

**ROBERT J. DiCARLO**  
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As you all know, I have opposed this measure from the beginning. I continue to oppose it for logical and historical reasons I will not repeat now, though I continue to consider them good ones. Some of you, even some of you who may have agreed with those reasons, may have been wondering whether the renaming of some buildings could possibly matter enough to oppose the president, many of the faculty, some of the students, I imagine the governor and a majority of the legislature, and, yes, even some of the library staff, who say they believe that adopting this measure is of the highest importance, and a critical test of our good will and moral soundness.

In a sense, those who doubt that the renaming of a few buildings is worth a fight are right. After all, if a sizable number of people want something a lot, and the rest don't care much, why not just give those who have strong feelings on the matter what they want, regardless of why they feel that way? But what we are voting on today is not simply the removal of names by which some of us, rightly or wrongly, may feel offended. When we vote on this measure, we are also voting on the doctrines that are being used to support it--doctrines of intergenerational racial bloodguilt that, if unchecked, threaten to cripple the students in whom they are inculcated, and could ultimately destroy our nation.

Does that sound a little extreme? If so, I invite my countrymen who have sponsored or supported this measure to stand back, take a fresh look at what they have been saying, and ask themselves where the principles they have been espousing lead, and have led always and everywhere.

Almost no one today would deny the injustice of slavery, and of the particularly brutal enslavement of black Africans in America. Nor would many fail to condemn the political and cultural system of racial discrimination against black Americans that survived for far too long after slavery was abolished. Nor would many deny that slavery, like many another past injustice, is still taking a toll.

Contemplating the magnitude of such crimes makes many understandably want to punish, or at least to seek restitution from, the perpetrators. While the hard fact is that those responsible are all dead, wishful thinking, which is always the mother of delusions, makes us want to find living scapegoats to take the place of those who have escaped our vengeance by dying. So, we invent theories of national or racial guilt.

For what is the doctrine of "white privilege" but an attempt to make an arbitrary group responsible for the crimes of people who may or may not have been their ancestors? Who is "white" anyway? Half of my ancestors were Catholics from southern Italy, and therefore were members of both a race and a religion that were despised by many of the people they found in America when they arrived. My Italian grandfather, far from being the descendant of a rich slaveholder, sold hot dogs under the boardwalk at Coney Island. No doubt, back in Italy, he had ancestors who were murdered, enslaved, oppressed, or dispossessed. Likewise, my mother's family arrived during the last century and her mother, like many, earned a modest living caring for the children of the rich.

Likewise, not every person with an ancestor in Africa is descended from a slave. Nor does every American who is identified or identifies himself as black start life at a disadvantage to everyone identified as white. While slavery was a terrible crime, it is not the only crime that can wound the human personality.

Even if there were some reasoned basis to identify a group of "whites" today some of whose ancestors did in fact own slaves, and it were further possible to identify living persons who have been harmed by that injustice, we cannot atone for the crimes of the dead by perpetrating new ones on the living. Moreover, the doctrines of victimhood and bloodguilt advanced as reasons for such new injustices only lead to disaster for both the individual and the society.

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These doctrines are pernicious for the individual, because only our American belief, which is a precious legacy of our western Judeo-Christian roots, in the power of the individual to overcome the circumstances of his birth, can in fact empower him to do so. On the other hand, if we are successful in convincing people who consider themselves not white that their success depends upon undoing the effects of injustices done to people like them in past generations by seeking advantages over their white contemporaries, we doom them to failure in the present.

After all, what is so-called "affirmative action" but a euphemism for just such race-based preferences? Such practices are obviously unjust to those who are not considered members of the aggrieved, and therefore preferred, groups, which lawyers aptly call "protected classes." A greater harm done to the non protected and non preferred is that they too can develop the same victim mentality as the protected classes, and they too can be doomed by it to fatalism, futility, and failure.

Theories of racial guilt, victimhood, vengeance, reparations, and bloodguilt are, if anything, more destructive at the level of the society than at the level of the individual. At best, these pernicious doctrines produce conflict, and the destruction of a sense of common ideals and the common good. At worst, they produce violence, civil war, and mass murder. For proof, one need only look at the recent and not so recent history of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, the Middle East, and Bosnia.

What is special about America, what has made it possible for people of many nations, races, and religions to live and prosper together, is the American idea that, in a land of liberty, each person, regardless of who his ancestors were, has the power to make something of himself. America's sins have not been consequences of those ideals, but failures to live up to them. The doctrines of racial victimhood and bloodguilt that we are being asked to endorse implicitly today strike at the very heart of that American idea. I hate those doctrines because I love America, and all its people, regardless of their origins or ancestry.

Let us then recommit ourselves to the American idea, so that, rather than embarking on a futile path of tribalism, injustice, and racial score settling, we can continue to pursue together the ideal of a nation with liberty and justice for all--a nation in which, as Dr. King, among many other good people, have dreamed, a man is not judged by the color of his skin. That is the American idea; that is the American nation; that is what so many of our forebears, whether or not we carry their biological DNA, have fought and died for. I therefore urge you to defeat this measure.