



July 1, 2020

UC Berkeley Building Name Review Committee

transmitted via electronic mail to building-name-review@berkeley.edu

We, the undersigned, endorse the conclusions of the July 1, 2020 *Proposal to Un-name Kroeber Hall*. Alfred Kroeber is not an appropriate symbol for the University of California, Berkeley or any welcoming campus. Celebrating his legacy with the honorific naming of Kroeber Hall sends a harmful message to Native American students, faculty, and staff at UC Berkeley, deters prospective students, and hinders repair of a damaged relationship with Native Californians and all Indigenous people.

As the Governor of California recognized in his 2019 apology to Native Americans on behalf of the people of the State of California, our state government “*historically sanctioned over a century of depredations and prejudicial policies against California Native Americans.*” Every institution in California needs to examine its history in this regard, including public universities like ours.

Alfred Kroeber engaged in research practices that were always objectionable to many Native Americans and that society now recognizes as reprehensible and has made illegal. This includes the collection of remains and sacred funerary objects of Native American ancestors and other Indigenous people from their graves, without consent from tribes or individual descendants of Indigenous people. Kroeber also mistreated a Native American survivor of genocide whom Kroeber placed as a living exhibit in the university’s museum.

Alfred Kroeber’s name does not represent the values of UC Berkeley and the campus is working to overcome its involvement in the disastrous legacy that Kroeber’s name has come to symbolize for Native Californians. As part of that important work, the campus should move quickly to accept this proposal to un-name Kroeber Hall and launch a process to find a namesake that characterizes the best of UC Berkeley’s principles for the present and future.

We understand that the Building Name Review Committee may also suggest posting plaques, exhibits, and murals to appropriately educate the campus community about Kroeber’s legacy. We believe this to be an important action to take and urge the campus to work closely with members of the UC Berkeley Native American Advisory Council, the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee, and other Native American scholars and Native Californian communities to drive the development of this material.

We affirm that Kroeber did not act alone and that additional substantive action to make our campus more inclusive and supportive of Native American students, faculty, staff, and visitors must follow this important symbolic change.

In support,

Members of the UC Berkeley Native American Advisory Council to the Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion

Paul Alivisatos, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Sabrina Agarwal, Professor of Anthropology and Chair of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

Phenocia Bauerle, Director, Native American Student Development and Member of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

Ataya Cesspooch, PhD Student and National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow

Seth Davis, Professor of Law and Member of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

Christine Hastorf, Professor of Anthropology, Archaeological Research Facility Director, and Member of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

Shari Huhndorf, Class of 1938 Professor, Department of Ethnic Studies, and Member of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

Lauren Kroiz, Associate Professor, History of Art Department, and Ex Officio Member of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

Amy Lonetree, Associate Professor of History, UC Santa Cruz, and Member of the UC Berkeley Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee

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Christopher Yetter, Senior Advisor to the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Proposal to Un-Name Kroeber Hall

July 1, 2020

Prepared for review by the UC Berkeley Building Name Review Committee

Acknowledgements

Kroeber Hall at the University of California, Berkeley sits on the territory of Huichin, the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone, the successors of the historic and sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Ohlone people. Every member of the Berkeley community benefits from the use and occupation of this land. Consistent with our values of community and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the University's relationship to Native peoples.

The notion that Kroeber Hall should have a different name is not new. Former UC Berkeley Professor Gerald Robert Vizenor is credited with advancing this idea (Schweninger, 2009), although it is not immediately apparent where the idea first originated. More recently, participants in the August 2017 UC Berkeley Tribal Forum outlined the ethical problems associated with the work completed by—and at the direction of—the namesake of the building, Professor Alfred Kroeber. While the 2017 Tribal Forum participants did not focus on the naming of Kroeber Hall, they made an important statement about the cumulative impact of the actions of Alfred Kroeber, his colleagues, and their students. The symbolic importance of the naming of Kroeber Hall was addressed directly in an [editorial](#) in the *Daily Californian* in 2018.

This formal proposal to the UC Berkeley Building Name Review Committee, therefore, is in response to the work and voices of many individuals in our campus community. It attempts to provide the Committee with a brief summary of the rationale for un-naming Kroeber Hall and an administrative vehicle to initiate formal review.

This proposal relies on inspiration and advice from Native American scholars and on the advocacy and research of staff and students, many of whom are Indigenous, Black, or Brown. This proposal would not be possible without their leadership and hard work.

Before outlining a case for changing the name of the building, we should also acknowledge that Alfred Kroeber was a complex human being who sought to create and share knowledge and was influential in the overall development of his field. Challenging his legacy may not be universally popular. The conversation is important for our community. UC Berkeley and the University of California are committed to repairing a damaged relationship with Native Americans and to making the campus a more welcoming and inclusive environment. Alfred Kroeber is a hostile symbol to many Native Americans and it is important to remove his name from the building. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge that Kroeber did not act alone and that additional substantive action must follow this important symbolic change.

Introduction to the Namesake of Kroeber Hall

Alfred Kroeber is a pivotal figure in the history of anthropology. A student of the influential Franz Boas, he was the first person granted a Ph.D. in this field from Columbia University and was the first faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley and Director of what was then the University of California Museum of Anthropology. He began teaching at UC in the spring of 1902 and retired in 1946. He received numerous awards and honors including serving as President of the American Anthropological Association. He served as Director of UC's Museum of Anthropology in San Francisco from 1909 through 1946.

Kroeber's sweeping book, *1925 Handbook of the Indians of California*, was the result of decades of multidisciplinary fieldwork that blended cultural anthropology, linguistics, archaeology, and history. As described by the Smithsonian Institution in an [abstract](#) for libraries, Kroeber's *Handbook* "includes demographics, linguistic relations, social structures, folkways, religion, material culture, and much more" and "tries to reconstruct and present the scheme within which these people in ancient and more recent times lived their lives." He is also the author of a noteworthy textbook, *Anthropology*, that, along with his other work, influenced the development of a generation of students in the field.

Summary of the Rationale to Un-Name Kroeber Hall

The namesake of Kroeber Hall, Professor Alfred Kroeber, engaged in research practices that are reprehensible. He has come to symbolize a generation of scholars at Berkeley who failed to consider important ethical implications of their work in anthropology and archaeology.

- Kroeber and his colleagues engaged in collection of the remains of Native American ancestors, which has always been morally wrong and is now illegal.
- Kroeber pronounced the Ohlone to be culturally extinct, a declaration that had terrible consequences for these people.
- Kroeber's treatment of a Native American man we know as *Ishi* and the handling of his remains was cruel, degrading, and racist.

Renaming Kroeber Hall is just one of many important steps needed to address our university's role in California's history of depredations and prejudicial policies against Native Americans and to rebuild broken relationships.

Collecting the Remains of Native American Ancestors

Kroeber personally engaged in excavating grave sites, directed the work of others in this regard, and built a repository for human remains exhumed by academic researchers and government agencies (2017 UC Berkeley Tribal Forum Report). This led to one of the largest curated collections of remains of Native American ancestors in the United States (2020 Native American Cultural Affiliation and Repatriation Work Sessions with UC). This has always been wrong and is also now illegal. Few actions conducted at our university in the decades that followed Kroeber's work are of similar enduring negative consequence or constitute such an incredible breach of ethics.

Mistreatment of Ishi

It is widely understood that in 1911, Alfred Kroeber and his associates took custody of a Native American man who had been “captured” by police near a slaughterhouse in Oroville. The man was starving and emaciated and had been reported to the authorities on suspicion as the culprit of a string of recent thefts of food. The police found no evidence to charge him of a crime and released the man into the custody of Kroeber and his associates.

Until his death, the man never provided Kroeber with his true name, and he became known as ‘Ishi’--an anglicization of the Yahi word for ‘man.’ Ishi lived in the UC anthropology museum building near Parnassus in San Francisco, adjacent to UC’s hospital, where he was treated for tuberculosis and later autopsied as a victim of this disease (Starn, 2004).

Ishi was free to move about the city, but under a troubling power dynamic. Ishi “performed” as a living exhibit for museum visitors, creating arrowheads and interacting with spectators. While living in the museum, his white benefactors provided Ishi with a janitorial position to earn pocket money. They also taught Ishi racial slurs as a way to refer to Black and Chinese people with his approximate 300-word English vocabulary, a sad testament to the culture. Ishi was apparently very distressed to be living in the museum amidst excavated human remains, Native American ancestors unearthed for research and curation (Starn, 2004).

While living in the museum and visiting the university hospital, Ishi had become acutely aware of autopsies and collection of the remains of Native American ancestors. With this awareness, he communicated to Kroeber his wishes for cremation and burial without autopsy, as was customary for members of his tribe. In Ishi’s final days alive, Kroeber was on travel and in daily contact with colleagues about Ishi’s health, communicating by telegram. The record clearly shows that Kroeber knew what final arrangements Ishi wanted and that after he became aware of Ishi’s death, Kroeber tried to stop his colleagues from conducting an autopsy of his friend with a strongly worded message. Kroeber’s words were too late; the telegram arrived after Ishi’s brain had been removed from the body. No other UCSF records show a brain removed in autopsy from the 1914-16 range (Gordon, 1999). Reversing course, Kroeber then sent a letter offering Ishi’s brain to the Smithsonian, where it was curated discreetly for decades until being rediscovered by Starn after the prodding of an Indigenous activist (Starn, 2004). A letter written by Kroeber to the National Museum at the Smithsonian reads: “I find that at Ishi’s death last spring his brain was removed and pre-served [sic]. There is no one here who can put it to scientific use. If you wish it, I shall be glad to deposit it in the National Museum collection.” The Director of the National Museum at the Smithsonian replied to Kroeber affirmatively, providing instructions for packing and shipping.

Salvage Anthropology, Salvage Ethnography, and the Myth of the Vanishing Indian

It should be noted that much of Kroeber’s work centered around “salvage anthropology” and “salvage ethnography” that advanced the myth of the “vanishing indian.” This myth stands in stark contrast to the reality that Native Americans are genocide survivors and part of the rich fabric of our community today, participating in all aspects of general society and also continuing

to practice and nurture traditional and evolving Native American culture. The 2018 selection for UC Berkeley's [On the Same Page](#) program, *There There* by Tommy Orange, provides a modern perspective on this as does Governor Newsom's apology to Native Californians delivered on June 18, 2019 (Cowan, 2019) and the corresponding [Executive Order N-15-19](#).

In this particular context, Kroeber is an outdated symbol that is counterproductive for our campus community. Although Kroeber contributed in significant ways to the evolution of his field and curated material culture and created knowledge that is still widely used today, his approach and that of his contemporaries had fundamentally flawed assumptions and was astonishingly detached from ethical standards.

At the *Native American Cultural Affiliation and Repatriation Work Sessions with UC* on January 31, 2020, Vincent Medina of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe shared an example of the disastrous real-world consequences of salvage ethnography -- and Alfred Kroeber's words -- on his family and tribe. Committee members are encouraged to watch this [testimonial statement](#), from the 7:00 minute mark to the 10:40 minute mark in particular. Kroeber wrote erroneously in 1925 that for all practical purposes this tribe was culturally extinct, and based on Kroeber's statement the federal government removed the tribe's recognized status and forced the surviving members of the band to vacate land protected for Native Americans.

Conclusion

Nationally and as a state, we are still grappling with the legacy of genocide, removal policies, and, more recently, K-12 educational systems meant to assimilate Native Americans and destroy their culture. As a campus, we are also working to address the legacy of scholars like Kroeber who removed Native American ancestors from their graves without affirmative consent from tribes or individual descendants. Today, public universities and museums can be valuable resources for understanding and celebrating Native American culture and history, and serve as the locus of activities that engage young Native American scholars, helping them to thrive in all academic fields and disciplines. This must include acknowledging hard truths about our national, state, and university history and ensuring that Native American voices are welcomed and strongly represented in making decisions about academic programs and museum curation (Lonetree, 2012). To that end, we need a more welcoming campus, which must begin with the un-naming of Kroeber Hall.

References

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