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[What's In A Name? Sometimes Good, Sometimes Bad, Sometimes Ugly](#)

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A [local controversy](#) has recently appeared over the name of one of Minneapolis's local lakes – [Lake Calhoun](#). Apparently, this lake was named after John C. Calhoun who, as secretary of war, established Fort Snelling in Minnesota. According to John Winters, a “local civil war history buff,” Mr. Calhoun held pro-slavery views during the early 1800's. As a result, there have been some calls for changing the lake's name – a name which has existed for 40 years.



This story piqued my interest because – ignoring the social and political implications – it looks like a brand identity crisis. The considerations at play here will be similar to the considerations that any company might face when grappling with the possibility of re-branding. [Mark Prus](#) recently provided some good considerations for changing your brand name.

While I don't want to minimize the social and political implications of Mr. Calhoun's unfortunate history, I do think it would be a terrible idea to change the name. There is substantial "brand equity" in the Calhoun name at this point, and Lake Calhoun is a large part of Minneapolis's identity. Additionally, a quick Google ® search produces numerous local businesses that have adopted the Calhoun name: Calhoun Square, Calhoun Cycle, Calhoun Beach Club, Calhoun Village. Calhoun Square, depicted below, has basically become an iconic Minneapolis landmark.



Frankly, I didn't even know who Lake Calhoun was named for prior to this incident. Lake Calhoun was just Lake Calhoun. But, now that the cat's been let out of the bag, should we care? Should we let the unfortunate past eliminate the positive present? Should we let the bad and potentially ugly history overwhelm the good? Should Minneapolis re-brand?



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