

**Final Report**  
**Pierce Library Naming Committee**

August 27, 2020

To President Insko,

Please find here the Pierce Library Naming Committee's Final Report regarding the denaming of EOU's Walter and Cornelia Pierce library. Our recommendation is to dename the library. We have organized the report beginning with a brief history of the ongoing controversy concerning the library's name; the criteria and guiding principles we used to guide our decision-making process; and a detailed analysis that applies those criteria and principles to the question of retaining or removing the library's current name.

We adopt the report and its principles unanimously.

Tim Seydel, (chair)

*Eastern Oregon University '89, Vice President for University Advancement*

Andrea Camacho

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In 1954, Eastern Oregon College named the university library after Walter Pierce, shortly after his death. Pierce, a long-time eastern Oregon resident, had served as Oregon governor from 1922-1926. In addition, Pierce served 10 years in the U.S. Congress and two terms in the Oregon state senate.<sup>1</sup>

In the ensuing 66 years, people have raised concerns about Pierce's reputation as the "Klan candidate," as well as his nativist beliefs and his active support for various anti-immigrant policies. In 1999, in response to campus and community discussions asserting that keeping Pierce's name on the library was detrimental to the college, President Phillip D. Creighton directed Provost Bruce Shepard to examine the issue. The final committee report recommended keeping Pierce's name but adding his wife Cornelia's name. Cornelia Marvin Pierce was appointed in 1905 as the secretary of the recently established State Library Commission. She also served as the Oregon State Librarian from 1913-1928, resigning her post to marry Pierce.<sup>2</sup>

Since this report in 1999, the question has arisen informally across campus numerous times regarding the appropriateness of the library name. Most recently, the EOU Faculty Senate resolved in 2017 to rename Pierce Library through a deliberative process.<sup>3</sup> In response to that resolution, University Advancement recommended President Insko convene an advisory committee to consider again the question of the library's name.

Primarily because of Pierce's active courting of Ku Klux Klan support in his successful run for the governorship in 1922, the question of the library's name has remained contentious over the decades. At the same time, while not an especially significant political figure, as a progressive Democrat, Pierce was a champion of efforts to "democratize the political process and lessen the inequities of the new corporate capitalist reality of the early twentieth century."<sup>4</sup> This seeming contradiction has injected some complexity into the discussion of the library name. The authors of the 1999 report concluded that since Pierce was not an actual member of the KKK, "we do not believe that candidate Pierce's cultivation of the votes of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1922 election is, alone, sufficient grounds for removing his name from our Library."<sup>5</sup> However, much has

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<sup>1</sup> "The Name of the Walter M. Pierce Library," report to Phillip D. Creighton, October 5, 1999, <http://provost.eou.edu/pierce>. For scholarship covering Walter Pierce's political career, see Robert R. McCoy, "The Paradox of Oregon's Progressive Politics: The Political Career of Walter Marcus Pierce," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, v. 110, no. 3 (Fall, 2009), 390-419; Gerald Schwartz, *Walter M. Pierce and the Tradition of Progressive Reform: A Study of Eastern Oregon's Great Democrat*, Dissertation, (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1970); and Arthur H. Bone, *Oregon Cattleman/Governor Congressman: Memoirs and Times of Walter M. Pierce*, Portland, OR: The Oregon Historical Society, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Cornelia Marvin Pierce," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cornelia\\_Marvin\\_Pierce&oldid=871951454](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cornelia_Marvin_Pierce&oldid=871951454) (accessed August 10, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Knowles, Faculty Senate President to Tim Seydel, Vice-President, Office of University Advancement, June 1, 2018. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B165D3H\\_UsLGYWxoVUJFdHk0OVk/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B165D3H_UsLGYWxoVUJFdHk0OVk/view)

<sup>4</sup> Robert R. McCoy, "The Paradox of Oregon's Progressive Politics: The Political Career of Walter Marcus Pierce," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, v. 110, no. 3 (Fall, 2009), p. 406.

<sup>5</sup> "The Name of the Walter M. Pierce Library," p.3. it should be noted that the question of Pierce's KKK membership is not entirely settled.

changed since 1999. At a minimum, our nation's growing awareness of and commitment to cultural competency, and our increasingly sophisticated understanding of the corrosive and pervasive realities of systemic racism, require us to offer a more thorough measuring of an individual's actions. It is telling that both historians who co-authored the 1999 report now favor removing Walter Pierce's name from the library.<sup>6</sup>

Historical scholarship has changed as well, and provides us a more useful framework for evaluating the relationship between racist ideology and progressive politicians like Pierce. Rather than puzzle over a "paradox," many historians now identify an international community of whiteness that coalesced around the turn of the century and "defined their identity and rights in racial terms: the right of Anglo-Saxons to self-government and the commitment of white workers to high wages and conditions, against those they saw as undermining their newfound status, whether they be aristocrats or 'coolies.'"<sup>7</sup> This analysis moves away from a perspective of paradox and instead examines how some whites who advocated for progressive democratic reform like women's and workers' rights at the same time grounded those rights in an effort to create a "homogenous, racially white society...Racism and progressivism came from that same impulse to create a more perfect democratic society, but only for whites."<sup>8</sup> In his study of postwar Japanese-American resettlement in Oregon, historian Robert Hegwood has termed this form of political reform as "racially exclusive progressivism."

In attending to a more nuanced analysis that moves beyond a false binary of progressive vs. racist, the committee formulated a set of criteria and guiding principles with which to evaluate the historical legacy and contributions of Walter and Cornelia Pierce and make a recommendation regarding whether or not to change the name of the library.

## Criteria

In October, 2019, to guide their deliberations regarding denaming, the committee developed and agreed upon the following criteria, which are closely modeled after those used by the University of Oregon in their building denaming process.<sup>9</sup>

In assessing the legacy of the individuals:

1. Did their values and actions conflict with EOU's mission statement, Values and Principles, strategic plans, and library professional values?

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<sup>6</sup> Chuck Coate and Greg Monahan, personal correspondence with Rebecca Hartman, August, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alan Hegwood, "Erasing the Space Between Japanese and American: Progressivism, Nationalism, and Japanese American Resettlement in Portland, Oregon, 1945-1948," Master's Thesis, Portland State University, 2011, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> David Alan Johnson, Quintard Taylor, Marsha Weisiger, "Report on the History of Matthew P. Deady and Frederick S. Dunn,"

[https://president.uoregon.edu/sites/president2.uoregon.edu/files/deady\\_dunn\\_final\\_report\\_08-05-16.pdf](https://president.uoregon.edu/sites/president2.uoregon.edu/files/deady_dunn_final_report_08-05-16.pdf)

2. Did they demonstrate discriminatory views that actively promoted systemic oppression (with historical context)?
3. Did they actively sponsor legislation and/or use power in government to oppress and discriminate?
4. Did they demonstrate redemptive action?
5. Did they promote violence against people?
6. What is their dominant public legacy?

In addition, the committee framed their work around the following guiding questions and principles:

1. What is the role of the library building in creating community?
2. EOU's commitment to ensuring all students feel valued and included in the EOU community, especially students who are members of historically marginalized groups.
3. We should be careful not to obscure history but at the same time understand that history changes, as do our social and cultural values.

We do not believe the complex historical questions about the names of buildings can be answered by means of a simple checklist. While we have used the above criteria and principles as guidelines, our conversations together as a committee led us to agree that there are abiding principles which inform our recommendation.

First, as an institution of higher learning, EOU's processes of naming and interpreting naming should be an opportunity for learning and reflection—about history, about our contemporary understandings of and relationships to the past, and about our vision for our university community. We would note that this principle echoes the 1999 report, which concluded that their “review of the issues involving Pierce is a valuable undertaking for the campus. Regularly, we should seek opportunities to know our racist history—not because there is any particular merit in beating ourselves with the past but because we must know the past, and hence, ourselves, to consciously craft the future we desire. Also, the simple review of an issue such as we have undertaken is, we hope, a reminder to our students, to ourselves, to the community, of how the academic enterprise can best approach challenging controversies: with research, reason, and creativity.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, we believe that it is good stewardship, and an affirmation of the above pedagogical principle to interpret, and sometimes reinterpret, the names of university buildings. Because our understanding of the past is constantly changing in the study of history, it is not unnatural for new historical interpretations and discoveries to produce controversy over building names. Perhaps most importantly, honorifics given at one time can have significantly different effects on community members at another. History should not be a yoke to burden those of us who live in

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<sup>10</sup> “The Name of the Walter M. Pierce Library,” p. 4.

the present; instead, to reject the *honoring* of that history is to own our history while asserting our power to move past it.

## Analysis

### 1. Did their values and actions conflict with EOU's Mission Statement, Values and Principles, strategic plans, and library professional values?

The committee felt this was a key criteria, given that mission and value statements are rendered meaningless bits of rhetoric if buildings honor individuals whose actions and beliefs undermine those values. Our mission statement declares: "EOU guides student inquiry through integrated, high-quality liberal arts and professional programs that lead to responsible and reflective action in a diverse and interconnected world. As an educational, cultural and scholarly center, EOU connects the rural regions of Oregon to a wider world." The university's Values and Principles are as follows:

**Altruism:** We give selflessly to empower one another and the University community through inclusiveness, appreciation, and stewardship.

**Civility:** We believe in the free and open exchange of ideas, embrace diverse backgrounds, and deliberately seek multiple perspectives.

**Discovery:** We honor our heritage and invest in our future with innovation, vision, and creativity.

**Integrity:** We uphold the foundation of professionalism, honesty, respect, and sincerity in all of our interactions.

**Interdependence:** We cultivate vibrant connections and relationships to enhance opportunity and success locally and globally.

**Quality:** We passionately pursue intellectual engagement, academic rigor, and the highest standards in all endeavors.

In applying this set of criteria, we were most troubled by the enduring nature of the Pierces' commitment to exclusionary and nativist values, and we identified a clear conflict between this commitment and EOU's values of inclusiveness, embracing diversity, and valuing multiple perspectives. Throughout his political career, and after retiring from public office, Walter Pierce and his wife Cornelia supported nativist and racist causes and legislation.

As early as the late-nineteenth century, Pierce supported Oregon's Sylvester Pennoyer's gubernatorial anti-Chinese platforms.<sup>11</sup> As a state senator in the early twentieth century, and again as governor, Pierce advocated for various efforts to limit the property rights of non-citizens in Oregon, efforts generally targeting Asian-Americans. Many of those efforts were opposed by

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<sup>11</sup> McCoy, p. 407.

the U.S. State Department, Oregon newspapers, and the Portland Chamber of Commerce, all of which argued that such legislation would damage relations with Japan, a U.S. ally during World War I.<sup>12</sup> As governor, Pierce's opening message to the legislature, "called for 'enactment of a law prohibiting selling or leasing of land...to Mongolians.'"<sup>13</sup>

In 1923, Pierce signed into law Oregon's Alien Land Ownership Act, prohibiting non-citizens from owning land in Oregon. One of the main premises behind this legislation was that if Japanese could purchase land, they would no longer be available as cheap agricultural labor to white landowners.<sup>14</sup> He also signed bills that required county assessors to create lists of all Japanese and Chinese who did own land, prohibited non-citizens from acquiring business licenses, and required all foreign business owners to post signs declaring their nationality or country of origin. At the same time, Pierce supported a number of measures designed to provide economic support to Oregon farmers, including progressive tax legislation, irrigation projects, and forward-thinking transportation policies. As governor, he also ordered investigations designed to protect small investors from fraud, urged the development of public power programs many years before the New Deal realized those projects, and advocated for prison reform.<sup>15</sup>

Rather than a paradoxical dichotomy between racism and reform, however, we see Pierce's efforts to champion the economic interests of the 'little guy' as part of his racially exclusive progressivism. For example, upon visiting an irrigation project, Pierce was indignant to find that half the farmers benefiting from the project were "Mongolians."<sup>16</sup> In our interpretation of the historical record, Pierce's nativism was central to his political legacy, not a footnote to it. In a 1923 speech to the American Federation of Labor in Portland, Pierce spoke of the importance of keeping "the fertile soil of Oregon" from the "hordes from the Orient" and the "low caste Mexican peon."<sup>17</sup> During his governorship, he authorized his name to appear on the letterhead of the official correspondence of the Anti-Immigrant league of America, and he was "sympathetic to much of the anti-Catholic legislation which was introduced by Klan-controlled members of the legislature."<sup>18</sup> As a state senator, he voted for a bill prohibiting the teaching of German in public schools as well as one which outlawed the printing of any publication in any language other than English.<sup>19</sup> Pierce's exclusionary nativism, while it may have reflected a widespread enthusiasm for "100% Americanism" during the post-WWI era, clearly conflicts with EOU's mission and value statements. In addition, as we discuss below, Pierce continued to align himself with racist policies and legislation, well into the 1940s.

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel P. Johnson, "Anti-Japanese Legislation in Oregon, 1917-1933," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, v. 97: no. 2 (Summer 1996): p. 178.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, p. 197, cited in McCoy, p. 408.

<sup>14</sup> McCoy, p. 408.

<sup>15</sup> Schwartz, pp. 69-85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

## **2. Did they demonstrate discriminatory views that actively promoted systemic oppression (with historical context)?**

## **3. Did they actively sponsor legislation and/or use power in government to oppress and discriminate?**

Oregon's 1923 Alien Land Ownership Act was passed at a time of growing anti-Japanese sentiment in the western United States. In this historical context, Pierce's support of the bill placed him squarely in the camp of nativists and eugenicists who argued for numerous forms of legislation designed to limit economic opportunities and civil rights for non-whites, particularly Japanese and Japanese-Americans. In previous discussions regarding denaming Pierce library, some have suggested that Pierce's racial motivations should be contextualized so as to deem them appropriate for his time while inappropriate for ours. However, this argument often assumes that such motivations went unchallenged or were widely acceptable in the past. Historical evidence shows us that while exclusionary racist ideology was *more* widely accepted in the early twentieth century, it was by no means universally accepted. While we can acknowledge the broader historical context of that moment in history, it is relevant that many people opposed the legislation, including the Oregon Chamber of Commerce.

In contrast, the bill's strongest supporters were the Ku Klux Klan, the Anti-Asiatic Association League, and the American Legion. These groups, much like Pierce himself, framed the argument for limiting economic opportunities for Japanese through the racial ideology of exclusion. Ben Dorris, chair of the American Legion's legislative committee, testified that the Legion supported the bill because "We want to see the state remain white and American."<sup>20</sup> Supporters also emphasized the dangers of "Anglo-Saxons" being quickly outnumbered by "inferior" races, with false assertions about high Japanese birth rates.

The committee found the Land Act to be only one example of Pierce's consistent support throughout his political career for a wide variety of measures reflecting racial and religious intolerance. In this regard, the committee concludes that Pierce did demonstrate discriminatory views that actively promoted systemic oppression. He clearly sponsored or supported legislation and used his power in government to oppress and discriminate.

During his second term in the Oregon legislature, Pierce supported more than one effort to limit immigrants' property rights.<sup>21</sup> As a U.S. Congressman during the 1930s and 1940s, Pierce twice opposed and voted against federal anti-lynching legislation. He opposed changing U.S. immigration quotas to allow Jewish children fleeing Nazi Germany to enter the country. As

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<sup>20</sup> "Ousting the Japanese," *Oregon Voter* 32, January 27, 1923, p. 37.

[https://books.google.com/books?id=yQRAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA105&lpg=PA105&dq=ousting+the+japanese+oregon+voter+32&source=bl&ots=Hp-Nzul\\_P1&sig=ACfU3U1WnflNk3O0DUOnxEARiJ5CZefeTw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiFgfrp2pvrAhXzNX0KHdC\\_CVsQ6AEwBHoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=ousting%20the%20japanese%20oregon%20voter%2032&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=yQRAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA105&lpg=PA105&dq=ousting+the+japanese+oregon+voter+32&source=bl&ots=Hp-Nzul_P1&sig=ACfU3U1WnflNk3O0DUOnxEARiJ5CZefeTw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiFgfrp2pvrAhXzNX0KHdC_CVsQ6AEwBHoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=ousting%20the%20japanese%20oregon%20voter%2032&f=false)

<sup>21</sup> McCoy, p. 407.

governor, he signed a bill in 1923 to sterilize the feeble-minded and criminally insane in state institutions, legislation similar to that he had supported earlier in the century.<sup>22</sup> Cornelia Pierce, who believed the passage of that bill was one of her major achievements, worked closely with a leading proponent of eugenics to advocate for the legislation.

Further evidence of Walter Pierce's intransigent exclusionary ideology, as well as his record of supporting discriminatory legislation can be seen in his unwavering commitment to Oregon's 1922 Compulsory School bill, which "left Oregon with a reputation as one of the most backward and reactionary states in the Union."<sup>23</sup> The bill, sponsored by the Scottish Rite Masons, received some support from liberal progressives, but it was the Ku Klux Klan who most enthusiastically supported it. Generally, historians have interpreted the bill as a rather thinly-veiled attack on Catholic parochial schools.<sup>24</sup> It provided that all children, with some exceptions, attend public school during the entire school year. Pierce endorsed the bill during his campaign for governor, arguing that it would "free [future generations of Americans] from snobbery and bigotry."<sup>25</sup> His endorsement of the Compulsory School Bill secured the Klan's support for his candidacy, though there were plans for Klan support of Pierce as early as May, 1922.<sup>26</sup> According to Gerald Schwartz, Pierce contended throughout his life that the Catholic Church was "an authoritarian institution bent upon subverting democratic thought and human progress by its teaching of medieval dogma in the parochial schools."<sup>27</sup> Unlike his Republican opponent, Ben Olcott, who as governor had issued an anti-Klan proclamation, declared the school bill "an issue of religious fanaticism" and had refused Klan support, Pierce accepted the Klan's endorsement and in later years wrote that he was able to defeat Olcott "owing to a very peculiar religious situation that arose in the state."<sup>28</sup> The legislation was quickly struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in a unanimous decision as a violation of personal civil liberties under the 14th Amendment.<sup>29</sup>

As to Pierce's relationship with the Klan, we note that some historians conclude he was a member while others conclude he was not.<sup>30</sup> If one takes as evidence the 1923 letter addressed to him as "W.M Pierce, Esteemed Klansman," then perhaps Pierce was indeed a Klan member.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp. 409-410. See also Gerald Schwartz, p. 280.

<sup>23</sup> M. Paul Holsinger, "The Oregon School Bill Controversy, 1922-1925," *The Pacific Historical Review* 37:3 (August, 1968): 327-41. Cited in McCoy, p. 412.

<sup>24</sup> See McCoy, Schwartz. For a fuller account of the Klan's activities around the bill, see Schwartz, pp.58-63.

<sup>25</sup> Schwartz, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Schwartz, p. 59-60. When State Representative Charles Hall of Coos Bay, the only Republican primary candidate to openly accept the endorsement of the KKK, was defeated by incumbent governor Olcott, the Klan chose to endorse Pierce. According to Schwartz, Pierce's critics saw his support of the School bill as an act of political expediency. Schwartz.

<sup>27</sup> Schwartz, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Walter M. Pierce to Stephen T. Mather, n.d., and Pierce to Dean Wigmore, April 3, 1938, quoted in Schwartz, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> "Pierce v. Society of Sisters," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierce\\_v.\\_Society\\_of\\_Sisters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierce_v._Society_of_Sisters); John R. Vile, "Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925)," <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/445/pierce-v-society-of-sisters>.

<sup>30</sup> Robert McCoy, along with David Horowitz and Gerald Schwartz, conclude that Pierce was a Klan member; Arthur Bone and M. Paul Holsinger maintain there is no evidence of Pierce's membership. See McCoy, pp. 413-414.

<sup>31</sup> Schwartz, p. 68.



While the question of his membership was central to the 1999 committee, we would argue that it is less relevant than his actions and principles. As a State Senator, Governor, and U.S. Congressman, Pierce demonstrated consistent support for nativist and exclusionary racial measures of the sort endorsed by the Klan. But it was with World War II, that these views coalesced into what one historian has termed an “anti-Japanese crusade.”<sup>32</sup> Serving as a U.S. Congressional representative, in 1942 Pierce was appointed to the Special House Committee investigating Japanese evacuation and internment. Yet even the forced removal and internment of over 100,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans was insufficient in his opinion. Pierce supported the “disenfranchisement of all Japanese and a constitutional amendment that would withhold citizenship from those subject to dual citizenship, namely Japanese persons.”<sup>33</sup>

In the context of our criteria, we conclude that regardless of the question of his Klan membership, Pierce’s support of the Compulsory School bill, his and Cornelia’s successful campaign for forced sterilization, his vote against a federal anti-lynching law, and his sustained assault upon the civil liberties of Japanese-Americans are clear evidence of the Pierces’ discriminatory actions and values.

#### **4. Did they demonstrate redemptive action?**

#### **5. Did they promote violence against people?**

Pierce was defeated for reelection to Congress in 1942. After he left Congress, Pierce announced that he and Cornelia “would return to Oregon “to make our fight for real Americanism.””<sup>34</sup> They were very active in anti-Japanese campaigns, particularly through the notorious Japanese Exclusion League. After WWII, the League advocated for the removal of all Japanese, including citizens, from the United States, arguing that the Japanese were “unassimilable” and that it was imperative to “send all the yellow Japs back to Japan and not have another race problem for future generations to face.” Cornelia Pierce had complained in 1942 that “some of the Washington offices seem to feel that the Japs are very cute little people who are absolutely harmless,” and as late as 1945, was writing that she and her husband were “sure the sugar interests of Hawaii have always backed the Japs.”<sup>35</sup> In a sustained campaign of speeches and letters to the editor, Pierce’s position was that “there should be no members of the Japanese race in postwar America.” In explicitly racist terms, he asserted that “We are now up against the question as to which race will dominate this beautiful section.”...”Oriental and occidental cannot live together. Shall we surrender to Asiatics the country which...is the finest flower of white civilization?”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> McCoy, p. 409.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, and Schwartz, p. 289.

<sup>34</sup> Schwartz, p. 290.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 283-290.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 293.

In 1944, along with five other Democratic Presidential electors in Oregon, Pierce opposed the War Department's order authorizing the return of the Japanese to their former homes in the West, declaring that "the Japanese are a real race problem. They never can become real Americans."<sup>37</sup> The electors also called for mass deportations and a Constitutional amendment to deny citizenship to people of Japanese descent. In 1945, Pierce was the main speaker at a mass anti-Japanese meeting in Gresham. He told the audience, "We should never be satisfied until every last Jap has been run out of these United States and our Constitution changed so they can never get back."<sup>38</sup> According to Schwartz, it was at Pierce's urging that the gathering passed a resolution calling for deportation and strict enforcement of the Alien Land Law ( a law struck down as unconstitutional seven years later). Cornelia also addressed the gathering, calling on attendees to "bombard the legislature" with demands to address "the Japanese question." In response to this meeting, then-Governor Sprague held a counter meeting "to advocate fair play for the returning Japanese" and Harold L. Ickes wrote that "this campaign of undisguised economic greed and ruthless racial persecution has shocked and outraged good Americans in every section of the nation."<sup>39</sup>

The historical record holds no evidence that either Walter or Cornelia Pierce engaged in any redemptive action or even reflective thought regarding these issues. Throughout his career, Walter Pierce exhibited a full-throated animosity towards non-Protestants and people of color, especially Japanese and Japanese-Americans. Considering that both he and Cornelia continued to hold these views well into the 1940s, it is clear to the committee that they did not demonstrate redemptive action.

At the same time, while we are hard pressed not to categorize the stripping of civil liberties and property rights as a form of violence, there is no evidence that either one of them promoted physical violence against people. One possible exception may be the fact that Walter Pierce approved of the Hood River American Legion's "warning to the area's Japanese not to return at the end of the war."<sup>40</sup> Beyond physical violence, it could be argued that the Pierces's agitation for anti-Japanese sentiment, their demands for mass deportations and their calls for a Constitutional amendment denying citizenship based on race were themselves a form of violence, rhetorical if not physical. But in a fair application of the criteria, the committee concludes that the Pierces do meet this criteria--they did not promote violence against people. Sadly, Walter Pierce did condone another type of violence. On November 29th, 1944, the Hood River American Legion defaced the community's war memorial, removing all the names of Japanese-American servicemen. Walter M. Pierce approved.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 294.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 295.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 296.

<sup>40</sup> Schwartz, p. 296.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. See also, "Hood River Incident," *Densho Encyclopedia*.

[http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Hood\\_River\\_incident/#Incident](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Hood_River_incident/#Incident). Accessed August 14, 2020.

## **6. What is their dominant public legacy?**

The Pierces' dominant legacy is at best an ambiguous one. Cornelia made contributions to rural Oregon in her position as state Librarian. Walter made contributions to the state in his various political offices, perhaps most significantly in the development of Columbia River hydroelectricity; enacting Oregon's first graduated income tax; modernizing the state's system of roads; and advancements in irrigation projects. He is also widely remembered for advancing popular government. However, that achievement, when viewed through the lens of racially exclusionary progressivism, becomes problematic. For at the core of Pierce's populist and progressive politics was an enduring commitment to racial inequality and the values of white supremacy.

While there is no argument that Walter Pierce made contributions to Oregon in his years as a public servant, the committee concludes that his principle legacy is at best tarnished by, and at worst, singularly defined by, a consistent and enduring commitment to racist ideologies and values. For Pierce, civil liberties, due process, and democratic processes were not universal rights and principles but rather, entitlements of white Protestant Americans. However one might attempt to historically 'contextualize' these values, even in the early twentieth century, and certainly by the mid-century, the Pierces' commitment to exclusionary racial policies reflected a strain of racist ideology that was increasingly rejected by Americans. We see no way to reconcile such a legacy with the values and goals of our university.

## **Guiding Principles**

### **1. What is the role of the library building in creating community?**

The library is the intellectual heart of campus and essential to supporting the academic pursuits of the EOU and local community, as well as supporting the institutional mission of EOU. This role requires the library to be an inclusive space that is accessible to all members of the EOU community. The library vision and mission are as follows:

**Vision:** We are committed to creating and maintaining a dynamic environment, focused on service and guided by the principles of intellectual freedom, that encourages access to the cultural, historical, and intellectual achievements of humankind.

**Mission:** Pierce Library will provide access to quality and current research materials and services for the students, faculty, and staff of Eastern Oregon University, regardless of location, and for the eastern Oregon community.

In addition to the vision and mission, the library is guided by the core professional values of the American Library Association which include Access, Privacy, Democracy, Diversity, Education and Lifelong Learning, Intellectual Freedom, Service, and Social Responsibility.<sup>42</sup> These values, which are aligned with the university's own values, are the foundation for library services that cultivate a welcoming and safe space. It should also be noted that while many core values of librarianship are longstanding in the field, they have not historically been applied to all members of society. Librarianship has shifted in recent years to prioritize issues of equity and social justice and to understand and rectify the ways libraries have participated in and upheld systemic racism and oppression despite embracing opposing values.

The library serves a vital role in building community on campus by providing access to information and knowledge as well as a space that allows for learning and interaction. There are students who use the library several times a week or even daily throughout their time at EOU. Studying, meeting friends, and interacting with library faculty and staff become a central part of their EOU experience and community on campus. The library is a venue for student and community events such as the Night Against Procrastination, Ars Poetica readings, and lectures that provide opportunities for enrichment and community building. The library third floor lounge also serves as a meeting place for students, faculty and staff, student groups, and community members.

The committee believes that library services and the mission and vision are clearly rooted in the values of access and inclusion. As previously stated, the committee could find no way to reconcile the values and actions of Walter and Cornelia Pierce with the values and goals of our university. The same held true for the values and services of the library. The committee acknowledges Cornelia made important contributions to library services in Oregon. However, as demonstrated elsewhere in the report, the enduring racist and exclusionary views of the Pierces provide strong evidence that her contributions to library services were meant for whites only. The Pierces did not value true access for all, and that stands in direct contradiction to the mission and vision of the library as well as current values in the field of librarianship. Furthermore, individual students as well as student groups have expressed discomfort and frustration with the library name and associated history. For some students, especially students of color or those from historically marginalized groups, this history negatively impacts their comfort level when using the space and for some their desire to use the space at all. It is essential for the university to acknowledge that barriers to access are not always physical or technological. Many barriers are a product of history and social injustice. The committee believes that having the Pierce legacy associated with the library undermines many aspects of the library's work, especially efforts to

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>

create a more inclusive and representative space and a library collection that serves all members of the EOU community.

## **2. EOU’s commitment to ensuring all students feel valued and included in the EOU community, especially students who are members of historically marginalized groups.**

Pierce's virulent anti-Asian racism was a core component of his political identity for over forty years and as such is integral to his legacy. Because of this, we find that Pierce Library stands as a tribute to the values of racial exclusion and white supremacy, values that clearly contravene EOU’s stated objectives to “foster an inviting and supportive university culture” and “support intercultural competency, inclusiveness, and diversity.”<sup>43</sup> As long as the library bears the Pierces’ names, their association with exclusionary racism along with the persistent popular understanding of Pierce as the “Klan governor” serve to undermine any meaningful commitment the university has to ensuring all students feel valued and included at EOU.

## **3. We should be careful to not obscure history but at the same time understand that history changes, as do our social and cultural values.**

According to Professor Emeritus of History, Chuck Coate, “Back when I participated in discussion of the name change, I believed it was better to learn from our history than to try to erase it; and I thought we agreed to have annual exhibits and discussions of Pierce, the Oregon Klan, and racism. One of my regrets is that outside of the classroom, neither I nor others followed through. Now it's clearer to me that a building name inspires little informed and critical discussion but has large symbolic significance. Walter Pierce's career was complex and often liberal, but he was associated with the Klan, supported ethnic and religious prejudice, and was a fanatical anti-Japanese racist.”

The committee’s recommendation is to dename Pierce library but to follow through on the 1999 recommendation to learn from our history. Because history changes, as do our social and cultural values, we believe that the time has come to dename the library. But to effectively avoid simply erasing history, the university needs to genuinely commit to and devote resources to a meaningful project that documents and acknowledges the history of the library’s name, the Pierces, and of EOU’s history of engaging with the controversy surrounding these issues. Because of the central role EOU students have taken in moving the naming issue forward, we believe a project documenting and interpreting the history of the library’s name is well-suited to an experiential learning project, perhaps co-directed by faculty from the library and the History Department. Such a project would be an excellent and fitting opportunity to make material the principles of pedagogy and stewardship of the historical record which we outlined at the beginning of this report.

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<sup>43</sup> EOU Strategic Plan, Goal 4.

At the time of this writing, these questions of the historical record are of foremost importance in our nation. In 2016, Yale University's Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming asserted that, 'a university ought not erase the historical record but a great university will rightly decide what to commemorate and what to honor, subject always to the obligation not to efface the history that informs our world.'<sup>44</sup>

[https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR\\_FINAL\\_12-2-16.pdf](https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf)

In recommending that EOU dename Pierce library, the committee believes this is an opportunity for our university to take a symbolic but deeply significant step toward becoming a great university--Oregon's Rural University, interconnected with the world in the twenty-first century and genuinely committed to empowering itself and its students with a knowledge of history and the courage to move beyond it.

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<sup>44</sup>Letter of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming,  
[https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR\\_FINAL\\_12-2-16.pdf](https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf)