

# Yale *Film and Media Studies Program*

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23 September 2016

Charles B. Johnson  
Franklin Resources, Inc.  
One Franklin Parkway  
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*courier*  
53 Wall Street, Room 216  
New Haven CT 06511

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I want to begin—belatedly I know—by thanking you for your incredibly generous gift in endowing one of Yale’s new colleges—Franklin College. I say this as a Yalie: my father was class of ’42, I went to Yale and have now taught here for the last 25 years. My daughter is also a graduate. I have felt for a long time that our university needed to expand the number of students in Yale College, and your gift has done so much to make that possible. Bravo!! I also want to add that your naming the college after Benjamin Franklin has my complete support. Perhaps if I had donated \$250 million I would have named it after someone else, but naming it after this remarkable man is certainly a decision I respect—and also understand. So I apologize for some of the statements in the *Yale Daily News* even as I would like to suggest that the real culprit was the Yale administration rather than the students. The powers-that-be led us to believe that the names of these colleges were open to discussion when, at least in the case of Franklin College, that was not the case. And they tied it to the discussions around Calhoun College, when these two items really are independent. Your Franklin College gift and its announcement should have been handled separately from these other matters. Students (and faculty) felt fooled and were angry. (I went to a number of meetings to contribute my ideas on these matters.) I am so sorry that you have had to endure what might seem a lack of appreciation in some quarters. My own belief is that your generosity is widely appreciated—and will be increasingly so in the years to come.

At the same time I would like to politely disagree with your comments on Calhoun College. As a Yale graduate I was initially not in favor of changing the name of the college. My suggestion was to change whom it was named after—all the Calhouns who graduated from Yale—which includes a student of mine whose father is a black cop in Houston. That received little interest. What I have come to realize is that the issue with Calhoun College is not simply the name. In fact, the college was built around the name John C. Calhoun as a shrine to white supremacy. We were reminded of this when Corey Menafee shattered a stain glass window depicting John C. Calhoun’s slaves in Calhoun dining hall. As you know the kitchen staff is overwhelming African American and it is not surprising that to work under those windows every day became too much to bear. Calhoun College is not a museum: it is a place where people live and work. We need to

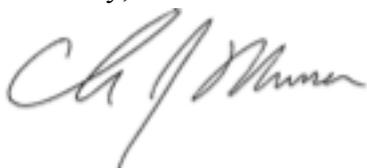
replace this shrine to white supremacy. It needs to be renamed and reconfigured—not to efface history but to remind Yale students and the world that Yale was more often on the right side of history.

Yes. John C. Calhoun was a Yale graduate but while he was senator for South Carolina, Yale professors were helping the *Amistad* captives retain their freedom. I think this is very important as we present Yale to the world. And Benjamin Franklin is also very relevant to this issue. According to one source:

In his later years Franklin became vocal as an abolitionist and in 1787 began to serve as President of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. The Society was originally formed April 14, 1775, in Philadelphia, as The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage; it was reorganized in 1784 and again in 1787, and then incorporated by the state of Pennsylvania in 1789. The Society not only advocated the abolition of slavery, but made efforts to integrate freed slaves into American society.

I am totally convinced that Franklin would want us to change the name of Calhoun College. Moreover, there are still other reasons why retaining the name of Calhoun College is untenable. It should concern you that retaining the Calhoun name is going to adversely affect “the Yale brand” as well as its relations with the New Haven community. The Mayor of New Haven has already asked for it to be changed. And there will be recurrent protests that are certain to gain in strength. The administration already worries that students in Calhoun College will at some point sleep out on the Cross Campus rather than in the college. They will be arrested to front page news. (They might do it in the dead of winter so no one will think they are “coddled.”) Students will then insist that they not be assigned to Calhoun College. Yale will have to ask incoming freshmen to tick off a box if they don’t want to be in Calhoun College. Faculty will refuse to be Calhoun Fellows. You can see where this will lead. So I would urge us to channel the spirit of Ben Franklin and do what you have done and (re)name the college after a figure or group we all can admire—and hopefully make the college a monument to Yale’s efforts to end slavery. That is the kind of residence we all should be happy to work, eat and live in.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles Musser".

Charles Musser  
Professor of Film and Media Studies  
Professor of American Studies and Theater Studies