students from University housing, justify the removal of his name from Coffey Hall.

### Arguments for removing Coffey’s name

#### *Coffey’s deeds and actions*

1. President Walter Coffey sought to abandon President Ford’s nondiscriminatory housing policy, which had made campus housing available to all Minnesota state residents without regard to race. Specifically, President Coffey closed the campus rooming facility (also known as International House, located at 623 Washington Avenue) in 1942 when he discovered that students had integrated the facility. President Coffey’s decision was met with swift resistance across the campus and the larger Twin Cities community. Students and community leaders challenged the decision and requested a meeting with President Coffey to clarify the University’s policy. President Coffey refused to speak with the students or to go on the record about the University’s policy with regard to segregation in campus housing. He maintained his silence and refused to clarify the school’s policy throughout the summer and, in many ways, throughout his tenure.
2. The Board of Regents, possibly feeling pressured by campus protests and on the advice of President Coffey, voted to reopen International House during their July 10, 1942 Board meeting. Four days later, President Coffey assured members of the Citizens’ Committee that an integrated rooming housing option would be available to Black and white students. Simultaneously, Coffey’s administration approved a shadow housing policy that steered Black students seeking on-campus housing toward the International House, but also admitted internally that if Black students were determined to not heed their warnings the University would need to relent and offer them access to all University residential facilities.
3. President Coffey, Dean and Assistant to the President Willey, and the Board of Regents appeared increasingly aware that their actions were on shaky ground, both from the standpoint of the law and public opinion. Internally, they conceded that Black students had a right to access all University

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<sup>294</sup> The notion that Japanese Americans were “alien” pervades the historical record. The clearest example is the fact that the archival file that holds the documentation pertaining to the exclusion and eventual incorporation of Japanese-American students is labeled “Alien-Japanese-Americans, 1942-1944.” Our Task Force has not had a chance to explore the records on Japanese-American agricultural extension workers. There is considerable work to be done around issues of race and labor as they relate to the work of the Department of Agriculture. We would encourage the University to support efforts to conduct research in these archives.

facilities. They did not make the choice to publicly recognize and protect the rights of African-American students at the University of Minnesota.

#### *University values and climate during Coffey's tenure*

4. President Coffey's actions were out of step with existing University policy—upon assuming the presidency, former President Ford's nondiscriminatory housing policy was already four years old. President Coffey's actions were out of step with the campus culture and the well over one thousand petitioners who demanded the University return to a nondiscriminatory housing policy, and he actively moved the University back to the exclusionary policies of the Coffman era.
5. President Coffey's predecessor, President Ford, made the case as early as 1937 that the University of Minnesota and any president of this state institution must take a stand against discrimination, regardless of their personal views, and should support policies that promote the inclusionary values of democracy which are bound up with those of the University. President Coffey's actions were at odds with these values and expectations.
6. President Coffey received letters decrying his policies and asserting that the closure of International House, as well as his silence on the issue, were inconsistent with the values of a public University in a democratic society.
7. When he endorsed policies that created a crisis where one had not existed and then tried to limit Black housing options on campus, President Coffey was aware that "there [we]re country-wide movements designed to check discrimination against negroes and these movements have the backing of important leaders in public life, nationally and locally," and he knew his housing policies were attracting public attention and inspiring protests within and outside of the state. He was also aware of a "[s]urvey of other institutions reveal[ing] that there are numbers of them at which negroes are housed in university dormitories, without any problems arising." Coffey was thus conscious of the ways in which his policies stood against reform efforts pursued by civil rights organizations, and the extent to which other university campuses were working to integrate their housing facilities.
8. As a land-grant university responsible for serving the educational needs of state residents, President Coffey's efforts to deny Black students campus housing on the same terms available to white students undermined their educational experiences and ensured that many Black students did not and would not feel at home or fully part of the community at the University of Minnesota.

#### *University values today*

9. President Coffey's actions are at odds with the University's values today. Fairness and respect, cultivating a diversity of community and ideas, acting with integrity, and fulfilling our land-grant missions are core university values. President Coffey's actions were in breach of these principles. His efforts to reinstitute to the discriminatory housing practices of the Coffman era and his disrespect for the rights of Black and white students to live and study in a diverse community setting are at odds with our values. Moreover, even when President Coffey appeared to accede to demands that he put an end to discriminatory housing practices, he approved administrative efforts that undermined Black student access to campus dormitories. Because this is a land-grant university charged with

serving the needs of all members of our state, President Coffey's actions undermined those efforts and contributed to the feeling that many Black residents have had about the University of Minnesota as an unwelcoming space.

10. Removing Coffey's name will signal to Black citizens of the State of Minnesota, and Black alumni, faculty, staff, and students at the University, that the University is deliberately making a break from its discriminatory past. Blacks in the community associate President Coffey's name with efforts to segregate and exclude Blacks from the University after decades of Black protest. Removing President Coffey's name will demonstrate the University's recognition of and disavowal of President Coffey's actions. It will continue the process of clarifying to African Americans that the University is here to serve all students.
11. Removing Coffey's name will signal the University's commitment to its land-grant mission. This mission rests on serving the state's residents, as well as on taking on and wrestling with the major challenges facing the state and the region. Racial inequality and the prevalence of racial disparities are major issues of concern. Removing Coffey's name will demonstrate that the University is taking account of how its own practices have contributed to these local and regional disparities. Further, it will continue the process of encouraging the University to determine how it should be using its resources and institutional strength to make the University and state more equitable places.
12. Today Coffey Hall is predominantly used for administrative purposes and contains, among many other things, the University of Minnesota Extension programs and the CFANS Offices for International Programs and Diversity and Inclusion. The fact that Coffey took steps during his presidency to prevent Black students from living in University housing and to exclude Japanese Americans from studying at the University is fundamentally at odds with the purpose of these offices. CFANS is engaged in ongoing efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse student body and to work collaboratively with Native American tribes,<sup>295</sup> and the Extension office is also working on initiatives related to outreach to immigrant communities. Removal of Coffey's name would signal a renewed dedication to the inclusion-related goals of CFANS and Extension, as well as the values of diversity of community and ideas, integrity, and equality that are shared by all other services and programs housed within the building.

#### *University climate*

13. The University is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive climate for all of its members. President Coffey's efforts made the University a more hostile and unwelcoming space for Black students. Maintaining the name would be an indicator of the University's failure to take seriously its historic role in fostering exclusion and segregation. Removing the name would support the diversity and inclusion work done by CFANS student services offices housed within the building, contribute to the University's current Campus Climate Initiative to build a culture of inclusion, and invite conversations and new initiatives that push the University to consider the ways in which its current practices hinder or support these goals.

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<sup>295</sup> "Striving for Diversity in CFANS: Students Pushing to Improve the College's Diversity," *Minnesota Daily* 2 December 2018.

14. Removing President Coffey's name will allow the University to recommit itself to the values of fairness and respect in a University that prides itself on its diversity of community and ideas. It will support the University's efforts to make the campus a more diverse, inclusive, fair, just, and welcoming place. Moreover, changing the name is consistent with our current Campus Climate Initiatives.<sup>296</sup>
15. Across the nation, universities and colleges are engaged in critical conversations about how racism played a role in building their institutions. The University of Minnesota is poised to be a leader in the region on these issues. The only way to become such a leader is for the University to excavate its own past and use what it has learned to build a more equitable institution, one that remembers the names of the students and faculty and community members who fought for equality on its campuses while holding itself accountable for those leaders who effectively excluded students on the basis of their race, religion, or political affiliation.

#### *Resources*

16. Many of the public comments objecting to the renaming of buildings specifically cite the waste of resources in such an effort. The Task Force has heard from representatives of the campus facilities/buildings and grounds staff, and are assured that the removal of a building name and/or renaming Coffey Hall would not be burdensome or an expensive process. Indeed, buildings on this campus have been renamed in the past (for example, from a general name indicating the function of the building to the name of a person), and the use of digital maps will mitigate much of the potential confusion.
17. Public comments also reference the "time and expense" of assembling the Task Force making these recommendations. Certainly, significant time and effort were dedicated to this process, but these were by faculty, staff, and students who chose to devote their time and effort to this work. With the exception of a graduate student research assistant hired to assist the Task Force, no additional compensation was received by Task Force members or supporting staff.

#### *Educational merit*

18. The educational value of reckoning with the University's complicated history of race, segregation, and exclusion on campus is substantial. This process of excavating the racial history of the University of Minnesota offers an opportunity for campus wide learning and conversations that extend beyond the campus into the larger community and across the region. President Coffey's case is important to this reckoning. It reminds us that when hard-fought rights are gained there is no assurance that they will be guaranteed or maintained. Black students' rights and access to campus housing were less protected in 1942 than they had been in 1937. The history related in this report and, more specifically, the mechanisms that University administrators used to maintain racial segregation at the University of Minnesota while simultaneously purporting to disavow discrimination are important to learn about and unravel for their educational value.

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<sup>296</sup> <https://campus-climate.umn.edu/about>



19. By removing Coffey's name from the building, the University could create an excellent opportunity to delve deeper into the complicated history of its impact on the state of Minnesota. Because of Coffey's long tenure as dean of the Department of Agriculture prior to his involvement in the segregation of on-campus housing, the renaming of Coffey Hall in particular could be used to unite research, discussion, and education across colleges and campus borders.

#### *Public perception and politics*

20. Renaming would be viewed favorably by a significant segment of our campus community (students, staff, faculty) as being responsive to the harms done by commemorating Coffey, given his efforts to roll back the University's commitment to the fair and equal treatment of all its students, regardless of race, creed, or political affiliation. Renaming would be seen as a positive action to make the campus community more welcoming of students of color.

### **Arguments against removing Coffey's name**

#### *Coffey's deeds and actions*

1. Removal of President Coffey's name could be seen as an expression of disregard of his many important contributions to the University during his long tenure both as the dean of the Department of Agriculture (1921-1941) and as president of the University (1941-1945). Over the course of these formative years for the University, President Coffey built up the department and extension services, and he managed the University during World War Two, which contemporary accounts indicate was a significant managerial and administrative accomplishment. In 1949, in recognition of his years of service, the Board of Regents, on the recommendation of the Committee on University Honors, voted unanimously to name the St. Paul Campus administrative building after President Emeritus Walter Castella Coffey.

#### *University values and climate during Coffey's tenure*

2. We do not know what precipitated President Coffey's reversal of President Ford's policy and the return to President Coffman's approach, but housing segregation was rampant throughout the state of Minnesota during the 1940s. Thus, President Coffey's efforts, first to segregate the University's housing and second to steer Black students to certain housing facilities, were in line with regional housing trends and practices.

#### *University values*

3. President Coffey furthered the University's land-grant mission by sharing University of Minnesota agricultural research with the wider Minnesota community. And as dean of the Department of Agriculture he led important outreach efforts throughout wider Minnesota, supporting the economic development of the entire state. Coffey's achievement in more completely fulfilling the University's land-grant and service mission is impressive. "Never before has the [Experiment Station] so fully enjoyed the confidence and support of the farmers of the state," according to one letter of support.<sup>297</sup> He also managed the University effectively during a period of war. He was a strong

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<sup>297</sup> Andrew Boss, "Dean Coffey in Minnesota," in "Program at the Dinner in Honor of Dean W. C. Coffey, 29th Annual Meeting of the American Society of Animal Production" (1936), pp. 314-17.

steward of the University during his tenure, and is remembered as an engaged professor who prioritized interacting with and mentoring students.

4. Both as dean and president, Coffey advocated vigorously for the University's importance to the state and its future and placed a high value on the importance of higher education for the state's civic and economic life.
5. The University community's established practice has been that former presidents have been recognized by having a building named after them. This policy implicitly understands and accepts that presidents will have aspects of their record that receive praise and other aspects that receive censure, and that they may have been highly popular or less popular during their term in office, but that nonetheless they would receive the honor of a building naming.

#### *University climate*

6. Given Coffey's history and reputation of positive relationships in Greater Minnesota, removing the name could be perceived as a lack of concern for the challenges facing rural Minnesota. Some essays in the 1930s-1940s suggest that Dean Coffey and later President Coffey might have been the best known and most widely recognized University of Minnesota official throughout the state, due in large part to his outreach around the state.

#### *Resources*

7. Resources expended in the renaming process, including the time spent to investigate the actions of specific individuals, could be more effectively directed toward the highest University priorities, toward support for students of color and students in financial need, and toward expanding our awareness of our institutional history, rather than time-consuming debates over building names.

#### *Educational merit*

8. Some fear that by making his name less visible to the University community, its removal will draw attention away from President Coffey's both positive and negative contributions to students, the agricultural community of Minnesota, and the University.
9. Student respondents to the public comments portal who oppose renaming assert that our efforts would be better directed into education about the troubling history of discrimination, exclusion, and segregation.

#### *Public perception and politics*

10. Actions of this type may alienate portions of the public. To some, efforts to remove names, artwork, statues, or other significant structures will be seen as part of an ideological or political agenda.

## Deliberation and Recommendations

The Task Force recommends removing President Coffey's name from Coffey Hall. In addition, whether or not the name is removed from the building, we recommend the installation in the building of a new permanent exhibit about Walter Coffey's complicated legacy.

Our recommendation to remove Walter Coffey's name from Coffey Hall is guided by consideration of the arguments for and against removing the name as well as the five guiding principles—Change, Diversity, Preservation, Exceptionality, Deliberation—established by the Coleman Committee. The full text of these principles appears in section III.2 of this report.

## Change

We are living in a moment when colleges and universities across the country are examining their histories. The “A Campus Divided” exhibit captures several critical histories chronicling exclusion, segregation, and antisemitism at the University of Minnesota. This exhibit began to reshape our understanding of campus history, and the extensive historical analysis of the Task Force has continued that work with regard to the role of President Coffey in the history of housing discrimination on the campus. The Coleman Committee report underscores the fact that institutions such as the University of Minnesota continually undergo change and, most importantly, that “our own understanding and interpretation of campus history can also change over time.” In fact, change does not necessarily mean that the history, culture, values, and traditions must be lost. In order to adhere to our core values today, especially with regard to fairness, respect, and the service mission of a land-grant institution, we believe that changes are sometimes needed to preserve those values. In this case, we believe one appropriate response to President Coffey's efforts is the removal of his name. It is the case that President Coffey promoted other university values, but his efforts to segregate University housing were so contrary to the evolving values of both his times and our own time that the name change is needed as a part of the University's larger efforts to clarify its core values with respect to the centrality of fairness and respect for all of our community members.

## Diversity

Promoting a “diversity of community and ideas” is another core value of the University of Minnesota. As stated in the Coleman Committee report, “[t]hroughout the history of the University of Minnesota, substantial and positive contributions have been made by many unique individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, as befits a public, land-grant university, the diversity of Minnesotans should be a prominent consideration in the process of naming and renaming buildings and significant University assets.” In the process of examining President Coffey's actions, the Task Force has been introduced to a new set of historical change makers who demanded the University serve all state residents on an equal basis. President Coffey supported policies that undermined the diversity of the University and made it a less hospitable place for students of color. Shifting away from President Ford's policy of integration, Coffey's actions sought to keep Blacks out of the campus dormitories.

## Preservation

The Coleman Committee report states, “[c]hanging the name of a building, space, or university asset does not and should not mean erasure. The process to name or rename or remove a name should be considered part of the pedagogical mission of the University.” As the University of Minnesota examines its history and evaluates the role of President Coffey in that history, it is critical that we not lose sight of important factors. First, removing President Coffey's name will neither erase his efforts or the University's efforts to resegregate student housing, nor will it erase the positive aspects of his legacy. The Coleman Committee report also notes that “it is incumbent upon us today to acknowledge the full, living history that formed this University community.” That acknowledgement serves as the foundation for instructive reflection on our past and its relation to our present. Preserving a name must, then, serve this purpose of acknowledgement and

reflection. Yet preserving the name of Coffey Hall would be unlikely to encourage such a process of reflection, which (as the Coleman Committee report notes) is part of the pedagogical function of the University. Rather, removing his name is another step in holding the University accountable for its practices and is a vehicle for, in the words of the Coleman Committee report, “mak[ing] room in our story for those voices held silent in the shadows of the past and to make certain our future conversations include everyone.” To accomplish this end, we must recognize those who challenged and reversed Coffey’s efforts. And we must also endeavor to create and preserve those spaces across the University where we can hear more clearly from community members about how the University can fulfill its service mission equitably and rectify those places where our policies and practices undermine that mission. Second, removing President Coffey’s name meets our pedagogical mission and demonstrates that we are a learning community. Removal is not erasure. As the University learns new things about its institutional history the University can respond in ways that preserve that history; that encourage critical inquiry about those moments when we have not been true to our mission; and that recognize hidden voices.

### Exceptionality

Removing the name from a building is a serious matter, and the Coleman Committee adopted the University of Michigan’s premise that “it is impossible to hold someone accountable for failing to share our contemporary ideas and values. Instead, the question must be what ideas, values, and actions were possible in a particular historical context.” Our colleagues at Yale similarly state, “no generation stands alone at the end of history with perfect moral hindsight.” Considering President Coffey in light of these considerations adds to our reasons for recommending that his name should be removed. Discrimination in the regional housing market was rampant before and during President Coffey’s tenure, meaning students of color had few places to turn to find housing, including in the area around campus. After a decade of student protest against racism on campus, President Ford set the University on a new trajectory by integrating campus dormitories. President Coffey reversed that trajectory. This shift was met with protest from many quarters of the University, so it is not that his policies were simply out of step with our time, but they were increasingly out of step with his own time. Whatever relief and goodwill toward the University might have emerged in the African American community because of President’s Ford’s new trajectory, President Coffey returned the University to discriminatory practices and put that improved relationship at risk. His situation was truly exceptional in that he assumed the presidency at a point when housing integration was the explicit campus policy--no president before him had assumed the office on those terms. He had an opportunity to deepen this commitment toward equal treatment, but he did not grasp it. On the St. Paul campus, President Coffey’s principal legacy may be more related to his work as dean of the Department of Agriculture, but the administration building on the St. Paul campus was also named after Coffey in recognition of his service as president. President Coffey had a productive legacy in other areas of his administrative career, and we can and should value these accomplishments, but he also failed to fulfill the mission of the University in ways that are exceptional and profoundly hurtful to diverse communities and to the highest ideals and aspirations of the institution. President Coffey’s determination to reopen International House is not indicative of an evolution on these issues. Rather, reopening International House was an aspect of the concerted efforts of his administration to divert Black students into campus spaces that would not threaten the administration’s efforts to maintain white campus dormitories. President Coffey’s actions were as deeply troubling at the time as they are from the vantage point of our times, and for these reasons serious consideration should be given to removal of his name.

## Deliberation

As we stated at greater length in section III.3 on the principle of deliberation, we do not seek to impose our expectations from today arbitrarily on individuals of the past. Today's values should guide what and who we wish to honor with the distinction of a naming. We also recognize that individuals need to be assessed within the context of their own time and what was imaginable and possible then. We must both measure actions against the norms and practices of their day and evaluate in what way the values they stood for might be in conflict with those of our own times. Individuals operate within institutions and systems that impose constraints on actions, but choices are nonetheless still available to individuals, particularly those exercising power and discretion in their administrative roles. Retaining a name on a building does not mean endorsing all of the more objectionable and problematic actions of an individual. Likewise, to remove a name from a building, to change a name, does not mean saying the contributions have no value or are worthy of no recognition. Collectively reckoning with our institutional history provides an occasion for emphasizing that individuals, particularly leaders with significant authority in their roles, are responsible for their own decisions.

The Task Force members have, within the constraints of time and of their charge, conducted thorough research both in the historical archives and in the collection of perspectives on campus values and renaming. In accordance with the principle of deliberation articulated in the Coleman Committee report, this Task Force has considered the naming and potential renaming of Coffey Hall "via a careful, informed, inclusive, and deliberative process." The Task Force has learned about the contributions of Walter Coffey during his years of service as dean and president at the University. We have also considered the ways in which, despite significant opposition on campus and off campus and despite moves toward integration at peer institutions, Coffey sought to segregate student housing at the University after the previous president had stated clearly that all University facilities were to be available to all students without regard to race. We recognize that our recommendation to remove Walter Coffey's name from Coffey Hall will not be supported by every constituency, but we believe it is the best course of action.

## V. Conclusion

Having made our recommendations with respect to the four individual cases, we take up two final considerations arising from this intensive period of research and deliberation. First, we call attention to crucial aspects of University history that are not discussed above but which warrant further investigation. And second, we underscore the importance of thinking beyond naming and offer an additional set of initiatives for the consideration of campus academic administration that is aimed at linking past practices and actions and our University history with contemporary issues across our campus.

These potential initiatives are offered in response to the [questions posed by the president and provost](#) in their September 13, 2018, response to the Coleman Committee report which announces the formation of the Task Force: "How do we link past practices and actions, our University history, with contemporary issues across our campuses? Where are there opportunities for scholarship to build upon the "landscape of memory"—as some describe the at times politically contentious nature of remembering the past? How should we institutionalize and support these reflective practices?" We turn in the next section to consider the

types of initiatives and activities that help address these questions and support and sustain this important work.

## V.1 Beyond naming: initiatives to continue reckoning with our history

The naming or renaming of a building or other significant University asset is an important consideration as we reckon with and learn from our history. But the question of renaming is only a part of a broader set of possible initiatives that can enrich our knowledge and understanding about discriminatory actions and patterns of inequity and assist efforts to reform institutional practices and build a more welcoming, inclusive university. Deciding whether or not to change a name should be the beginning rather than the endpoint of historical inquiry and reflection.

The Coleman Report calls for a permanent committee on university history, similar to those adopted at several peer institutions, that would have as part of its responsibilities this kind of “beyond naming” work. In their charge to the Task Force, President Kaler and Provost Hanson indicated their intent to implement that recommendation. The work of that new committee, the Advisory Committee to the President on University History, will commence as the work of this Task Force concludes.

We understand the matters that we discuss here will be considered more fully by the permanent Advisory Committee to the President on University History, which will include members of this Task Force and other University stakeholders. We strongly recommend that the University dedicate resources to these efforts in line with what we have seen at peer institutions such as Brown University, Georgetown University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to allow the Advisory Committee to the President on University History to have significant impact. Dedicated resources will be a clear sign of the University’s commitment to the importance of examining and learning from our history if we are to realize and remain true to our core values.

As a Task Force, we did not vote on the individual items discussed below. Rather, as a group we voted to endorse the spirit of the types of initiatives outlined here. Thus, these items should be considered as the kinds of possible initiatives the University, through the Advisory Committee to the President on University History, could pursue as it continues to uncover and draw insights from our history. It will be the work of that committee, with dedicated resources made available, to discuss, evaluate, weigh, and prioritize possible initiatives for the University.

### V.1.A. Areas for future research in University history

The focus of this report has been on documented instances of racial discrimination, which includes antisemitism, by officers of the University. It is important to also note that the University was built upon processes of indigenous exclusion that went almost unremarked upon in the documentary record of campus life during the period under consideration here. These processes were barely mentioned because so many Minnesotans (and other Americans) took them as a given. In this regard, it bears emphasis that the University of Minnesota is a land-grant university. By the provisions of the 1862 Morrill Act, the federal government endowed the University with “public lands”—lands that had been only recently expropriated from the Dakota and Ojibwe nations. The final violent act in that expropriation came in the Dakota-U.S. War of 1862, the very year the Morrill Act was passed. The University would proceed to buy and develop additional land that had

been expropriated from the Ojibwe and Dakota. To the extent that University officers and even the faculty, staff, and students who protested racial discrimination reflected on this expropriation, they considered it to be ancient history that was no longer at issue.

And yet it was not ancient history. It had occurred mere decades before, and well within the memory of indigenous communities. Native communities in those decades were passing along knowledge of their lands, history, and rights to future generations. In the 1960s and through the present, that knowledge would come more clearly into view for non-Natives in Minnesota and at the University as Native communities around the state and in the Twin Cities enjoined the state and the University to serve the needs of indigenous people. This is a history that must be recounted and collectively owned as part of the University's history.

Also absent in this report is any sustained discussion of other forms of discrimination, notably but not only the existence of gender- or sex-based discrimination and inequity in the period of the University's history upon which we have focused. We recognize the need for investigations into the treatment of female job applicants, faculty, and staff across University history, as well as the ways in which there were different expectations of and different opportunities made available to women and men as students. There is also an opportunity for the University to consider women for naming opportunities on buildings and significant public spaces on campus. Currently, eight buildings on the Twin Cities campus are named for women (Boynton Hall, Comstock Hall, Sanford Hall, Shevlin Hall, McNeal Hall, the Freeman Aquatic Center, the Thompson Center for Environmental Management, and the Barker Center for Dance). Two other buildings are named jointly for a woman and man (Ridder Arena, Weaver-Densford Hall). Two campus buildings named for women are no longer standing: Powell Hall (razed in 1981) and Norris Hall (razed in 2010). Reconsideration of building names, when determined to be an appropriate action, may open additional opportunities to recover and acknowledge women's experiences at and contributions to the University.<sup>298</sup>

More time would have been necessary to further explore these issues and the challenges faced by other populations that have historically faced discrimination on the basis of their sexuality or disability or other status. As became apparent in our exploration of President Coffey and the International House, there is a need for more research into the treatment, experience, and surveillance of international students at the University during and after the war.<sup>299</sup> A more sustained examination of our institutional history would enable the University to account for ways in which its practices may have contributed to disparities on campus and across the state of Minnesota, and beyond its limits. Through such efforts, the University can better determine how it should use its resources and institutional strength to redress past injustices and work to make the University and state more equitable places.

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<sup>298</sup> Ryan Mattke's ArcGIS [color-coded map](#) shows buildings on campus and whether they are named for men or women.

<sup>299</sup> For example, Professor A. N. Christensen, the adviser of foreign students, volunteered "to cooperate in any way possible... to give information concerning many of [the international students]." He continued, "It might even be advisable for me to confer with representatives of the Federal Bureau of Investigation or other offices so that I may be better informed as to the status of certain of our foreign students." A.N. Christensen to Dean Malcolm Willey, 16 December 1941. Foreign Students, 1937-1945. Office of the President (Box 14). University Archives. University of Minnesota Libraries.

### V.1.B. Naming initiatives

Believing that questions of renaming necessarily entail thinking critically about the relationship between past and present, we point toward a number of ways and means by which such educational enterprises might be conducted going forward. These are only intended as examples. We mainly seek here to stress that questions of renaming can and should inspire searching inquiry and sustained public dialogues that engage all members of the University community.

Although we were asked to investigate the names of four buildings, the name of Pioneer Hall came up repeatedly in our research and deliberation. In view of the current renovation of the building, taking up the question of renaming might be made a part of a broader educational project surrounding the history of racial discrimination and exclusion at the University of Minnesota. One reason Pioneer Hall was so central to our work is because it was one of the main sites of conflict over the exclusion of Black students from University housing. But Pioneer Hall also came up in our deliberations because President Coffman named it to reflect a “mythologized national and state history.” As Mark Soderstrom explains, Coffman chose the name “Pioneer” to encourage students to identify with Europeans who, in his view, brought civilization to what became Minnesota.<sup>300</sup> In celebrating that history, Coffman in effect dismissed the Dakota and Ojibwe societies that predated European settlement and ignored both the free and enslaved African Americans who settled in Minnesota. Given the central role that Pioneer Hall played in both the articulation and the implementation of racially discriminatory policies at the University, as well as the opportunity provided by its renovation, it presents a case ripe for review.

Dean and Assistant to the President Malcolm Willey, whose name appears on Willey Hall, was another powerful administrative figure in “A Campus Divided” and the Task Force’s research. Willey worked closely with President Coffey as the latter worked to create segregated housing on campus. When this effort failed, Willey played a leading role setting up what might be labeled shadow systems that attempted to deny African-American students equal access to all student housing facilities. Willey was also instrumental in rationalizing the University’s decision to decline the admission of Japanese-American students during World War II. Based on the material in “A Campus Divided” and in the reports above, we believe a review and possible reconsideration of Malcolm Willey’s legacy at the University is warranted.

Renaming a campus building, when called for by an examination and analysis of the historical record, also gives us the opportunity to consider honoring those individuals who embody the ideals and aspirations of the University in the past and present. It also offers an opportunity to honor the memory of African-American and Jewish students who were activists and worked to combat political surveillance and segregated housing such as Charlotte Crump, Helene Hilyer, Lester Breslow, Robert Loevinger, Eric Severeid, and Lee Loevinger, among many others who might be noted.<sup>301</sup> The University could also consider expanding the circle of names to include those with a connection to Minnesota who had powerful impacts on society. For example,

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<sup>300</sup> Mark Soderstrom, “Weeds in Linnaeus’s Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900-45,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004), 15.

<sup>301</sup> The Minnesota Student Association petition for renaming Coffman Memorial Union states that “MSA recommends renaming Coffman Memorial Union as Memorial Union, in memoriam to the voices lost during Coffman’s administration as well as a neutral name comparable to the St. Paul Student Center.”



Ohiyesa, known later in life as Dr. Charles Eastman, was a Dakota person from Minnesota who used education to advance the causes of American Indian people during some of their most difficult years. Dred and Harriet Scott were pathbreaking advocates for African-American freedom, and arguably among the most important African-American historical figures ever to reside in Minnesota. We present these names as examples. The Coleman Committee report proposed a procedure to generate ideas from across the campus community and state about naming possibilities, to help encourage campus and public involvement in the process.

### V.1.C. Built environment, signage, and land recognition initiatives

Ongoing examinations of our institutional history present opportunities to use the University environment to educate the campus community and visitors about our history. A variety of initiatives might be considered to further these ends.

There are many ways and means to add markers to our campus in order to promote reflection on the history of the University, provide recognition of injustice in the past and present, and foster inclusion. Exhibits and plaques could be placed strategically around campus to raise awareness about this history and its legacy for the University. Such strategies would ensure that history will not be “erased.”

Whether the building names in this report are changed or not, public history installations at each of the buildings would encourage visitors to grapple with the history of race, antisemitism, and student surveillance detailed above.<sup>302</sup> We also suggest that “A Campus Divided” be made a permanent exhibit and consider Coffman Memorial Union the optimal site. A number of comments submitted on the online form of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History, as well as comments submitted at the exhibit, also supported that idea. Doing so would enable ongoing critical reflection about the history thus far uncovered and inspire new research. The University could also create a more visible and extensive online digital exhibit.<sup>303</sup>

A number of campuses in North America (among them Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver) have begun making their street and other signs bilingual in both English and the local indigenous language. Exploring whether a move toward bilingual Dakota-English signage at the University (or possibly Dakota-Ojibwe-English signage) would be a powerful indication that the University recognizes that Native people are part of the present and the future of the University and the state. Any consideration of such a signage policy should be arrived at with representatives of the Dakota and Ojibwe communities.

Universities across the continent have adopted land recognition statements, often used at events, to declare that they recognize the original caretakers of the lands on which they are located and which sustain them.

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<sup>302</sup> The Minnesota Student Association petition on the renaming of Coffman Memorial Union “requests placement of a plaque inside Coffman Memorial Union that denotes the history of the building and the legacy of President Lotus Coffman, including all contributions to the University.”

<sup>303</sup> In spring 2018 the provost allocated \$4,000 for the digital exhibit. Emerita Professor Riv-Ellen Prell provided research funds to continue research for the website. To date, the exhibit webpage has been created and maintained on a volunteer basis by Emerita Professor Prell, but with funding this could be an even more valuable source of knowledge about our past.

For the University of Minnesota, this would be both the Dakota and Ojibwe nations. It would be important for any recognition statements to refer also to the ongoing presence of Native people here in the state and on campus. Any consideration of a land recognition statement should be arrived at with representatives of the Dakota and Ojibwe communities.

#### V.1.D. Archival and institutional historical initiatives

To facilitate further research into the history of the University, the University Libraries requires resources to collect, arrange, describe, and digitize records originating from the systemwide administrative offices of the Board of Regents, the Office of the President, and the Office of the Provost and units that have reported to that office (e.g., Student Affairs, Student Unions, Graduate School; Real Estate) that currently are not accessible. These records, once available, will reveal significant aspects of the history of this institution. Previous efforts to make available records from the Office of the President were successful in providing greater awareness of and access to these materials, including contributing to the inclusion of many of the documents featured in the “A Campus Divided” exhibit. In addition, resources for the Givens Collection of African American Literature to build on collections of local African-American leaders (e.g., Josie Johnson, Professor John Wright, Lou Bellamy) that reflect alternative views of the University and attract community interest would add considerably to our understanding of the University’s past. The collections of the University Archives and the Givens Collection continue to grow and require ongoing care. Annual accessions of new materials in both paper and digital formats increase the physical volume of records and the need for dedicated attention to managing our history and making it accessible to the University community and its stakeholders.<sup>304</sup>

#### V.1.E. Curricular initiatives

The Task Force discussed areas where additional faculty expertise could aid the work, as the president and provost’s letter announcing the Task Force put it, to link our past actions with contemporary issues across our campuses and to explore opportunities for scholarship to explore the “landscape of memory.” These include a public historian in the Race, Indigeneity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Initiative ([RIGS](#)) dedicated to the history and heritage of the University and its communities; a RIGS scholar whose research focuses on the Upper Midwest; and a position in Dakota studies. Positions such as these, endowed if possible to ensure their permanency, could be located at any of the campuses of the University of Minnesota system.<sup>305</sup>

We also see opportunities for course development related to the history and public memory of the University, including courses that actively engage students, faculty, alumni, and community members in continuing to explore the institution’s archival holdings. These courses could be hosted at any system campus and perhaps made available cross-campus through instructional technology. As described more fully below, the oral history project dedicated to those whose lives have been touched by the University in positive and negative ways could be linked to one or more of these courses.

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<sup>304</sup> To further these initiatives, the future Advisory Committee to the President on University History should consult with Libraries and Archives leadership and staff to determine what kinds of services or staff would best facilitate this work.

<sup>305</sup> The University of Wisconsin-Madison recently established a [director of public history](#) position as part of its ongoing efforts to understand and reckon with its institutional history.

### V.1.F. Student initiatives

As the University continues and deepens its efforts to build a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive campus, a range of initiatives might be considered. Our investigations confirm that work remains to be done to confront and redress the legacies of past exclusions and discriminatory policies that are part of our institutional history.

We are encouraged by and support efforts at the U to improve access and support for underrepresented populations, students of color, and American Indian students, including through scholarship, student services, and housing and living-learning-community assistance, and we appreciate the significant efforts in the current *Driven* campaign to increase student support and improve the student experience. We encourage initiatives that challenge the barriers to access and graduation that non-white, first generation, economically disadvantaged, and transfer students frequently face.

Some institutions have concluded that standardized admissions tests have had distorting effects on admissions—disadvantaging, for example, students who are financially unable to participate in test preparation services or first-generation students, often students of color or American Indian, who do not have the experience of parents or relatives who are college graduates to draw upon, and thus are less likely to meet admissions test score expectations. In response, these institutions have moved toward test-optional admissions. As this is not an issue we have examined in our work, we do not make any specific recommendations regarding the advisability of test-optional admissions, but we nonetheless see the exploration of the potential advantages and disadvantages of this kind of admissions process as a matter worthy of discussion by the permanent Advisory Committee to the President on University History.

The Heritage Studies and Public History Program (HSPH) at the University of Minnesota was created two years ago. This interdisciplinary graduate program, jointly stewarded by two colleges, recognizes the turn in the affiliated professions to work for greater access, diversity, and inclusion in the institutions which preserve and publicly interpret our histories. The program was developed in partnership with the Minnesota Historical Society and has received competitively awarded funding from the Mellon Foundation. Both master's degree and Ph.D. minor students in HSPH are trained by working collaboratively across institutions and directly engaged with stakeholder communities, in museum practice, public history, historic preservation, archival practice, and archaeology. As such, these students would be ideal participants in many of the potential initiatives outlined here, and the program itself could serve as an organizing hub for the initiatives.

### V.1.G. Community engagement opportunities

The work on campus history also presents numerous community engagement opportunities. For example, an oral history project devoted to University history, not only with students, staff, faculty, and administrators, but also with people who have been touched by the University in both positive and negative ways, could advance our knowledge and scholarship. Similarly, speakers series and conferences could bring recognized experts to campus who would be of interest to alumni and community members.

## V.2 The International House as a lesson in naming

We conclude with a reflection on the complicated history of the International House. (A more extensive recounting of this rooming house is in section IV.4 of this report on Walter Coffey.) It is valuable to revisit the

International House as we bring this investigation to a close because it reminds us of the power, politics, and contested nature of naming. The meanings and values that we attribute to the names on buildings matter.

In 1942, the International House symbolized two very different visions of the University. From the Coffey administration's perspective, the International House would be a segregated, University-run rooming house that would solve "the Negro problem" at the University of Minnesota. From the perspective of many students, the International House would embody the values of interracialism, internationalism, and brotherhood.

When these two visions clashed, the University closed down the International House, perhaps hoping the closure would stifle further pressure for purposeful integration at the University of Minnesota. In the end, the University reopened the rooming house and made important concessions, but it did not return the name, and the more idealistic meanings of racial equality it held for students, to the building. Instead administrators would refer to the rooming house simply by its street address. Building names matter and the history that led those names to be placed on a building are at times bound up with other histories that silence or have been silenced. Historical examination can reveal those silences. Not until "A Campus Divided" was the history of the International House again made part of the campus's collective awareness.

Like the International House, the names affixed to the four buildings under review in this report were intended to reveal and honor some histories and values connected to the individuals, but they also conceal other histories and values connected to the names. Although removing a name in the case of the International House might be interpreted as an attempt to hide or erase history, removing a name can also help recover history and make it more visible. The Task Force has recommended the removal of the names from the four buildings under review—an action we believe should be exceptional, in concurrence with the Coleman Committee report. Removing names in these instances helps reveal—not conceal—history. It recovers the complex history of four powerful individuals whose names will not be forgotten, and in the process reveals both the positive and negative aspects of their legacies. It also recovers the history and reveals the names of students, faculty, administrators, and community members who sought to make the University a more equitable institution.

Work of this kind, as we wrote above, requires us to employ empathy, as we avoid either sweeping condemnations or commendations when we examine the actions and words of generations past. We must also employ humility, as we ask ourselves what values and actions we would have held and exercised at that time and how future generations will regard our actions and values. Considerations of naming, unnamings, and renaming entail more than affixing or removing names from a physical structure. Rightly understood, they are integral parts of both a public reckoning with troubling aspects of the University's institutional life and a restatement of and recommitment to fundamental institutional values.

# APPENDIX

## Members of the Task Force on Building Names and Institutional History

### Members

- Susanna Blumenthal, William L. Prosser Professor of Law and Professor of History, UMTC, Co-Chair
- John Coleman, Dean, College of Liberal Arts, UMTC, Co-Chair
- David Chang, Distinguished McKnight University Professor, History; Chair, American Indian Studies
- Greg Donofrio, Associate Professor, Architecture; Director and co-founder, Heritage Studies & Public History, UMTC
- Michael Gaudio, Professor and Chair, Art History, UMTC
- Katherine Hayes, Associate Professor, Anthropology; affiliated faculty, American Indian Studies; co-founder, Heritage Studies & Public History, UMTC
- William Jones, Professor, History; faculty, Heritage Studies & Public History, UMTC
- Malinda Lindquist, Associate Professor, History; affiliated faculty, African American & African Studies, UMTC
- Leslie Morris, Professor, German, Nordic, Slavic & Dutch; Director, Center for Jewish Studies, UMTC
- Madyson Turner, President, Student Unions & Activities Board of Governors, UMTC
- Kelly Wallin, Council of Graduate Students representative to Student Senate Consultative Committee, UMTC

### Advisors and Consultants

- Erik Moore, Head, University Archives & Co-Director, University Digital Conservancy, University of Minnesota Libraries
- Riv-Ellen Prell, Emerita Professor of American Studies, UMTC, Advisor
- John Wright, Professor of English and African American & African Studies, UMTC, Advisor

### Research and staff support

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- Julie Reuvers, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the President, University of Minnesota
- Katharine Tyler, Assistant to the Provost, Office of the Executive Vice President & Provost, University of Minnesota

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