

University System of Georgia, Board of Regents must account for adequate representation, transparency for campus renaming effort to work

#RenameGrady coalition of students, alumni, stakeholders stands ready to collaborate with board

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Last week's decision by the University System of Georgia (USG) and Board of Regents to convene a five-member board to review names used on USG campuses is promising, but the work of that board will fall far short of making meaningful, lasting change without proper representation and transparency around the process and timeline.

To that end, the #RenameGrady coalition of alumni, students and stakeholders call for an advisory seat at the table; advance information about meetings, including an agenda and a procedure for getting on the agenda; live broadcast of these meetings; and minutes to be made public. This group has done the work and the research, and members are able to provide valuable input to make this renaming process successful.

The #RenameGrady coalition formed early this month to demand the namesake of the University of Georgia (UGA) College of Journalism and Mass Communication be changed from Henry W. Grady, a white supremacist, to Charlayne Hunter-Gault, an award-winning journalist, alumna of the school and one of the first Black students to integrate UGA in 1961.

"I am surprised by this effort and deeply honored," Hunter-Gault said. "Given the social justice issues America is currently grappling with, and to support all who are looking to correct the wrongs of the past, especially those relating to racism, I believe now is a good time to focus on the names of institutions that do not reflect the reality of the American dream, to wit: that all people are created equal, regardless of race, creed, color, gender or sexual orientation. So I support the renaming of the Grady College, whether it ends up with my name or not. So glad my fellow Bulldogs are 'woke' to this historic moment."

Hunter-Gault established the Giving Voice to the Voiceless Fund, an Grady College-based endowment to provide grants to UGA students to provide voices "to people whose voices are needed—to help them realize their dreams for themselves and their communities, to help contribute to human understanding, and to enlarge our capacity for empathy." The college has named a distinguished writer-in-residence in Hunter-Gault's honor. She continues to serve UGA through speaking engagements and served on the Peabody Award Board of Jurors from 2009 to 2015.

Amid the national protest movement surrounding the murders of unarmed Black citizens, including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks and Elijah McClain, the push to rename the school comes after a [June 2, 2020, column](#) by Grady College alumnus Sam Jones in The Red & Black, UGA's independent student newspaper; other efforts in [Atlanta](#) and [Houston](#); and the [scholarship](#) of media historian Kathy Roberts Forde—all of which shed light on Grady's history and moved concerned stakeholders to action.

"After engaging with Forde's scholarship and reading Jones's column, I began searching everywhere for a petition to sign. I reached out to fellow alumna Kathryn Purcell Schiliro and asked, 'Where's the petition?'" said Amber Roessner, a three-time UGA and two-time College of Journalism and Mass Communication graduate who is currently an associate professor of media history at the University of Tennessee. "When we found out that there wasn't one, we were compelled to take action to rename Grady and to do our part in dismantling the legacy of white supremacy on the University of Georgia's campus."

Grady, a UGA alumnus, well-known orator and the managing editor of the Atlanta Constitution, is credited with the economic revival of the post-Reconstruction "New South" following the Civil War. But his vision for prosperity was predicated on the convict leasing system, a form of slavery by another name, that hinged on the preservation of white supremacy. "The supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained forever, and the domination of the negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards, because the white race is the superior race... [This declaration] shall run forever with the blood that feeds Anglo-Saxon hearts," he said in 1887.

Grady is one of many examples of racists' names pervading UGA and USG campuses. That Black students must walk past these names daily on their way to class is offensive. Black students shouldn't be asked to take pride in the diplomas they've earned, much less support their college and university, when emblems of racism and white supremacy are the namesakes of the very institutions that award them diplomas.

Moreover, USG schools are publicly funded institutions. The taxpayers of this state should not be forced to tolerate the glorification of such vile, racist hatred and ignorance.

"I've always been a proud Grady grad," said Mandi Woodruff Santos, who earned a journalism degree from UGA in 2009 and is now executive editor of LendingTree. "Now I see the name and I cringe and hate that I didn't know the story of its namesake and what he stood for sooner. But when you know better, you do better.

"This isn't just about removing the name of a man who wanted 'the domination of the negro race resisted ... because the white race is the superior race.' It's about ushering in a new era of inclusion at the University of Georgia's College of Journalism and Mass Communication."

Hunter-Gault was the first Black woman to integrate UGA in 1961, and she was the first Black person to graduate from Grady College in 1963. Her career has involved work at some of America's bedrock journalistic institutions: The New Yorker; The New York Times, where she became the Harlem bureau chief and convinced editors to stop referring to people who are Black as "Negroes;" PBS, where she was a national correspondent for the "MacNeil/Lehrer Report;" NPR; and CNN. She is the recipient of two National News and Documentary Emmy Awards and two Peabody Awards.

In an effort to garner support for the removal of Grady's name from the college and the addition of Hunter-Gault's, the #RenameGrady coalition has started a petition on Change.org that is more than 8,500 voices strong. To sign the petition, please visit www.change.org/RenameGrady. The group has a voice on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @RenameGrady and developed a website, www.RenameGrady.com, to provide additional resources.

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