

Committee Recommendation regarding Renaming the Ely Lecture Series

Richard T. Ely was a founder of the American Economic Association in 1885, and served as its President from 1889 to 1901. He taught economics at Johns Hopkins University, the University of Wisconsin, and Northwestern University. He wrote widely on agricultural economics, economic history, and political economy. In 1962, a lecture series held during the AEA annual meeting named in his honor was instituted by the Association. The Richard T. Ely Lecture has no ties, including financial, to the family of Richard T. Ely.

Despite his contributions to economic thought, Dr. Ely also wrote approvingly of eugenics¹ and slavery,² inveighed against immigrants,³ and favored segregation.⁴ This generated questions from AEA members about the appropriateness of continuing the lecture series named after Ely.

Accordingly, an *ad hoc* committee of the AEA was asked in 2020 to assess the extant evidence and make a recommendation about the appropriateness of continuing to host a Distinguished Lecturer Series at the annual AEA meetings, with the series named for Richard T. Ely.

This committee, comprised of Olivia S. Mitchell as Chair, Lisa D. Cook, and Gary Hoover, has reviewed the evidence. In so doing, we kept in view the fact that the AEA seeks to create a professional environment with equal opportunity and fair treatment for all economists regardless of age, sex, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, health condition, marital status, parental status, genetic information, political affiliation, professional status, or personal connections.

The committee has concluded that Richard Ely's writings express views inconsistent with the AEA's code of professional conduct. The committee thus believes that the AEA should discontinue the Ely Lecture Series and replace it with the title *AEA Distinguished Lecture Series*. Such a move would also be in consistent with similar measures taken by other institutions (for references, see the Appendix).

The committee also proposes that the Association's President-elect, when selecting the AEA Distinguished Lecturer, consider a pool of names generated from a call for suggestions at the end of the annual officer election where members also suggest Distinguished Fellows and Officer candidates. Moreover, we recommend that the pool of people considered for the AEA Distinguished Lecture Series be expanded to include worthy economists from the marginalized classes listed above.

Appendix: References Related to Other Institutions Renaming their Richard T. Ely Lecture Series

Doerer, Kristen. 2018. "How Colleges Confront Their Racist Pasts." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 23, 2018.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Colleges-Confront-Their/244586>.

[Contains eugenics-related example]

Duehren, Andrew M. and Claire E. Parker. 2016. "Corporation Accepts Proposal to Change Law School Seal." *The Harvard Crimson*, March 15, 2016.

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2016/3/15/corporation-hls-seal-change>.

Jaschik, Scott. 2018. "Ending Honors for Racists." *Inside Higher Ed*, March 30, 2018.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/30/university-michigan-removes-honors-late-president-and-professor-racist-legacies>.

Svrluga, Susan. 2016. "University of Oregon will rename dorm that honored a professor who was a KKK leader." *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/09/09/university-of-oregon-will-rename-dorm-that-honored-a-professor-who-was-a-kkk-leader>.

Svrluga, Susan. 2020. "Berkeley strips name from its law school building, citing namesake's racist views." *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/01/30/berkeley-strips-name-its-law-school-citing-benefactors-racist-views>.

Wang, Monica and Susan Svrluga. 2017. "Yale renames Calhoun College because of historical ties to white supremacy and slavery." *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2017.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/02/11/yale-renames-calhoun-college-because-of-historic-ties-to-white-supremacy-and-slavery>.

Endnotes

¹ "there are certain human beings who are absolutely unfit, and should be prevented from a continuation of their kind" https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/serials/files/regulation/2016/6/regulation-v39n2-7_6.pdf

² "and thus slavery may be looked upon as a necessary stage in the evolution of industrial society", in *Studies in the Evolution of Industrial Society*, p. 48: Richard T. Ely

https://books.google.com/books?id=0CsuAAAAYAAJ&pg=PR3&dq=inauthor:richard+inauthor:Ely&lr=&num=30&as_brr=3#v=snippet&q=negro&f=false

³ "The fullest unfolding of our national faculties requires the exclusion of discordant elements--like, for example, the Chinese." [Cited in <https://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2016/12/richard-t-ely-alt-right-founder-american-economic-association.html>]

⁴https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2576&context=fac_pubs