

Comments to the Marshall University BoG on the Subject of Jenkins Hall

Jerome A. Gilbert, President
February 21, 2019

Many opinions have been swirling around the issue of the name of Jenkins Hall over the past 10 months or so. After receiving a request from Marshall University student John Ross in the spring of 2018, I put together an *ad hoc* committee to examine all the names of buildings on the campus. My charge to the committee was to rewrite the online material about Jenkins Hall, to examine all building names on campus to determine if contextualization or additional action was warranted, and to submit a report to me during the 2018-19 academic year.

I want to begin by thanking committee chair Christie Kinsey for her steady and objective leadership in approaching this sensitive issue. I also thank the other committee members and consultant Lacy Ward, Jr. for helping shape and shepherd this process. The committee found only one building name they thought needed further scrutiny and that is Jenkins Hall, named after the deceased Cabell County resident and confederate officer Albert Jenkins. No other building name on campus was identified for further consideration.

There are many strong feelings and emotions associated with this issue, and I have attempted to try to remain objective, calm, and receptive to others' opinions. I have tried to respect everyone's right to an opinion. I think it is wrong to attempt to discredit or disparage others for their opinions. I find it unfortunate that a few people have resorted to incivility and personal attacks of others. Please remember that we are much like a family at Marshall and even when there are family disputes, a loving and functional family comes back together and finds a way to live in harmony. I continue to argue for civility in this debate.

Today I am presenting to the Board the recommendations of the *ad hoc* committee. In addition, I will communicate to you some of my own thoughts about Albert Jenkins. I will also suggest an alternative approach that the Board may want to pursue with regard to the building name. After my comments, the Board will go into executive session to discuss the name of Jenkins Hall, other naming proposals at Marshall, and other business.

The committee's report details the process that was followed in developing their final document. As you know, the process involved seeking input from students, campus faculty and staff, alumni, and the community. A public information session was held in late November and an online survey was conducted. The committee collected all of the information and deliberated over what recommendation to make.

On their own initiative, the committee considered four questions: "What recommendations would be least objectionable to the most people? What recommendation would do the most good for the most people? Who would be most hurt if the name is changed? Who would be the most hurt if the name is not changed?"

With those questions in mind, the committee chose not to make a single recommendation to the Board but made the following recommended options for the Board of Governors to consider:

1. Keep the name Jenkins Hall;
2. Change the name to Marshall Lab School Building; or
3. Change the name to some combined name reflecting both the building's historic name (Jenkins) and its historic function (Lab School).

The Board has been given a copy of the Final Report, the report is a public document, and there are copies of it here today. I also will distribute copies of my comments as well.

I interacted directly with the committee at the beginning of the process and have restricted my interactions to be mainly with Chair Christie Kinsey and Consultant Lacy Ward. I purposefully did not attend the public forum in November, but I did view all of the videotaped segments of the meeting on Marshall's website. I have tried not to influence or prejudice the committee, and I think I have been successful in that regard.

With that background in mind, I want to share with you some independent thoughts that I have on the matter. I will begin by saying that in my opinion being a confederate officer or a slaveholder should not automatically disqualify an individual from being considered for a naming opportunity. Or to put it in other words, there should not be a litmus test on one or two issues. If you, like I, do not subscribe to a litmus test, then you do not have to worry about the concept of what people have called a slippery slope. What must be considered is the entirety of an individual's life and the total impact of that individual's life when judging his or her reputation and legacy.

I think much of the backlash of discussing the name of Jenkins is the fear that someone will apply some hidden agenda in attempting to erase history and/or demonize Albert Jenkins. The history and events of the life of Albert G. Jenkins need to be preserved and studied. He was a resident of Cabell County (VA), a graduate of Marshall Academy, a plantation owner, a graduate of Harvard, a member of the U.S Congress from Virginia, a slaveholder, and a general for the Confederate States of America.

It is obvious to all of us that the highly subjective question that has to be answered is this: is Albert Jenkins worthy of having his name remain on a building at Marshall University?

We cannot and should not change the fact that Albert Jenkins' name has been on the building for almost 82 years. I would argue that whether or not the name remains on the outside of the building as the official building name that it is appropriate to have some historical context on the inside of the building to reference his life and his accomplishments.

The question that the Board of Governors will want to consider in their deliberations is whether Albert Jenkins' accomplishments are of a level and of a kind that he deserves to have his name remain on the outside of this building as the official name.

For some guidance in answering this question in my mind, I turned to our own policies of the Board of Governors. Specifically, I examined MUBOG GA-10 Naming of Units and Facilities. I will quote now from section 2.1 of Policy GA-10. The policy reads, "this policy is designed to ensure that any unit or facility that is named at Marshall University honors individuals of extraordinary achievement and whose accomplishments are of enduring distinction and value. In addition, naming opportunities may be granted in honor of an individual who has made a significant and far-reaching impact on Marshall University through: 2.2.1 Extraordinary public service or service to the University without consideration of a monetary contribution. 2.1.2 A major monetary gift made to the University in accordance with the terms of this policy."

Without applying a litmus test, but when viewing the entirety of the life of Albert Jenkins, let's ask this question: is Albert Jenkins a person whose life shows "extraordinary achievement and whose accomplishments are of enduring distinction and value" or a person who has had "a significant and far-reaching impact on Marshall University through extraordinary public service or service to the University ..."? I think that you could make an argument that the entirety of his life does not meet this standard of extraordinary achievement and significant and far-reaching impact on Marshall University. And I would acknowledge that there are some that would argue that it might meet this standard.

I now would like to propose an alternative action for consideration by the Board of Governors that is different from the three options that have been proposed by the *ad hoc* committee. Considering the original naming of the building in recognition of Albert Jenkins and the fact that the building has had that name for 82 years, the Board should consider that the name "Jenkins" could be included inside the building in a prominent location as the original name of the building and that there could be some historical context on the interior of the building explaining his place in history.

Furthermore, in consideration of the BoG policy that states "extraordinary achievement" of "enduring distinction and value," I would like to suggest that there is a former and deceased president of Marshall University whose achievements and accomplishments easily meet the standards of this policy and would be a good candidate to have his name on this building. Additionally, this same president has a connection to the academic programming within the building whose name we are debating. In order not to reveal the name of the person outside of Executive Session, I will refer to the person as "President John Doe" of Marshall University.

The Board of Governors could consider placing the name of this former president on this building and have signage on the building that reads "John Doe Hall." You could also consider adding the phrase "formerly Jenkins Hall" if the Board thought it appropriate. Inside the building could be the history of the building enshrined in a display that encapsulates the life of Albert Jenkins and the career of President John Doe. Also included in the display could be

mention of the fact the Marshall Laboratory School was housed in the building and that now the building houses the College of Education and Professional Development.

This could be a compromise that preserves the history of the building and serves to promote the preservation of the history of the life of Albert Gallatin Jenkins. In Executive Session with the Board, I will present background information and the identity of President John Doe for the Board's consideration.

Having presented all of this, I realize that the full power of naming buildings lies with the Board of Governors. They may decide to leave the name as is, modify it in some way, or change it to convey a different recognition. It is the Board's decision to make and I know that it will not be an easy one for them, because this is a complex situation with strong feelings on all sides of the issue.

XXX