

Response to the Western Washington University Legacy Review Task Force Report

WWU Authors and Endorsers:

Wayne Landis, Steve Hollenhorst, David Leaf, Leo Bodensteiner, Robin Matthews,
Marion Brodhagen, David Wallin, Nicholas Zaferatos¹

August 18, 2021

The environmental community around the world is engaged in a profoundly important conversation that has great promise for a more inclusive, diverse, and ultimately more powerful movement. This conversation requires that we confront the troubling aspects of the movement's history, including the legacy of its early leaders, including T.H. Huxley. Like many educated Victorians, he held prejudices and biases, particularly in his earlier writings. But, like many of us, his views evolved and changed as he gained more knowledge and understanding of both human evolution and ethics.

We appreciate the role that the Legacy Review Task Force (LRTF) has played in this important process, particularly in listening to and responding to the concerns of students. Unfortunately, we have found serious flaws in the LTRF report regarding the racism claims against Huxley. We thank you in advance for your attention to our concerns summarized below:

- 1) It is essential that we evaluate the environmental movement's historical figures, including Huxley. Yet such an evaluation must also uphold the high standards of research and scholarship expected of public universities. Unfortunately, the LRTF report has fallen into the disinformation tactics of anti-evolutionists and creationists, thereby advancing their sectarian political agenda.
- 2) A well-known approach of creationists is to attack the teaching of evolution by insinuating that key proponent of evolution were racists. The claims in the LRTF report against Huxley are directly derived from creationist writers and pseudo-science publications that are also linked to white supremacy, climate change denial, and the Big Lie that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. Association with such arguments in the cause of social justice draws WWU into the culture war between the scientific community and proponents of creationism.
- 3) The report ignores definitive evidence of the positive impact Huxley made on society generally, and in the lives of its marginalized and underrepresented members in particular. Specifically, the report cherry picks from the opinions of the four invited scholars (Lyons, Riedy, Rupke and White) to advance claims in direct opposition to the actual position of a majority of these scholars. It largely relies upon the opinion of Nicholaas Rupke, who has a history of supporting Young Earth creationism and creationist views of evolution.
- 4) The LRTF makes specific claims that are serious distortions and outright falsehoods regarding Huxley's writings. We analyze four of the most egregious claims and provide detailed refutations of each.
- 5) We agree that in spite of gains in the last few years that Huxley College and the environmental movement needs to work harder to be more diverse and inclusive. The Board of Trustees (BOT) should direct the university to undertake an evidence-based process that encourages social justice advocates, historians of science and scientists to come together around the goal of advancing both WWU's values of diversity and academic excellence through mutual learning, seeking truth, and finding common ground.

¹ The authors wish to thank the scientists, historians, science educators, and other scholars from WWU and around the U.S. and world who analyzed the LRTF report and made contributions to this response. Specifically we are grateful to the following: Nick Matzke, Senior Lecturer, School of Biological Sciences, University of Auckland, for his deep analysis of the report; Paul Braterman and his readers at [Primate's Progress](#); Matt Young, Joe Felsenstein and their readers at [Pandasthumb.org](#); Jerry Coyne and his readers at [whyevolutionistrue.com](#); and Glenn Branch, Deputy Director of the [National Center for Science Education](#), an affiliate of the [American Association for the Advancement of Science](#) (AAAS).

We did attempt to make these concerns and recommendations known in several ways before and during the LRTF process. We first recommended that the LRTF be made up of objective, non-partisan members. However, several openly partisan critics of Huxley were appointed. We then asked that there also be included at least one member with an expertise on Huxley and/or biological evolution. This request was also denied. We then asked to address the LRTF, an opportunity that was afforded Huxley critics, and were again denied. With no other recourse, we publicized our concerns with two editorials, one in the *Seattle Times*² and one in *The Planet*³. These concerns were also largely dismissed. The result is a lopsided polemic filled with distortions and outright falsehoods regarding Huxley's views and writings.

It is absolutely necessary that we reckon with the environmental movement's historical figures, Huxley included. Unfortunately, larger religious and political forces are also at work to take advantage of this commitment. The religious right has long had Huxley, "Darwin's Bulldog," in their crosshairs. A vocal secularist (he invented the word "agnostic") and leading voice for the idea of humankind existing within, rather than divinely apart, from nature, Huxley represents an existential threat to their theistic, sectarian worldview. For decades, anti-evolution creationists have used disinformation tactics, such as *gaslighting* and *quote-mining*, many aimed at Huxley, to undermine the teaching of evolution in public schools. Gaslighting happens when creationists sow seeds of doubt to get people to question their own perceptions or judgments about science, and evolution in particular. Quote-mining is a strategy in which creationists lift a passage of writing from its context to misrepresent the writer's position. This material is then strategically placed at slick pseudo-science websites, TV "documentaries", and even academic textbooks that look legitimate at first and even second glance.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what has happened here at WWU. Gaslit by creationists to think the worst of Huxley, well-meaning social justice advocates began calling for Huxley's name to be removed from the college, claiming he was a racist. Vulnerable to misinformation, some students inadvertently began doing the creationists' work by engaging in a quote-mining campaign aimed at discrediting Huxley. It's not surprising that vulnerable students, and even other members of the LRTF, might mistake such disinformation for authentic and unbiased scholarship. With no voices on the LRTF to bring attention to the problem, the LRTF report synthesizes and amplifies this anti-science creationist narrative.

Ironically, denaming the college would, on the national and international level, be a huge win for creationists and white supremacists bent on undermining secular institutions, evolution science, and evolution education. In a recent commentary published in *Scientific American* entitled "Denial of Evolution is a form of White Supremacy,"⁴ Allison Hopper contends that evolution denial is a form of white supremacy disguised as "religious freedom." Anti-evolution activists have, for over a century, relentlessly pressed for biblical stories to be included in science education curricula. She notes that the first legal campaigns against the teaching of evolution in the 1920s was supported by the KKK. At the heart of white evangelical creationism is the mythology of an unbroken white lineage that stretches back to a light-skinned Adam and Eve. Leading evolution theorists like Huxley have long been the target of creationists because they challenge this narrative.

² Hollenhorst, S., and Landis, W. 2021. Reconsider cancel-culture target at WWU. *Seattle Times*. <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/reconsider-cancel-culture-target-at-wwu/>

³ Landis, W., Leaf, D., Hollenhorst, S., and Bodensteiner, L. 2021. Op-Ed: Standing Up to Anti-Evolutionism: Finding a win-win outcome for justice and science in the Huxley College name issue. *The Planet*. <https://theplanetmagazine.net/op-ed-standing-up-to-anti-evolutionism-4cd26d17133a>

⁴ Hopper, A. 2021. *Denial of Evolution is a form of White Supremacy*. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/denial-of-evolution-is-a-form-of-white-supremacy/>

In the following analysis, we describe in detail the deep concerns we have with the LRTF report. We begin with the general overarching problems, followed by analysis of the more glaring inaccuracies, distortions, and falsehoods. We owe a debt of gratitude to the many scientists, science historians, science educators, and other scholars from WWU and around the world who have read and critiqued the LRTF report. We have synthesized their observations here.

Overarching Concern: Advancing an Anti-Evolution, Creationist Narrative

While there are many troubling issues with the T.H. Huxley section of the LRTF report, the most obvious and overarching concern, with national and international repercussions, is that the conclusions are based on disproven arguments advanced by anti-evolution, anti-science creationists, some of whom also can be described as holding white supremacist views. These writings began to appear in the 1970s and are strategically placed at *faux*-science and pseudoscience websites, where they were unwittingly picked up and deployed by well-meaning individuals here at WWU. We know this because the creationist and white supremacist sources were cited by LRTF members in editorials and working documents used by the LRTF. The LRTF report embraces and amplifies this disinformation into a hyperbolic narrative not accepted by any respected and objective historians.

The LRTF dismisses this concern as a “so-called genetic fallacy, or fallacy of origination, by criticizing the source of an argument rather than the argument itself.” But this misses the point. The arguments themselves, not just their creationist origins, are seriously flawed distortions and falsehoods, as we show in the analysis below. Given these flaws, combined with the ideological agenda behind them, their claims cannot be regarded as credible. The fact is that the LRTF did not present any objective, independent evidence to substantiate the claims of Huxley’s racism. Virtually all of the sources the LRTF used are problematic because they advance an anti-evolution, creationist, and ironically, white supremacist agenda.

While the LRTF report does not include the names of these creationist sources, it does something even worse. It embraces the claims while stripping away any acknowledgement or citation of the original sources. The result is a grave misrepresentation of those claims that frankly is tantamount to plagiarism. We ask, why does the LRTF report hide these original sources? If the claims were supported by objective scholarship in legitimate historic and scientific literature, the LRTF surely would have cited these sources. The fact is that such objective support does not exist in the scientific or science history literature. Hiding the creationist sources results in a seriously misleading retelling of history.

Specifically, the claims of racism against Huxley are largely derived from the following individuals:

- **Henry M. Morris**. The original claim that Huxley was racist traces back to a 1973 article⁵ by Henry M. Morris, founder of modern young-earth creationism, fanatical anti-evolutionist, and himself a racist who espoused a biblical justification for slavery.⁶ Morris avidly misused quotations from legitimate scientists and scholars to undermine evolution. By characterizing evolution’s greatest proponents as racist, Morris knew he could get progressives to do his work for him. It is suggestive that the single Huxley quote in the LRTF report, from his essay “Emancipation – Black and White,” was first quote mined by Morris and used in the 1973 article and has metastasized through creationist sources ever since.

⁵ Morris, H. 1973. Evolution and Modern Racism. *Acts & Facts*. 2 (7). <https://www.icr.org/article/evolution-modern-racism/>

⁶ Braterman, P. 2019. Creationism, Noah’s Flood, and Race. *3 Quarks Daily*. <https://3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2019/03/creationism-noahs-flood-and-race.html>

- **Paul Glumaz.** The claim that Huxley’s ethnological work is racist was first advanced by Paul Glumaz, a long-term activist for the Lyndon LaRouche organization, a fringe conspiracist political network.⁷ The article used by LRTF members was published in *Executive Intelligence Review*, a notorious LaRouche newsmagazine known for hawking conspiracy theories over the past five decades, including that climate change is a hoax⁸ and the “Big Lie” conspiracy that claims the presidential election was stolen.⁹
- **Jerry R. Bergman.** Bergman is a young-earth creationist and author of the book *The Darwin Effect*, published by a creationist publisher, which purports to document “the common destructive threads that tie some of history’s most murderous dictators, uncaring capitalists, and aggressive social activists to the flawed concepts of Charles Darwin.” Ironically, in 1985, he complained that he was the victim of reverse discrimination in the newsletter of David Duke’s National Association for the Advancement of White People.
- **Brian Thomas.** Thomas is another young-earth creationist and writer for the Institute for Creation Research, a young-earth faux-research organization that attempts to debunk evolution science and theorists like T.H. Huxley. His articles focus on current events and news that he then shoehorns¹⁰ into supporting creationism, as in the case of his distortions of Huxley’s position on fisheries management and regulation.¹¹

We know this because these names and/or their ideas were cited in articles and papers written by LRTF members themselves that were then carried over into the LRTF report. We also know because in the process of purging any reference to these original sources, they missed one, **Michael Flannery** (citation number 10). Flannery is a fellow with the anti-evolution, intelligent-design-promoting Discovery Institute, which promotes creationism under the banner of “Intelligent Design”, as well as other conspiracy theories, such as the consensus on climate change is bogus.¹² Flannery has produced a string of pseudohistorical commentary – some in pseudoscience blogs, some in minor academic journals – aimed at vilifying evolutionary scientists. One of Flannery’s most recent articles is, not surprisingly, an attack on Allison Hopper’s *Scientific American* commentary.¹³

It is laudable that the LRTF solicited observations from such scholars as White, Lyons, and Reidy. These observations do not of themselves settle the question of Huxley College’s name, but they, and similar reliable and objective scholarship, rather than ideological attacks on Huxley, should be at the basis of any decision. It is extremely troubling that their ideas were almost completely ignored.

By contrast, there is the historian Nicolaas Rupke, whose minority views the LRTF chose to adopt over the views of White, Lyons, and Reidy. Rupke has published two articles in the *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, a pseudoscience journal published by a creationist group whose founders included Henry M. Morris (see above). One of these articles purports to prove the 6,000-year geologic history of the earth and the biblical flood. Did the LRTF missed this or purposely ignored it? Or did they notice that Rupke’s

⁷ George, J. and Wilcox, L. 1996. *American Extremists: Militias, Supremacists, Klansmen, Communists & Others*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. [ISBN 978-1-57392-058-2](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0891957392).

⁸ Glumaz, 2016. How Bertrand Russell made us stupid, fearful, and evil. *Executive Intelligence Review*. https://larouchepub.com/other/2016/4305russell_made_us_stupid.html

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYZbg2IR6gY>

¹⁰ <http://www.skeptdic.com/shoehorning.html>

¹¹ Thomas, B. 2009. Huxley Error Led to Cod Calamity. *Acts & Facts*. 38 (8):17. <https://www.icr.org/article/huxley-error-led-cod-calamity/>

¹² Flannery, M. 2012. Review: Planetary History, Wallace, and Natural Selection. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 43, No. 1 (Summer 2012). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41487865>

¹³ Flannery, M. 2021. Richard Owen and Charles Darwin on Race: A Study in Contrasts. *Evolution News*. <https://evolutionnews.org/2021/07/richard-owen-and-charles-darwin-on-race-a-study-in-contrasts-2/>

views evolved, making it acceptable to promote his later writing while hypocritically ignoring Huxley's evolution in thinking on equity, justice, and the unity of all humanity.

Even more problematic with Rupke is that his recent writings do not accept the critical mechanisms of natural selection that are a matter of scientific consensus. Instead, he has devoted his career to elevating the legacy of one of Huxley's contemporaries and opponents, Richard Owen, who promoted a role for divine intervention as an evolutionary mechanism. Rupke's attacks on Huxley and his so-called "Huxley's Rule" (see below), along with his promotion of Owen's supernatural views, show the anti-evolution ideology at the core of his critique of Huxley.

As further evidence of Rupke's bias, we note that he did not sign on to a letter¹⁴ written by the faculty in the Department of History at Washington and Lee University, of which he is a member. Written in response to calls for the removal of Robert E. Lee's name from the university, the letter calls for a full reckoning with the institution's history of racism, Robert E. Lee and the Confederacy. It is telling that Rupke did not sign on to the letter, but does criticize Huxley, suggesting that his concern is not so much with the racist views of historical figures, but with Huxley in particular.

Such creationist motivations are not, by themselves, a refutation of the arguments used. But they are highly relevant in evaluating the trustworthiness of the arguments. They are also highly relevant when considering, as we are here, matters of balance. The imbalance in the LRTF report is immediately apparent to anyone with specialist knowledge of the evolution-creationism controversy, or of evolution science, or of the history of 19th century thought. Unfortunately, no such specialists were included on the LRTF. The result of this imbalance is readily apparent. Of the four academic specialists consulted by the LRTF, Rupke's problematic opinion was adopted over those of the three other internationally acclaimed scholars.

Report Themes

Beyond the general problem with the claims and sources described above, the LRTF organized its criticism of Huxley along three basic themes, which are described as: "Huxley's views about natural racial and gender inequalities, the role of these hierarchical views in the application of Darwin's theory of evolution to humans, and the development of scientific racism more generally." The report implies that all four historians came to these conclusions. They clearly did not. Only Rupke made such strong claims. In fact, the other three historians all acknowledged Huxley's role in combating racial and gender inequalities, refuting hierarchical ideas in human evolution, and fighting scientific racism.

Natural Racial and Gender Inequality

Regarding the first claim, that Huxley held views of natural racial and gender inequality, we strongly encourage the Board of Trustees to reread the views of the historians, included in Appendix C. The LRTF's summary is simply not an accurate reflection of their views, Rupke excepted. The concluding words of Paul White, one of those distinguished historians, presents a more accurate synthesis of those views:

Huxley is described as an abolitionist, he was in fact much more than this. He called for the elimination of all political, legal, and economic prejudices, equal rights and opportunities for people of all races (and sexes). If the staff and students agree to remove Huxley's name, they should at least do so with a better understanding of his

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/WashingtonandLeeHistory/>

views, and an appreciation for his place in the history of human emancipation and activism.¹⁵

An extremely troubling aspect of the LRTF report is that it lifts quotes first mined by creationists to confirm the racism and sexism claims against Huxley, while ignoring Huxley's writings and other evidence that disprove the claims. Additionally, the report relies on earlier writings of Huxley, but totally ignores the evolution of thought that led him to see the unity and equality in all humanity. To be sure, Huxley's earlier views reflected the same Victorian-era prejudices and bigotry of his scientific and clerical peers. But the report ignores the fact that Huxley escaped these prejudices to adopt views expressive of full racial and gender equality.

As evidence of this evolution of thinking, in his 1870 lectures on "The Character, Distribution and Origin of the Principal Modifications of Mankind,"¹⁶ he claimed that there was no scientific evidence that any group of people was innately different from, or more biologically advanced than, any other. In the same lectures he overtly declined to use words such as "species," "varieties," and even "races" to describe diversity in human populations. Similarly, in an 1878 commentary¹⁷ he contended that socio-economic disparities were the result of "pre-existing social and political relations," not race. He did not believe "that race has any appreciable influence upon their social and political conditions of the present day." This is ultimately where Huxley landed. This is the marker he put down for the rest of society to aspire toward.

Human Hierarchy and Scientific Racism

As for the second and third claims, that Huxley promoted a hierarchy of humans and scientific racism, the LRTF again relies on the ideas of Lyndon LaRouche operative Paul Glumaz (but without citation) and Rupke to paint Huxley as a polygenist (someone who accepts the idea that the human "races" evolved from different origins) and as holding that there exists a greater difference among "the races of man" than that between "the lowest Man and the highest Ape."

First, it is a complete fabrication to claim that Huxley was a polygenist. This is simply another gaslighting distortion that was uncritically accepted by the LRTF. The consensus view in the history of science literature is that Huxley opposed the *theistic* theory of monogenesis – the idea that humans descended from Adam and Eve. This does not make him a polygenist. What he did support was scientific monogenesis, or the "new monogenism" – that *H. sapiens* is a single species with a monophyletic (one population) origin followed by diversification through migration and geographic isolation. The "poly-" element to Huxley's thinking explicitly relates to the diversification through migration and geographic isolation, not to human origin.

Huxley's view is wholly consistent with current scientific consensus and follows current thinking based on DNA evidence. The claim that Huxley's views were not monogenist demonstrates fundamental misrepresentation of his views, the basic tenets of evolution, and the seeds of disinformation planted by creationists. Huxley in fact wrote that polygenists "have as yet completely failed to adduce satisfactory positive proof of the specific diversity of mankind."¹⁸

Second, there is only one legitimate "Huxley's Rule" or "Huxley's Law" in the scientific literature, and it is in reference to the research of Julian Huxley on heterogonic growth in organisms. Indeed, a distinguished

¹⁵ White, P. 2021. Letter to Legacy Review Task Force, March 27. [https://president.wvu.edu/files/2021-04/PS White Huxley Legacy.pdf](https://president.wvu.edu/files/2021-04/PS%20White%20Huxley%20Legacy.pdf)

¹⁶ <https://mathcs.clarku.edu/huxley/SM3/GeoDis.html>

¹⁷ <https://mathcs.clarku.edu/huxley/UnColl/Nature/PracFall.html>

¹⁸ See Huxley's "Methods and Results," p. 275, but also p. 257. <https://mathcs.clarku.edu/huxley/CE1/>

philosopher of biology, the late David Hull, has noted that, relative to T. H. Huxley, “nothing today goes by the name of Huxley’s Law.”¹⁹ The only place the phrase “Huxley’s Rule” or “Huxley’s law” occurs in relation to T. H. Huxley is in the writings of Rupke – no other historian or evolutionary science scholar has supported it. In short, it exists only in Rupke’s mind.

Third, Rupke’s conception of Huxley’s Rule, that “intragroup difference exceeds intergroup difference,” is the inverse of Huxley’s actual views. For an accurate take on Huxley’s position, we can look directly at his writing in *Man’s Place in Nature*:²⁰

“Thus, whatever system of organs be studied, the comparison of their modifications in the ape series leads to one and the same result – that the structural differences which separate Man from the Gorilla and the Chimpanzee are not so great as those which separate the Gorilla from the lower apes” (p. 123). “But if man be separated by no greater structural barrier from the brutes than they are from each other – then it seems to follow that... there would be no rational ground for doubting that man might have originated... by the gradual modification of a man-like ape”... “At the present moment there is but one hypothesis which has any scientific existence — that propounded by Mr. Darwin” (p. 125).

In other words, the difference between the highest apes and humans is greater than the variation found among humans. Rather, it is an argument for the close biological kinship of humans with the great apes—chimpanzees and gorillas. Again, modern DNA evidence confirmed this conclusion, 100 years after Huxley proposed it.²¹ It’s obvious why no other historians or evolutionary scientists support Rupke’s conclusions.

Specific Problematic Claims

There are also many specific claims in the report that are distortions, misrepresentations, and outright falsehoods about Huxley’s views:

1. “As a prominent scientist, Huxley contributed to upholding values that have made education less inclusive, and his words harm Black, Indigenous and other students of color at our institution...” and “The Task Force hopes that a changed name will bring the institution more in line with our contemporary mission and shared focus on academic excellence and inclusive achievement.”

There are two primary problems with this claim. First, it is based on the premise that the characterization of Huxley as a racist is a forgone conclusion. Given the problematic nature of this conclusion, it does not follow that harm was caused. Without a better explanation of the harm, how it was caused by Huxley, and evidence that he caused it, it remains what it is, a disproven claim advanced by creationists and anti-evolutionists in order to undermine evolution.

Secondly, the report utterly ignores the demonstrable benefit and good that Huxley did create in his life work. In reality, the whole thrust of Huxley’s career was to make science, and education, **more** inclusive. Paul White again:

¹⁹ Hull, D. 1979. Reviewed Work: *T. H. Huxley: Man’s Place in Nature* by James G. Paradis.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827456>

²⁰ Huxley T.H. 1863. *Evidence as to Man’s place in nature*. Williams & Norgate, London.

²¹ The Chimpanzee Sequencing and Analysis Consortium. Initial sequence of the chimpanzee genome and comparison with the human genome. *Nature* **437**, 69–87 (2005).

Huxley devoted a great deal of his career to them in the field of education reform. He campaigned tirelessly for universal education, for the introduction of science and other modern subjects to schools and universities, for a true 'liberal education' as well as technical education for the working classes. In doing so, he opposed some of the most entrenched ideological and institutional hierarchies in Britain at the time, those of class.²²

The LRTF report completely overlooks the concrete evidence of positive impact Huxley made on society generally, and in the lives of its marginalized and underrepresented members in particular. Historians recognize Huxley as “the premier advocate of science in the nineteenth century”²³. He is also recognized as the single most influential person in the democratization of science and science education, for his role in the founding of the journal *Nature*, as founder and president of many scientific societies, for his work on the Jamaica Committee,²⁴ and for his work on ten Royal commissions. He is widely recognized for his leadership in the creation of the field of science education, for devising modern K-12 education curriculum for both the privileged and the masses, for bringing college and vocational opportunities to the working class, for fighting for the admission of women to universities, and as history’s greatest popularizer of science for common people.²⁵ Lastly, Huxley's life and work contributed significantly to the secularization of society and secular educational institutions²⁶ like WWU.

Also not acknowledged in the LRTF report is Huxley’s decades-long battle against the idea of scientific racism, and its chief proponent, James Hunt. He also vehemently opposed Hunt and the Anthropological Society for their support of not only the Confederacy, but for the institution of slavery.²⁷

In summary, we have on one side a claim of harm based on a distorted and demonstrably false characterization of Huxley. On the other we have overwhelming historical consensus of his profound positive impact on society. It is bewildering how the LRTF report uncritically embraces the former while totally ignoring the latter.

If there is real harm to Black, indigenous, and other students of color, we suggest it is from the creationist, anti-science disinformation that is driving a wedge between science and social justice advocates. WWU Students of Color and the LRTF are being taken advantage of by creationists with toxic agendas. The real harm results from this gaslighting with falsehoods and creationist propaganda. If we don’t stand up to it, it represents a tactic that will be used by creationists on a wider scale, resulting in even greater harm.

²² White, P. 2021. Letter to Legacy Review Task Force, March 27. [https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-04/PS White Huxley Legacy.pdf](https://president.wwu.edu/files/2021-04/PS%20White%20Huxley%20Legacy.pdf)

²³ Lyons, S. 1999. *Thomas Henry Huxley: The Evolution of a Scientist*. Roman & Littlefield. <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781573927062/Thomas-Henry-Huxley-The-Evolution-of-a-Scientist>

²⁴ Winter, S. On the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica and the Governor Eyre-George William Gordon Controversy, 1865-70. Branch. https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=sarah-winter-on-the-morant-bay-rebellion-in-jamaica-and-the-governor-eyre-george-william-gordon-controversy-1865-70

²⁵ Desmond, A. J. (1997). *Huxley: From devil's disciple to evolution's high priest*.

²⁶ Mayr, E. (1982). *The growth of biological thought: Diversity, evolution, and inheritance*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press.

²⁷ Lorimer, Douglas. “Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology, 1870-1900.” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Spring, 1988). 405-430. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3828098>

And lastly, there is significant harm the LRTF report does to the university's values of academic excellence, scholarly integrity, academic honesty, and the scientific enterprise. The inaccuracies, distortions, and falsehood in the report undermine these values. As a task force report, it could be argued that it need not be held to the same standards of source acknowledgement and citation as would an academic document. However, by not doing so, it undercuts our commitment to these values.

2. *"Some argue that in the broader context of the essay, Huxley was uncommonly progressive in his attitudes towards Black people. This claim does not stand up to scrutiny of the historical context...opposition to slavery and belief in the basic humanity of people of African descent was not uncommon, exceptional, or, in the context of Huxley's many negative generalizations on the basis of race, laudable."*

This is an inaccurate and oversimplified characterization of British views. While average working people supported the North and opposed slavery, they also held incredibly racist and sexist views. Conversely, the overwhelming consensus among historians is that the British elite was solidly in support of the Confederacy, including many members of Government and Parliament, and were therefore willing to set aside their qualms about slavery. These elites included the aristocracy and the gentry, who identified with the landed plantation owners, and the clergy and wealthy professionals who admired tradition, hierarchy and paternalism. Many elites also had economic interests in the slave-dependent economies of the Confederate states.²⁸ It's also important to note that that People of Color did not have the right to vote and did not gain full suffrage in Great Britain until 1928.

The conclusion that Huxley's views of full equality irrespective of race or gender were not uncommon is simply false. More to the point, all we have to do is look at the concluding words of historian Paul White, who the LRTF report ignores:

Were these views typical of his time? Not at all. They were far in advance of it; highly progressive, even radical. They were not simply views, but causes, and Huxley devoted a great deal of his career to them in the field of education reform. He campaigned tirelessly for universal education, for the introduction of science and other modern subjects to schools and universities, for a true 'liberal education' as well as technical education for the working classes. In doing so, he opposed some of the most entrenched ideological and institutional hierarchies in Britain at the time, those of class. In less outspoken ways, he also supported women's causes in higher education, scientific education, medical training and certification.

As further evidence, we only need look at Huxley's decades long battle against the scientific racism of the Anthropological Society of London, led by James Hunt, and its support for the Confederacy and the institution of slavery, all of which Huxley abhorred and publicly opposed.²⁹ We also see it in his membership on the Jamaica Committee. As such, Huxley was fighting against some of the most powerful forces in British society and the scientific community.

3. *"Task Force members voiced concerns that Huxley's grandson, the 1959-62 President of the British Eugenics Society, Julian Huxley, was invited in 1969 to speak at the dedication of the College of the Environment. This targeted invite that appears to not have been extended to other descendants of T.H.*

²⁸ Hopkin, A. (2018). *American Empire: A Global History*. PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc776kg>

²⁹ Lorimer, Douglas. "Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology, 1870-1900." *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Spring, 1988). 405-430. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3828098>

Huxley suggests that the racist pseudoscience of “better breeding” was seen as a legitimate aspect of Huxley’s legacy even after eugenics had been widely critiqued as unethical and potentially genocidal.”

This is the one claim in the report that did not originate with creationists, yet still is fraught with illogical assertions. It is simply unfair and petty to hold T.H. Huxley responsible for the actions of President Flora, or the views of a grandson for that matter. Nor does the LRTF present any evidence that President Flora contemplated Julian Huxley’s eugenics record when inviting him to speak at the dedication. Suggesting that eugenics was somehow part of President Flora’s thinking, or associated with T.H. Huxley, who devoted his career to fighting its predecessor concepts – scientific racism and social Darwinism - is simply a far-fetched conjecture. If President Flora actually held this view, of which there is no evidence, isn’t it his legacy that should be scrutinized?

4. *“Huxley’s claims about the inexhaustibility of fisheries has contributed to the decline of the salmon runs that are central to Coast Salish cultures”*

This claim is another falsehood originally advanced by anti-evolution creationists, namely Brian Thomas, in an article first posted at the Institute for Creation Research.³⁰ To fact check it, all the LRTF had to do was to read Huxley’s actual words,³¹ which are the exact opposite of the Thomas claims perpetuated in LRTF report:

I have no doubt whatever that some fisheries may be exhausted. Take the case of a salmon river, for example. It needs no argument to convince any one who is familiar with the facts of the case that it is possible to net the main stream, in such a manner, as to catch every salmon that tries to go up and every smolt that tries to go down. Not only is this true, but daily experience in this country unfortunately proves that pollutions may be poured into the upper waters of a salmon river of such a character and in such quantity as to destroy every fish in it.

In this case, although man is only one of many agents which are continually effecting the destruction of salmon in all stages of its existence – although he shares the work with otters and multitudes of other animals, and even with parasitic plants – yet his intelligence enables him, whenever he pleases, to do more damage than all the rest put together; in fact, to extirpate all the salmon in the river and to prevent the access of any others.

Thus, in dealing with this kind of exhaustible fishery, the principle of the measures by which we may reasonably expect to prevent exhaustion is plain enough. Man is the chief enemy, and we can deal with him by force of law...

Now, if you will consider the action of the conservators of a salmon river, you will see that they, at any rate, strive to do for the salmon that which a careful shepherd does for his sheep. Obstacles in the way of free access to the breeding grounds are removed by the construction of fish passes; the breeding stock is protected by the annual close time; animals which prey on the fish, or compete dangerously with them, are kept down; or the salmon are placed at an advantage by artificially stocking the river. Finally, the destructive agency of man, who plays the part of the butcher, is limited by removal of pollution—by the prohibition of taking parr and

³⁰ Thomas, B. 2009. Huxley Error Led to Cod Calamity. *Acts & Facts*. 38 (8): 17. <https://www.icr.org/article/huxley-error-led-cod-calamity/>

³¹ Huxley, T.H. Inaugural Address: Fisheries Exhibition. 1883. <https://mathcs.clarku.edu/huxley/SM5/fish.html>

smolts—by the restrictions on the character and on the size of meshes of nets; and, indirectly, by the license duty on nets and rods...

A salmon fishery then (and the same reasoning applies to all river fisheries) can be exhausted by man because man is, under ordinary circumstances, one of the chief agents of destruction; and, for the same reason, its exhaustion can usually be prevented, because man's operations may be controlled and reduced to any extent that may be desired by force of law.

These words are exceptionally consistent with fishery science today, 140 years after Huxley spoke them. We should be proud to be associated with such prescient views on what we know today as one of the world's and our region's most important ecosystem services.

In the same address, Huxley did say that sea fisheries – cod, herring, mackerel – were inexhaustible, but he clearly qualified this to say this was only true “in relation to our present modes of fishing.” He unequivocally limits this conclusion to current conditions, not the future. Huxley understood that renewable resource sustainability was a function of the dynamic interplay between the productivity of the resource, consumption demands, and harvesting technology. Huxley cannot be held accountable for not anticipating the massive increase in worldwide seafood demand, or for the technological advances (SONAR, GPS, nylon nets, radio communications, diesel power, etc.) that have drastically changed this balance. It is clear from his remarks that he acknowledged that the dynamic between humans and the resource was not static, and that future conditions could change.

Conclusions

Of all the individuals whose names are being considered for removal, T.H. Huxley is the only one of major international stature. As such, the decision around his name will have national and international repercussions that the BOT must consider. These repercussions will reflect, for good or ill, on the reputation of the institution. As a public institution that values academic excellence and scholarly integrity, WWU should prevent this anti-science propaganda from taking root. Rather than reflexively acquiescing to misinformed demands, as well-meaning as they are, we should strive to replace disinformation with evidence-based, factual history, and honest evaluation that includes all perspectives around this decision.

Like many great social reformers of the nineteenth century, Huxley grew and evolved through scientific inquiry and personal experience. In his later writings, he expressed the view of the oneness and equality of all humanity, regardless race, ethnic background, gender, or class. While many of his academic and political colleagues promoted white supremacist myths and exclusionary views, Huxley worked tirelessly for universal equality and against the entrenched forces of oppression and hierarchy. For this he remains worthy of honor and respect for dedicating his life to promoting the inherent values and rights of every human being, of the interconnectedness of all humanity, and the connection of humanity to nature. It is clear from his scientific and moral journey that if he were alive today, Huxley would be an ally in the fight to dismantle systemic racism.

As a public institution, WWU should not perpetuate or advance a particular religious ideology, especially one so vehemently opposed to public, secular educational institutions. We cannot allow a sectarian political agenda to divert us from our goal of creating a sustainable and livable Earth for all, including communities of color. If Huxley could transform himself from a narrow-minded Victorian to a global citizen who understood the oneness and equality of all people, so can we.

Although we believe de-naming is not a solution, much work remains to make the mainstream environmental movement in general, and Huxley College in particular, welcoming to People of Color.

Open and sustained dialogue within the entire WWU community (especially students) is needed to understand the causes for anger and discontent. We recommend that the BOT direct the university to conduct a year-long review of its diversity, equity, and inclusion work across all of its environmental programs, both inside and outside of Huxley, and develop a set of tangible actions for further progress. Such actions should go beyond divisive, agenda driven symbolic gestures (like de-naming) to include strategies resulting in real change, such as training and education about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that is required and compensated to encourage unanimous organizational buy-in and collaboration. Our hope is that better widespread DEI awareness and sustained dialogue among WWU employees and students will manifest in increasingly effective communication across race, class, gender, and cultural lines. With healthy communication, training and conversations can be translated into real action, such as ensuring leadership supportive of DEI, an institutional culture in which DEI values are ingrained, and targeting funding in strategic ways that support people of color.

In closing, we urge continued conversation about the name of the Huxley College of the Environment, with an evidence-based lens that results in a full reckoning of T.H. Huxley's legacy. Social justice advocates should be deeply involved in the conversation, but so should the science and science history communities. The BOT should encourage the two groups to come together around the goals of mutual learning, seeking truth, and finding common ground. While a college name change may in the end be part of this work, such a decision should be made free of the anti-science, creationist, and white supremacist-derived narrative infused throughout the LRTF report.