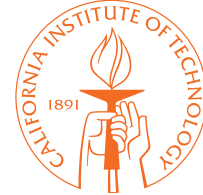


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Thomas F. Rosenbaum, *President*
Sonja and William Davidow Presidential Chair and Professor of Physics



January 3, 2021

To: Caltech Board of Trustees
In re: Committee on Naming and Recognition Final Report

On July 22, 2020, I appointed a special committee to explore naming and recognition policies at Caltech. The committee, chaired by former Board Chair Ben Rosen, brought together individuals from across the Caltech community: trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, postdocs, and students. The members of the committee were able to offer diverse perspectives to the issues at hand, representing very different domains of expertise and tapping distinct life experiences and backgrounds.

Caltech is not alone in confronting the question of naming buildings on its campus. These considerations have roiled universities across the country as well as broader society. The most intense concerns at Caltech center on Robert A. Millikan, given his involvement with eugenics through the Human Betterment Foundation, although Chandler, Gosney, Munro, Robinson, Ruddock, and Watson (the subject of different concerns) also have garnered attention. The committee was charged to consider and make recommendations for general policies related to space naming and other forms of recognition, as well as consideration of specific building names on campus.

The issue of memorialization, and its impact on views of the past and aspirations for the future, has a particular emotional resonance. A strong manifestation of these deeply felt emotions is a strident polarization of views. It is my firm belief that only through the open exchange of ideas, by challenging one another's premises, by listening with respect and empathy, and by being open to the possibility of changing one's mind, are we able to discover the best path forward. This value system cuts to the core of what a university is, and what we as trustees are now challenged to represent. Committee members started with very different views, but through an intense exchange of ideas, informed by close reading of primary sources and consultation with a broad spectrum of experts, advocates, and Caltech community members, came to unanimous conclusions. There is extraordinary power in this process, which will serve as a guide in our discussions as a Board to reconcile actions with principles, and to set a course for Caltech that both remembers where we came from as an institution and positions us for future greatness.

I endorse fully the recommendations of the committee as laid out in its closely reasoned and methodically detailed final report. I am convinced both by the particulars and by a compelling vision for Caltech. It is fraught to judge individuals outside of their time, but it is clear from the documentation presented that Millikan lent his name and his prestige to a morally reprehensible

eugenics movement that already had been discredited scientifically during his time. As stewards of Caltech, we must preserve our history and lift up our stories – and here the committee’s recommendation to present Millikan’s contributions in their full complexity through physical and electronic means is exceptionally important – but we must give precedence to the Institute’s future. How we are seen by the next generation of scholars hinges on our ability to confront our past, differentiating a recognition of history from memorialization. The Institute needs to attract the most powerful trustees, faculty, students, and staff from every background to position ourselves for continued scientific and technological leadership.

There are three other aspects of the report that I wish to underscore. First, the members of Ruddock House, present and past, need to be consulted and involved in a renaming process. Second, the archival investigation of Thomas Watson, Sr.’s ties to Nazi Germany through his leadership of IBM undermine the essential accusations in Edwin Black’s *IBM and the Holocaust*, thereby removing any firm basis to recommend renaming the Watson Laboratories of Applied Physics. Third, terms of gift agreements may complicate and delay the removal of names from buildings. I recommend that the Board first decide on the principles we wish to apply. So charged, management will then confront the practicalities associated with implementing those principles.

The discussions we will hold on January 13, 2021 are of seminal importance to Caltech’s future. Renaming buildings, as recommended by the Committee on Naming and Recognition, is a symbolic act, but one that has real consequences in creating a diverse and inclusive environment. It will be an act that helps define who we are and who we strive to be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas F. Rosenbaum".

Thomas F. Rosenbaum