

Minnesota Student Association
Resolution to Rename Coffman
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Concerning: The name of Coffman Memorial Union, the legacy of President Lotus Coffman, and the “A Campus Divided: **Progressives, Anticommunists, Racism and Antisemitism at the University of Minnesota 1930-1942**” exhibit¹ in Andersen Library;

Whereas: Former President Lotus Coffman was the architect of publicly financed, segregated student housing at the University of Minnesota,² despite segregation being illegal under Minnesota law and uncommon in northern higher education institutions;

Whereas: President Coffman targeted and monitored African American and Jewish students during the 1930s and oversaw surveillance of Jewish and leftist student activists during their time at the university;³

Whereas: In August 1935, President Coffman and the Board of Regents refused to integrate Pioneer Hall in, stating that the “housing of Negro students in Pioneer Hall...would not be conducive to their best interests, nor to the interests of the other students who may be residing there;”⁴

Whereas: Other senior administrators including, but not limited to Comptroller William Middlebrook, President Walter Coffey and Dean of Student Affairs Edward Nicholson, created and enforced similarly discriminatory and harmful policies, indicative of an institutional problem at the University of Minnesota;

¹ <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/>

² <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/person/lotus-d-coffman/>

³ <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/person/lotus-d-coffman/>

⁴ <http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/index.php/text/coffman-rejects-integrating-pioneer-hall/>

Whereas: The main student union at the University of Minnesota is dedicated to Coffman for his support of student activities. However, Coffman deliberately excluded minority students from student activities;

Whereas: Eight of the University's multicultural groups are housed on 2nd floor of Coffman Memorial Union;

Whereas: Foot traffic in Coffman on an average business day is 15,232, during an average business week is 77,107, and during an average business month is 327,143;

Whereas: During the 2016-2017 academic year, the University's Campus Climate Workgroup established the Bias Response and Referral Network, a system that "works to respond to bias incidents on the Twin Cities Campus in ways that **support those most impacted**, promote education and dialogue, and affirm the University's commitment to equity and diversity, free speech, and academic freedom;"⁵

Whereas: The Campus Climate Workgroup also launched a poster campaign titled, "We All Belong Here."⁶ This campaign seeks to promote tolerance through the following highly visible messages: "Our differences drive our greatness;" "Respect everyone every day;" "Rise above intolerance;" "Stand up to injustice;" and "Strive to be inclusive;"⁷

Whereas: The persistence of Coffman's name not only makes the University of Minnesota's student union less welcoming, but it also directly contradicts the "We All Belong Here" campaign, as former President Coffman actively divided students and explicitly stated that not all types of students belong at the institution;

Whereas: The University is a public land-grant institution and held to a higher obligation to serve the communities of Minnesota;

Whereas: The University has an opportunity to address its past and ensure that future honors bestowed by the U reflect inclusive values. As stated in the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents Mission Statement, "the University strives to sustain an open exchange of ideas in an environment that provides an atmosphere of mutual respect, free from racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and intolerance;"⁸

Whereas: Universities throughout the United States, both public and private, are examining the histories of past donors and leaders and concluding that some of these buildings should be renamed;

Whereas: Issues pertaining to racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia are still present on campus today;

⁵ <https://bias-response.umn.edu>

⁶ <https://campus-climate.umn.edu/content/'we-all-belong-here'-campaign-launches>

⁷ <https://bias-response.umn.edu>

⁸ http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Mission_Statement.pdf

Whereas: According to the Bias Response and Referral Network Year-One Report (2017)⁹, BRRN received 76 bias incident reports between February 2016 and February 2017. 25 bias incidents were related to religious-based discrimination and 16 were related to race-based discrimination.

Whereas: 22 of the BRRN-reported incidents were reported in one month, February 2017. 9 of the 22 were categorized as “anti-Semitic” incidents, including swastikas and Nazi propaganda on University property. This trend reflects a national rise in anti-Semitic and bias-related incidents;

Therefore: Minnesota Student Association (MSA) requests the removal of Lotus Coffman’s name from Coffman Memorial Union.

Therefore: MSA requests the establishment of a committee of relevant and representative **students**, staff, and faculty to select a new name for the student union that aligns with the University’s current stated principles -- to be done by the end of calendar year 2018.

Therefore: MSA recommends renaming Coffman Memorial Union as *Memorial Union*, a neutral name comparable to the St. Paul Student Center.

Therefore: MSA 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.

Therefore: MSA requests establishing a permanent “A Campus Divided” exhibit on campus; incoming students should understand the complete history of the university and have the opportunity to engage with the exhibit.

Therefore: MSA requests complete acknowledgement of past University presidents contributions on the Presidential History website.¹⁰

Therefore: MSA supports future discussions on renaming buildings connected to individuals who perpetuated similar discriminatory policies as President Lotus Coffman.

⁹ <https://bias-response.umn.edu/sites/bias-response.umn.edu/files/brnn-year-one-report.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://president.umn.edu/about/presidential-history>

