

GORDON M. CRAGG, PH.D.



Dr. Gordon M. Cragg obtained his undergraduate training in chemistry at Rhodes University, South Africa, and his D. Phil. (organic chemistry) from Oxford University in 1963. After two years of postdoctoral research at the University of California, Los Angeles, he returned to S. Africa to join the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. In 1966, he joined Chemistry Department at the University of South Africa, and transferred to the University of Cape Town in 1972. In 1979, he returned to the US to join the Cancer Research Institute at Arizona State University working with Professor G. R. Pettit. In 1985, he moved to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, and was appointed Chief of the NCI Natural Products Branch in 1989. He retired in December, 2004, and is currently serving as an NIH Special Volunteer. Dr. Cragg's major interests lie in the discovery of novel natural product agents for the treatment of cancer and AIDS, with an emphasis on multidisciplinary and international collaboration. He has given over 100 invited talks at conferences in many countries worldwide, and has been awarded NIH Merit Awards for his contributions to the development of the anticancer drug, Taxol® (1991), leadership in establishing international collaborative research in biodiversity and natural products drug discovery (2004), contributions to developing and teaching NIH technology transfer courses (2004), and dedicated service to the NCI in developing and maintaining evidence-based PDQ cancer information summaries for health professionals and the public (2010). In 1998-1999 he was President of the American Society of Pharmacognosy and was elected to Honorary Membership of the Society in 2003; he was named as a Fellow of the Society in 2008. In November, 2006, he was awarded the "William L. Brown Award for Plant Genetic Resources" by Missouri Botanical Garden which also named a recently discovered Madagascar plant in his honor, *Ludia craggiana*. In April, 2010, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Science by his South African alma mater, Rhodes University, and in March, 2012, a special issue of the Journal of Natural Products was published in his honor. Dr. Cragg has established collaborations between the NCI and organizations in many countries promoting drug discovery from their natural resources. He has published over 150 chapters and papers related to these interests.

TRANSFORMATION AT RHODES UNIVERSITY AND THE ISSUE OF THE NAME OF OUR GREAT INSTITUTION

As an Old Rhodian, I hereby wish to express my strongest opposition to the implementation of any name change for the highly respected institution known as Rhodes University. The founding of the university was dependent on the munificence of Cecil John Rhodes through support provided by the Rhodes Trust, and over the past 100 plus years, and particularly in the past few decades, the University has established a proud record of academic excellence

which is available to all races and cultures, and which is indelibly associated worldwide with the name, Rhodes University. To change the name will sever links to a name associated worldwide with world class excellence and scholarship, and will deny such prestige and advantages to future graduates. What's more, I feel that any name change will amount to a sign of profound disrespect for the judgement, tolerance and wisdom of leaders such as the late President Mandela and past Rhodes Chancellor, Professor Jakes Gerwel, both honorary graduates of Rhodes University, who understood the need to put past history behind them, and look to constructive future progress. In the following paragraphs, I have attempted to expand on the reasons for my opposition to name change.

I have read with interest Vice-Chancellor Mabizela's Circular of 26 March 2015, 'Developments on our campus' based in part on a memorandum received from the University Student Representative Council (SRC) raising issues of transformation at Rhodes University, and 'the issue of the name of our institution.' I also appreciated receiving the letter from Dr. Mabizela related to continued support for Rhodes University, and its mission of providing world class education to the many talented students '*who would otherwise not have the opportunity to study at Rhodes.*'

Substantial Progress at Rhodes University

As an alumnus of Rhodes University, I am tremendously impressed by what has been achieved in the decades that have elapsed since my Rhodes student days in the 1950s. Dr. Mabizela's circular refers to '*the significant progress in the transformation of the demographic and social composition of the student body. The 'race', class, gender, ethnic, national, linguistic, cultural and religious composition of our student population has changed and will continue to change given our imperatives of social equity and social justice.*' This is indeed a record of which I, and I am sure many Old Rhodians, feel justifiably proud. As I mentioned in my graduation address in April, 2010, when I was greatly honored by the award of the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa* by Rhodes University, 'the Rhodes of those early days (the 1950s) was very different to the culturally diverse center of academic excellence which we are all privileged to see today.'

The Positive Role of Cecil John Rhodes and the Rhodes Trust

I am also very conscious of the over 100 years of history which has nurtured and given rise to the center of academic excellence known worldwide as Rhodes University. As stated by my friend and fellow-Rhodian from the 1950s, Dr. Alan Polack, retired Dean of Pharmacy at the University of Tasmania, '*a university builds a reputation and prestige with time as a consequence of the performances and works of its staff, researchers and graduates.*' However, as recorded in the "*Story of Rhodes. Rhodes University 1904 to 2004*", the beginning of our university was tenuous to say the least, and as stated on page 3, the "Rhodes Trust 'Came' to the Rescue" through their donation of De Beers preference shares valued at £50 000, without which the 'Bill (in the Cape Parliament) for the incorporation of Rhodes

University College' would have been meaningless. Thus, the Rhodes University we know and value today most likely would not have been established without the munificence of Cecil John Rhodes.

Regarding the issue of name change, Dr. Mabizela states that *“There are those who are of the view that, given the horrendous things that Cecil John Rhodes did to the Black people in the Southern African region through his colonial and imperialist excesses, it is morally and ethically indefensible and completely unconscionable to have a university bearing his name. For these people the name Rhodes represents vicious colonial brutality and conquest and for them there is a strong link between Cecil John Rhodes, the person, and Rhodes University.”* While I understand the reasons for some resentment, I regard the above condemnation as excessive. Despite the conduct of two Matabele Wars, when Rhodes was buried in 1902 the ceremony *“was attended by Ndebele chiefs, who asked that the firing party should not discharge their rifles as this would disturb the spirits. Then, for the first time, they gave a white man the Matabele royal salute, Bayete”* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_Rhodes#Political_views.” To my mind, these actions on the part of the Ndebele chiefs do not portray someone who was hated by the Africans of the day for *“the horrendous things that he did to the Black people in the Southern African region through his colonial and imperialist excesses”* and his ‘vicious colonial brutality’. Indeed, his actions would appear to pale in comparison with the actions of recent African leaders as outlined in the Perspective article by Malaika wa Azania featured on the Rhodes University website (<http://www.ru.ac.za/perspective/perspectivearticles/bashirexposeshypocrisyofafricanists.html>). While rightly criticizing the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) attitude towards selectively targeting African and Arab leaders, Mr. Azania states: *“History is littered with many examples of African leaders committing crimes against their own people – crimes for which they are not prosecuted by the same AU (African Union) that today wants to claim moral righteousness in its criticism of the ICC and the West in general.”* Rather, I look on Cecil John Rhodes as a product of his day who was consumed by the ambition of colonial expansion of the British Empire. As Paul Maylam has noted, *“Rhodes is not straightforwardly assessed as either hero or villain”* (Maylam, Paul (2005). *The Cult of Rhodes: Remembering an Imperialist in Africa*. Page 4. New Africa Books. [ISBN 978-0-86486-684-4](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9780864866844))

The Parallel with the US Robber Barons

In the context of the same time period in the United States, I think of Rhodes as resembling the so-called Robber Barons of the US industrialization era *“who engaged in unethical and monopolistic practices, wielded widespread political influence, and amassed enormous wealth.”* (<http://history1800s.about.com/od/1800sglossary/g/Robber-Baron-definition.htm>). Among these Robber Barons were many well-known names - Andrew Carnegie, James Duke, Andrew Mellon, John D. Rockefeller, Leland Stanford and Cornelius Vanderbilt, to name a few (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robber_baron_%28industrialist%29). Despite their often ruthless exploitation of the working classes, the individuals named above eventually steered their fortunes to philanthropic works, and today the US is blessed with outstanding universities bearing their names. In addition, the corresponding named Foundations support

good works worldwide, and Rhodes University is one of the beneficiaries. I was interested to learn from Dr. Mabizela's report that the '*10-year old Accelerated Staff Development Programme*' is partially funded by the Mellon Foundation, and it is well known that the Carnegie Foundation helped establish public libraries throughout the United States, Britain, Canada and other English- speaking countries, including South Africa.

Rhodes and Excellence in Education and Scholarship

As with the Robber Barons, Cecil John Rhodes steered much of his wealth toward philanthropic works, and in my opinion, the greatest philanthropic contribution by Rhodes has been the provision in his last will and testament for the establishment of the Rhodes Scholarships. It's interesting to note that his aims were "*to promote leadership marked by public spirit and good character, and to "render war impossible" by promoting friendship between the great powers*" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_Rhodes#CITEREFMaylam2005).” I regard the Rhodes Scholarship as the most prestigious of all international scholarships, and the multiple countries receiving these scholarships may be found at <http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/about/rhodes- scholars/rhodes-scholars-complete-list>. In addition to economically advanced nations such as the US (all States), Germany, and several Commonwealth countries, awards are made to emerging economies such as Bangladesh, Botswana, Caribbean nations, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as many awards being made to various institutions and regions of South Africa. The name, Rhodes, is well known worldwide for these scholarships, and is synonymous with outstanding education and scholarship.

How South Africa's Great Leaders have reacted

Thus, mention of Rhodes University anywhere in the world elicits nods of recognition and association with the attributes of outstanding education and scholarship. In the light of the advances made by the University in recent decades as recorded by Dr. Mabizela, such recognition is well deserved. South Africa's greatest leader, the late President Nelson Mandela, clearly recognized the immense significance of the name, Rhodes, in establishing the Mandela Rhodes Foundation and the Mandela Rhodes scholarships, as did the late Professor Jakes Gerwel who served as Chancellor of Rhodes University and Chairperson of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation (<http://www.ru.ac.za/vice-chancellor/tributetojakesgerwel/news/rememberingjakeschancellorourchancellor-1.html>). I regard it as a tribute to the academic excellence of Rhodes University that many talented students of all races from the University have benefited from the award of both Rhodes and Mandela Rhodes scholarships. In addition, both President Mandela and Chancellor Gerwel clearly had no reservations in accepting honorary doctorates from Rhodes University, as have other prominent public servants of all races.

Do students of Carnegie Mellon, Duke, Rockefeller, Stanford and Vanderbilt Universities challenge and decry the naming of their universities after the “*unethical and monopolistic Robber Barons*” of a past era who funded their establishment? The students I have met over the years have been thankful for having the opportunity and the privilege of attending these outstanding centers of academic excellence, irrespective of the flaws of their founding benefactors. So it should be with students who have the privilege of attending Rhodes University. Following the inspiring example of their outstanding past leader, President Nelson Mandela, they should value the fact that Cecil John Rhodes had the foresight to channel his wealth to aiding in the establishment of their University, and to the promotion of academic excellence through establishing the world’s most prestigious scholarship which benefits talented students of all races and cultures from South Africa and many other countries.

Consequences of Name Change

Rhodes University graduates are proud of their alma mater, and I predict that any attempt at changing the name will be met by many with dismay and strong opposition. What’s more, as stated above, I feel that any name change will amount to a sign of profound disrespect for the judgement, tolerance and wisdom of leaders such as the late President Mandela and past Rhodes Chancellor, Professor Jakes Gerwel, both honorary graduates of Rhodes University who understood the need to put past actions behind them, and look to constructive future progress. Over the past 100 plus years, and particularly in the past few decades, the University has established a proud record of academic excellence which is available to all races and cultures, and which is indelibly associated worldwide with the name, Rhodes University. To change the name will sever links to a name associated worldwide with world class academic excellence and scholarship, and will deny such prestige and advantages to future graduates. I strongly urge those having the authority to finally decide this crucial issue, to fully appreciate the serious adverse consequences which will result from any name change, and to retain the name Rhodes University for posterity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gordon" followed by a stylized flourish.

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