



June 20, 2020

Dear USC Graduate Students,

One of USC's most visible landmarks, featured in the GSG logo, is the iconic globe that marks a prominent building on USC's University Park Campus. The 108 international flags that lie beneath the grand arches, and the building itself, represent globalization and inclusion and are a celebration of the vast diversity amongst our faculty, staff, and students. Yet, since its construction in 1966, the building's namesake starkly contrasted these harmonious ideals.

The University's fifth president, Dr. Von KleinSmid, was an active supporter of the eugenics movement and used his power to disenfranchise minorities. Von KleinSmid was a founding member of the early-twentieth century Pasadena-based eugenics organization, the Human Betterment Foundation (HBF).¹ Von KleinSmid was an active advocate of eugenic strategies to "free" society "from the ever increasing burden that must come to it through the inevitable unfitness of the generations yet born."² Some of the measures that Von Klein Smid advocated for included "the enactment of such laws as will compel a certificate of physical and mental fitness before a marriage license may be secured" to prevent those deemed "unfit" from reproducing, the forced institutionalization of the "feeble minded" and of "defective delinquents," and the state-sponsored sterilization of "defective" members of society.³ Eugenic organizations in California, like the HBF, focused their efforts on the perceived degeneracy and deviancy of people with disabilities, the poor, and racial minorities, with particular concern about Mexican, Filipino, and Japanese migrants. Von Kleinsmid's public promotion of eugenics and work with the HBF were integral to the growth and popularity of eugenics in the American West throughout the twentieth century.⁴ Moreover, major publications of the HBF proved essential to the foundation and expansion of the forced sterilization and racial hygiene programs of the Nazi State.⁵

The effects of Von Kleinsmid's involvement in the eugenics movement are still felt today. Von Kleinsmid curtailed the education of Japanese American students that had returned from

¹ Gosney, E. S. 1937. Human Sterilization Today. *California and western medicine*, 46(6), 396–398.

² Von KleinSmid, Rufus Bernhard. 1913. [*Eugenics and the State: A Paper Read before the Cincinnati Academy of Medicine*](#). Jeffersonville, IN: Indiana Reformatory Printing Trade School.

³ Von KleinSmid, Rufus Bernhard. 1913. *Eugenics and the State: A Paper Read before the Cincinnati Academy of Medicine*. Jeffersonville, IN: Indiana Reformatory Printing Trade School.

⁴ Stern, Alexandria Minna. 2016. *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*. Univ of California Press.

⁵ Kühl, Stefan. 2002. *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*.

internment after World War II and refused to send their transcripts to other universities, effectively expunging their degree progress.⁶ The work of the HBF also set the stage for the passage of legislation that allowed the forced sterilization of racial minorities, predominantly working-class Latinx women from East Los Angeles, at the LAC-USC Medical Center and other hospitals through the 1970's.⁷ Furthermore, Von KleinSmid's eugenic thinking proved integral to his work as the President of USC where he supported eugenics-inspired sociology and social work curricula. His reprehensible actions affected those of his time, and contributed to the systemic racism that is ubiquitously present to this day.

The University's decision to remove the name of the Von KleinSmid Center is long overdue and represents an important step forward in ensuring students are provided an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity. This has been a student-led initiative for many years as a joint effort between USC's Graduate Student Government and Undergraduate Student Government. We would like to recognize the contributions of our graduate student leaders who worked towards making this day a reality.

In the summer of 2018, GSG's Executive Board submitted a proposal to the USC Administration calling on the Diversity and Inclusion Council to conduct historical research about USC's past relationship with race and discrimination---including USC's involvement with Forced sterilization at (USC) LA County Hospital, USC's role in Japanese internment, and Von KleinSmid's connection to the eugenics movement---as well as to explore opportunities for appropriate changes and reparations based on this historical research.⁸ In 2019, GSG worked with USG and the Provost's Office to form the Nomenclature Task Force which was charged with the task of helping USC "establish principles and procedures on reassessing names across campus."⁹ Members Cassandra Flores-Montaña, Emmett Harsin Drager, and Quinn Anex-Ries played a key part of these meetings, helping to discuss and draft the final proposal of the Task Force.

The concurrent announcement of equitable initiatives represents an opportunity to foster a learning environment of justice and equality. We are thankful to President Folt and the administration for working directly with our student leaders to support the work of the Nomenclature Task Force that brought about these changes. It is through these student-led grassroots initiatives that lasting impacts come about. GSG will continue to actively listen and

⁶ [USC removes eugenics supporter's name from notable building](#)

⁷ Stern, Alexandra Minna. 2005. "Sterilized in the Name of Public Health: Race, Immigration, and Reproductive Control in Modern California," *American Journal of Public Health* 95.7, 1128-1138.

⁸ [Graduate Student Government Executive Board Proposal for the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council](#)

⁹ [Provost Task Force on University Nomenclature - USC Provost](#)

amplify student voices to lead initiatives that nurture a culture of diversity and inclusion for all students.

While removing Von Kleinsmid's name from The Center for International and Public Affairs is an important step for the University to take, our efforts cannot stop here. Without publicly reckoning with USC's past relationship to eugenics and racial discrimination, the removal of Von Kleinsmid's name is, at best, simply symbolic or, at worst, an erasure of our institutional ties to forms of systemic racism. As the final report of the Nomenclature Task Force notes:

In addition to its recommendation on removal, the committee [charged with reviewing requests to de-name buildings on campus] may also suggest further measures that could be taken to address the requester's objection. For example, if it recommends removal, the committee could recommend whether or not the renaming of the building should take into account the reason the previous name was removed, and further it could suggest that a public explanation be made (such as through a plaque on the building or an educational display) about the building's former name and why it was changed (to avoid "erasure" of something problematic in the university's history).¹⁰

Because of these remaining complexities and concerns related to the de-naming of The Center for International and Public Affairs, GSG recommends the following:

1. That USC's Administration, Board of Trustees, and President Folt immediately pass the final proposal of the Nomenclature Task Force.
2. That USC's Administration, Board of Trustees, and President Folt subsequently conduct the renaming process according to the recommendations of the Nomenclature Task Force including, but not limited to, some form of permanent public recognition of USC's relationship to Von KleinSmid.
3. That USC's Administration, Board of Trustees, and President Folt create a Task Force, with complete access to institutional archives, to fully investigate and report on histories of race, discrimination, and oppression on USC's campus.

As GSG noted in our 2018 proposal for the Diversity and Inclusion Council, there is wide-spread national precedence for the creation and implementation of institutional Task Forces on histories of race and discrimination. Several of USC's elite peer institutions, such as Harvard, Georgetown, and Yale, have released reports addressing historical connections to enslavement and contemporary issues of race and inequality.¹¹ While other East Coast and Southern

¹⁰ Final Report of the Nomenclature Task Force, 2020.

¹¹ For a comprehensive list of all similar programs see [Graduate Student Government Executive Board Proposal for the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council](#). Several prominent examples include, Brown University's [Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice](#), the Faculty Committee on [Harvard and Slavery](#), Georgetown's [Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation](#), and the [Chancellor's Task Force on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill History](#).

Universities have already begun to grapple with their own histories of oppression, enslavement, and racial justice, West Coast Universities have remained largely silent on issues of institutional history, reparations, and historical reckoning. USC can take this opportunity to use our renowned scholars and institutional resources on the history of the American West to further develop innovative approaches to addressing the specificities of these painful histories across our country.

We look forward to working with the administration to fully address the legacy of Von KleinSmid and our campus, ensuring that the building's name change is part of a long term commitment to reckoning with our institutional past. We also look forward to carrying out the Task Force recommendations on procedures for democratically and transparently renaming the building.

Best Regards,

GSG Executive Board 2020-2021