

Baylor acknowledges historic ties to slavery

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WACO—Baylor University regents acknowledged the school's historic ties to slavery and the Confederacy, and the board established an advisory commission that could lead to the removal or renaming of some campus landmarks.

Regents announced the establishment of a Commission on Historic Campus Representations at Baylor University that will “review the historical context of the university and its connection to all statues, monuments, buildings and other aspects of the campus in reference to their physical location, placement and naming.”

Take a look at university's history

In a June 25 “Resolution on Racial Healing and Justice,” Baylor's board of regents asserted the university's Christian commitment is “inconsistent with racism in any form,” but its history demands examination.

“We understand and acknowledge a number of the Baptist leaders and their congregants who began moving into Texas in the 1830s, primarily from the southern half of the United States, owned enslaved persons and held racial views common in that era. These early Baptists eventually included Baylor's three founders—Judge R.E.B. Baylor, Rev. James Huckins and Rev. William M. Tryon—most members of its initial board of trustees, and several early leaders of the institution,” the resolution stated.

“During Baylor's infancy, a number of university leaders and prominent individuals connected to the institution supported Confederate causes and

engaged in the fight to preserve the institution of slavery both during and following the Civil War, including some serving as members of the Confederacy's armed forces."

Citing the need to "explore and engage in significant conversations" about Baylor's historic ties to slavery and the Confederacy, the board affirmed the university's commitment "to instituting and promoting tangible and systemic changes to ensure fair and equitable policies and practices and to holding individuals accountable for such actions and activities that contradict such policies and practices."

The resolution acknowledged Baylor's "need to strengthen its commitment to a vibrant, diverse campus community and will intentionally listen to those affected by racism." The university will "develop a plan to initiate campus-wide conversations" and take steps to increase racial and ethnic diversity, as well as "to recognize the significant contributions of the Black community throughout Baylor's history."

Response from leaders

Michael Evans, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and member of the board of regents, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be part of a process "where people are open and have a heart to do the right thing."

Baylor President Linda Livingstone applauded the board for adopting the resolution and exploring the university's history.

"Now is the time for Baylor, as a Christian university, to look deeply within our hearts, and listen and learn with humility about our past and from voices that have been unheard for years while also taking tangible steps forward," Livingstone said.

“We must understand that we are all God’s children. As president, I am firmly committed to ongoing open conversations and the hard work ahead of confronting systemic racism, injustice and inequality at our university, historic and cultural representations on our campus and the deeply painful experiences of racism shared by current and former students, faculty and staff.”

Recent decades show highs and lows

Baylor did not admit its first Black student until 1964—13 years after Wayland Baptist College became the first four-year liberal arts college in one of the states of the former Confederacy to [integrate voluntarily](#).

When Baylor library staff began digitizing copies of the university’s yearbook in 2010, they found multiple photos of [students in blackface](#) and illustrations that perpetuated racial stereotypes, including several instances in the 1950s and early 1960s.

In November 2016—the day after the national presidential election—a female sophomore born in Zambia was [pushed off a sidewalk](#) on campus by another student who called her a racial slur. When a male student spoke up on her behalf, the student who had shoved her said, “I’m just trying to make America great again.”

A friend of the student who had been insulted and pushed posted a video about it on social media, and fellow students who wanted to keep her safe organized an informal #IWalkWithNatasha campaign to support her. At least 300 students—as well as some faculty and university administrators—gathered two days after the first incident to walk the young woman to class.

Still, isolated racially insensitive incidents have occurred at Baylor. Last year, Baylor’s Pi Beta Phi [sorority was sanctioned](#) for an online video in

which members sang a song that contained a racial slur.

In recent months, members of the board of regents “have been fully awakened to the injustices faced daily by our brothers and sisters of color,” Chair Mark Rountree said.

The board wanted to “document the actions it will take to further the pursuit of a university committed to excellence in all things and striving to openly and actively ensure a campus community where every individual feels valued and equally a part of the pursuit of the university’s mission today and for the future,” he continued.

Rountree commended Livingstone “whose leadership has already yielded multiple initiatives to examine and institute systems and conversation that lead to change.”

Actions already taken include:

- Required diversity training for all current students, faculty and staff. While Baylor already required diversity training for incoming students and new faculty and staff, training now will be required annually.
- A virtual Baylor Conversation Series this summer on issues such as race, peacemaking and racial reconciliation.
- The appointment of Malcolm Foley as special adviser to the president for equity and campus engagement, as well as director of the Black church studies program at Truett Theological Seminary.