

Jon Biotti '87
President, Board of Trustees
Belmont Hill School

Greg Schneider
Head of School
Belmont Hill School

Gentlemen:

Jon Biotti's letter of August 11, 2020, like recent public letters from the heads of other once prestigious colleges and universities, demonstrates the utter bankruptcy of modern American education. Rather than teach history, principles of free government, and the basics of civilized discourse, these institutions—unfortunately now including Belmont Hill—have set themselves up as the moral judges of past generations, quite without any consideration of the historical circumstances, passions and interests marking the eras in which those generations lived or the huge contributions they made to modern life, particularly in the United States.

John Adams' defense of the British soldiers implicated in the Boston Massacre famously established the right to a fair trial even in the face of mob violence. But you along with the press and many academics have convicted the police officers involved in George Floyd's death not only without trial, but apparently also without any consideration of either the official autopsy report showing a likely fatal dosage of fentanyl in his system, or the more complete video of the incident released by a British newspaper in which he complained of difficulty breathing before he was taken to the ground. It is not for me to defend those police, but they deserve—as do all criminal defendants—a fair trial by an impartial jury, not to be pilloried by the press and an academic mob on the evidence of a snippet of video.

Whatever the outcome of that trial, the fact remains that George Floyd was a thug, a convicted armed felon, and a druggie. To hold him up as a hero is sick, as is using his demise as an excuse for virtue signaling by corrupting and rewriting the history of the School. The bell by the old chapel, now the MacPherson Room, was erected by the class of 1933, a small class of 21, which produced three winners of the Alumni Award: my father, the grandfather of your current director of admissions, and the eminent historian Edmund Morgan, whose *American Slavery, American Freedom* (1975) stands as a landmark work on the very subject to which the School now offers nothing more than a silly sophomoric gesture. I do not know the precise history of the bell itself, but more than likely it came from Cuba via the Atkins and Claflin families, families I might add that contributed a great deal to the betterment of Cuba before being evicted by Fidel Castro.

To dismiss Mrs. Atkins and her family as “a financial supporter in the early days of Belmont Hill” is not just ungrateful; it's insulting. But for Mrs. Atkins there would not be

a Belmont Hill. Indeed, not only did she provide the bulk of the funds to establish and operate the School in its formative years, but also along with Henry Meyer provided the financial lifeline to keep the School running circa 1940 when it almost failed. What is more, the Claflins continued to provide important financial support at least through the Hamilton administration, including the first covered rink.

As important as it may be, diversity cannot trump integrity in education. We can learn from the past; we can try to understand it; but we cannot change it. Students need to develop sufficient mental toughness to function in the real world they will inherit, not to be shielded from actual or imagined “micro-aggressions” or other irritations they may find personally offensive. Any boy who cannot deal with walking past a century old bell from Cuba will never have the character to be a leader of anything. Pandering to such sensitivities is teaching by bad example.

So, to be blunt, if the bell goes, so does my support for Belmont Hill, founded by my grandfather to build men of sound character like the class of 1933, not to midwife a motley cohort of self-indulgent priggish toadies fit only “... to meanly lose, the last best hope on earth.”

Sincerely, Reg Howe '58