

From: The Building Name Review Committee  
To: Chancellor Carol Christ  
Re: Proposal to Remove the Name from Kroeber Hall

October 30, 2020

Dear Chancellor Christ:

The Building Name Review Committee (BNRC) has reviewed the proposal to un-name Kroeber Hall submitted to the Committee. Although the proposal's authors were not identified, the proposal was endorsed by (a) members of the UC Berkeley Native American Advisory Council to Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion, (b) 8 members of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee, and (c) several other members of the UC Berkeley community, including the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, the Senior Advisor to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, the Dean of the Division of Social Sciences, the Executive Director of the American Indian Graduate Program, a Distinguished Affiliated Scholar with the Center for the Study of Law & Society, and a doctoral student. In response to the proposal, the Building Name Review Committee received almost 600 comments, 85.4% of which supported removing the Kroeber name from the building.

After studying the proposal and carefully evaluating all information presented, our committee voted unanimously to recommend that the name be removed. If the recommendation to un-name the building is approved, we further recommend that units in Kroeber Hall, including the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Art Practice, the Museum of Anthropology as well as Native American groups on campus and in the Bay Area, be involved in exhibits and/or events that engage critically with the history of Professor Kroeber and the reasons why the name was removed.

The Kroeber Hall proposal is the fourth one that BNRC has reviewed, following proposals in relation to Boalt Hall, Barrows Hall, and LeConte Hall. As delineated in the subsequent section on Committee deliberations, although the committee was unanimous in its decision to remove the name from Kroeber Hall, the discussion to un-name Kroeber Hall raised several issues and revealed serious shortcomings of the BNRC process as it is now constituted. We will be writing a separate letter about this at a future date.

### **Building Name Review Committee Principles**

The legacy of a building's namesake should be in alignment with the values and mission of the university. The values of UC Berkeley are expressed in our [Principles of Community](#). In deciding whether to remove a building name, we believe that the committee should be guided by two principles:

1. As stated in the [Regents of the University of California Policy 4400: University of California Diversity Statement](#) :

*[T]he University of California renews its commitment to the full realization of its historic promise to recognize and nurture merit, talent, and achievement by supporting diversity and equal opportunity in its education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity. The University particularly acknowledges the acute need to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented. We view as our intellectual and ethical responsibility the promotion of an inclusive, global perspective on the peoples and cultures of the world, particularly in light of scholarly traditions that may omit, ignore, or silence the perspectives of many groups, such as ethnic minorities; people from non-European nations; women; lesbian, gay and transgender people; and disabled people, among others.*

2. Whether or not a building's name is removed, we believe it is historically and socially valuable to retain a public record, perhaps in the form of a plaque in the building, that notes the building's history of naming and the reasons for removing the name.

### **Building Name Review Process**

Per the process established by the Building Name Review Committee, the committee initiates a review once it receives a proposal. The proposal must make a strong, stand-alone case for why a building name should be removed.

Once a case goes forward, the review process includes wide-spread dissemination of the proposal via emails and posts on Berkeley websites, a comment period, the posting of comments, time for additional research or public meetings (if needed), and finally a report with recommendations for the Chancellor about the proposal.

### **Kroeber Hall Proposal**

The Kroeber Hall proposal begins with an acknowledgement that Kroeber Hall sits on the unceded land of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone. The idea of un-naming Kroeber Hall began at least a decade ago and was even the subject of an editorial in *The Daily Californian* on September 14, 2018; the editorial criticized the campus for not changing "building names that have roots in racist and oppressive histories" after two and a half years of the existence of this committee's predecessor.

Kroeber Hall is named in honor of Alfred Louis Kroeber, considered one of the most influential American anthropologists in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After studying under Franz Boas, Kroeber was a recipient of the first PhD in anthropology from Columbia University and was the founding member of the Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley, serving on the faculty from 1902 to his retirement in 1946. During his

time at UC Berkeley, he also served as the Director of the UC Museum of Anthropology. Author of more than 500 articles and books, Professor Kroeber was a leading scholar of indigenous peoples, including the Native American peoples in California. One of his major works is entitled the *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, 1925).

The proposal articulated several reasons for un-naming Kroeber Hall. First, Kroeber collected or authorized the collection of the remains of Native American ancestors from grave sites and curated a repository of these human remains for research study. This practice, labeled “Salvage Anthropology” by some scholars, is now illegal. The proposal argues that although this practice was not illegal when Kroeber engaged in it, it was immoral and unethical, even for the time. Second, Kroeber and colleagues took custody of a Native American man called “Ishi,” who they allowed to live in the Museum of Anthropology; Ishi was given a janitorial position at the museum and used as “a living exhibit” for museum visitors. He was also taught racial slurs that were used to refer to Asian and African Americans. Third, Kroeber’s claim that the Ohlone people were culturally extinct contributed to the decision by the Federal Government to delist the Ohlone from the national register of Native peoples, leading to the Muwekma Ohlone tribe having no land and no political power. Fourth, given this history, Kroeber is a public symbol of the discrimination against and disdain for Native Americans. A building named in his honor is an ongoing affront to Native Americans generally, an emblem of hostility to Native American members of the UC Berkeley community, and is not in keeping with Regent’s policy 4400 listed above.

### **Our Committee’s Outreach and Deliberations**

The Kroeber Hall proposal was received on July 1 and on July 6, a message was sent to UC Berkeley faculty, staff, and students indicating that the proposal was available on the BNRC’s website and soliciting responses to the proposal. We received 595 responses and the Committee met on October 7 to deliberate. As with the previous proposals, many of the public comments were Twitter-length (“racist”; “Let’s do what’s right”), or simply restated general principles and values. Others were quite detailed, substantively sourced, and rigorously argued. Noteworthy was a submission from the Chairwoman of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, on behalf of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribal Council, in support of un-naming. Some of the claims made in the proposal were supported by some and contested by others. Commenters agreed that the problem was somehow “historical,” but they did not agree what that history is, how to interpret it, and how it should be applied to the question of whether to un-name the building. Those in favor of un-naming tended to see the question as presenting a stark, self-evidently moral conclusion. As one commenter put it, without elaboration, no building should be named after Kroeber, given his history. Those opposed tended to emphasize the nuances of Kroeber’s career arc, the differences of “his time” and “context,” to describe

un-naming as “erasing history,” or to argue that focusing on problematic individuals distracts attention from systemic problems. In short, this proposal raised a number of complicated issues that did not surface as crisply in the proposals on Boalt, Barrows, and LeConte Halls. We briefly summarize these issues below.

The great majority of the comments (85%) were in favor of un-naming Kroeber Hall. Many of the responses were short and included rationales echoing the points of view in the proposal, related to decolonizing the campus and making the campus a safe and welcoming space for Native Americans and other people of color. This view was evident in the comment from the Native American members of our community:

“We are Native students currently enrolled in various programs at University of California, Berkeley including: Berkeley Law, School of Social Welfare, Berkeley Letters & Science, Environmental Science, Policy and Management, Engineering, etc. We welcome the Native American Advisory Council’s proposal to un-name Kroeber Hall as an opportunity for UC Berkeley to take concrete steps towards healing its relationship with California Tribal Communities and fostering a more welcoming environment for current Native students.

Sincerely,

All UC Berkeley Native student organizations

The American Indian Graduate Student Association

The Berkeley Native American Law Student Association

The Indigenous and Native Coalition- Recruitment and Retention Center”

A number of the individuals who supported un-naming provided additional nuanced perspectives. They acknowledged the problematic aspects of Kroeber’s legacy, but also highlighted his contributions to the field of anthropology and his support for Native Americans. Some of these respondents also felt that the negative aspects of Kroeber’s legacy were being overstated or given more weight than they should. They referenced the norms of the time period and the fact that the Department of Anthropology did not submit a joint comment on the proposal.

“To summarize: We should rename the building without exaggerating our critique of A. L. Kroeber. The Proposal to Un-Name Kroeber Hall (hereafter, the Proposal) highlights the pain arising from limitations in Kroeber’s view of ‘culture’ and his unreflecting Euro-American discursive positionality. But it elides his writing against racism, his work to support Indian land claims and the documentation of Native oral histories, his collaborations with Native coauthors, and above all his unique, enduring contributions to Indigenous cultural and linguistic revival. Focusing on Kroeber also distracts us from honest

self-examination, suggesting that our problem lies with a single villain rather than being what it is — foundational and systemic.”

The comments in support of keeping Kroeber’s name came from several sources including some members of the Department of Anthropology and other departments on campus. These comments focused on several points. These included: (a) the belief that all buildings named in honor of individuals who contributed to Berkeley should be kept as history should not be erased; (b) the un-naming process is fundamentally flawed and reflects political correctness; (c) hindsight is problematic and we should not be judging Kroeber and others by contemporary standards; (d) Kroeber was far from the worst of his time; (e) the proposal had errors indicative of shoddy scholarship and did not accurately reflect Kroeber’s legacy; and (f) the un-naming process will lead to many other buildings on campus being renamed, with someone listing more than 10 other buildings named after individuals whose histories were not without some blemish. Two arguments that stood out in this group were Kroeber’s views on the equality of all groups and his support for Native Americans:

“During the long, ugly and violent history of California and its UC universities with respect to Native Californians, AL Kroeber was an ally not an enemy. Beyond his meticulous writings, audio transcriptions, photos, conferences, his co-authoring of books and articles with his Native Californian informants and colleagues Kroeber went to federal court as an expert witness on behalf of a California Indian land rights lawsuit, ‘Indians of California, Docket No. 37 on June 23, 1952....Kroeber, who was very old at this time, responded to a cross-examination three hours a day for ten days in which he supported the land rights of the Indians. He argued that all the land in California, not just particular identified sites of Californian bands and tribes, belonged to Native Californians. His strong testimony helped win the case but it took decades before the tribes received small reparations for the plunder of their lands. (see Omer C. Stewart, Kroeber and the Indian Claims Commission Cases) <

<https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/anthpubs/ucb/text/kas025-013.pdf>>”

Kroeber’s testimony in support of Native American groups was acknowledged by one of these groups but described as “too little, too late.” There were also conflicting views about Kroeber’s involvement in the gathering of Native American remains, as reflected in the following contrasting claims from two submissions:

“As for the accusation that AL Kroeber was involved in excavations of Native California graves, Julian Stewart’s 50-page obituary of Kroeber in the 1960 journal, *American Anthropologist*, wrote that ‘Kroeber was never a physical

anthropologist, and, although he summarized basic information in his book, *Anthropology*, his publications on the subject were negligible. He had no predisposition to be a field archeologist.’ ”

“Some commentators on the Kroeber Hall un-naming debate have suggested that Alfred Kroeber had minimal interest in archaeology and did not participate in excavations of human remains in California; that the bulk of excavation of burials took place prior to 1909 before Kroeber took over administration of the department; and that the department and museum under Kroeber’s leadership (1909-1946) reduced its involvement in digging up Native burial sites. My research suggests a different assessment.”

### **Conclusion**

After weighing the multiple viewpoints, all of the voting members of the Committee agreed that Kroeber’s name should be removed, with weight being given to the negative impact of the name on the Native American members of our communities on campus, in the Bay Area, and beyond. The Committee also noted that simply changing the name is not sufficient and that work will need to be done to communicate the complexities and nuances reflected in the comments and to allow for engagement by all the groups that are stakeholders. To that end, we recommend authorizing and providing a budget for a working group to develop an appropriate restorative approach to reckon with the legacy of Alfred Kroeber, particularly in regards to indigenous communities in California. We recommend that the working group be composed of faculty, staff, and students drawn from the units housed in the building, as well as include others with relevant area expertise. Additionally, we recommend inviting representatives of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area to join the working group. The working group might consider, among other things, new faculty and staff hires, return of lands to Bay Area and other Californian tribes, completely fulfilling the obligations of NAGPRA, and the development of murals, exhibits, and other university-sponsored programs. We encourage the campus to be led by their vision, with a working group put in place before the end of the Spring semester 2021.

Sincerely,

Paul Fine, Professor, Integrative Biology (Chair)

Ari Chivukula, Berkeley Law

Keith Feldman, Associate Professor, Ethnic Studies (DECC representative)

James Ford, Chief of Staff, Academic Planning

Alex Mabanta, Berkeley Law & GA Legislative Affairs Director

Fabrizio Mejia, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Equity and Success, Equity and Inclusion

Dylan Penningroth, Professor, Law and History

Melvin Tangonan, ASUC Executive Vice-President

Victoria Vera, ASUC President

Frank C. Worrell, Professor, Graduate School of Education

Verna Bowie (ex-officio)

Therese Leone, Deputy Campus Counsel (ex-officio)

Nancy McKinney, University Development and Alumni Relations (ex-officio)