

*Oh grassy banks and wooded ways; Oh hillsides echo with our praise; I am cantate, jubilate;  
Shout giant oaks that touch the sky; Ye massive rocks below reply; I am cantate, jubilate;*



# The Fieldston News



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2018

HOMECOMING SPECIAL EDITION

## What Happened: New Logo Causes Uproar

By HALLE FRIEDMAN

Students, parents, teachers, staff and alumni have been in an uproar, disenchanted by the administration's failure to consult the Fieldston community prior to changing the school's logo from the orange tree symbol to what many think is a corporate-looking sun. Culminating in an ardent "Save The Tree" campaign, The Fieldston News Editorial Board mobilized a petition — featuring over 1,400 signatures — to restore the original logo. Sarah Danzig Simon, Assistant Head of School for Institutional Affairs, said, "I am aware that there is a petition, but have not actually received it from the petitioners. The petition is a time honored Fieldston tradition, I look forward to receiving it and meeting with the originators to share the data, insights and research which led to this decision." At the time of printing, a preliminary version of the petition has been delivered to the administration.

Supplanting what would have marked the 22nd anniversary of the "hand-drawn" tree, the administrators resuscitated the 19th century seal, and its accompanying dictum, "fiat lux." Ms. Bagby, announcing the rise of the "radiant sun," conveyed the message under the premise of a "new logo for a new year."

In June 2017, Ms. Bagby and Sarah Danzig Simon presented a communications audit to the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, comprised of current parents, alumni and a member of the Ethical Culture Society. Apparently, the report outlined several deficiencies in the school's communications department. Following a reportedly "comprehensive investigation" — with far-reaching implications for the school's communication strategy — the research unveiled "a broad inconsistency in

the way ECFS was regarded by the public."

Galvanized to reinvigorate and solidify the mission of the school in the public arena, "The Executive Committee asked Ms. Simon to come back with recommendations on how to begin to correct this problem," said Board Chair Caryn Seidman Becker. The resulting report, submitted in January 2018, enumerated communications solutions — notably including a proposal for a new logo.

However, the initial logo proposal was not, in fact, a reimagining of Felix Adler's seal, and the administration deliberated on whether merely to modify or "reinvigorate" the tree. Pentagram, a preeminent design consultancy firm, presented various renderings of an "enhanced" tree until their senior partner, Michael Bierut, broached the subject of reviving the initial school seal. As the brainchild of Mr. Bierut in the 1990s, the affectionately dubbed "broccoli" tree logo was, in effect, rendered obsolete by its very own designer.

"When we first started the process, I absolutely thought we would end up with a redesigned tree," Ms. Simon said. "I also knew we needed outside expertise to guide the process. . . Our team from Pentagram showed us something like 40 slides of their attempts to 'reinvigorate' the tree as well as some other options. My immediate response was, 'No. The tree is our symbol. It's in our school song, for goodness sake.' And then the senior partner from Pentagram, Michael Bierut, reminded me of our school seal with the motto, 'Fiat Lux' and a concept for a logo which was rooted in our school's founding. Was I nervous to make such a big change? Of course, change is always hard." Ms. Simon

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CARTOON BY TEMA ZELDES-ROTH

### QR CODE:

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PETITION TO SAVE  
THE TREE — SCAN  
IN CAMERA APP



# What Happened (cont.)

added, “Reimagining the logo in keeping with our history is one of many communications steps the school has undertaken to help people understand our mission, values, educational underpinnings and current program.”

Inundated with inquiries from various sectors of the community about the significance of this new emblem, the administrators recirculated similar messages to parents. Through market analysis, Pentagon indicated that other entities adopting the “hand-drawn” tree logo fell under the realm of daycare centers, elementary schools, nursing homes and rehab centers.

Darrel Frost, ECFS Director of Communications, was firm in his conviction that, while “[the tree] had been a familiar mark for the past twenty years or so, we found that for a lot of people — applicant families, of course, but also many current families and faculty/staff — the tree registered as young and amateurish.” Frost added that

“since [the tree] is a relatively recent addition in the long history of the school (it was designed in 1996), and since all of our variations suffered from the same basic problem, we took a step back and considered other possibilities.” While the current iteration of the tree was unveiled in 1996, a tree has represented the school, or at least been a significant part of the visual identity of the school, since 1911 at the latest.

Ms. Simon noted that “[her] logo was the geometric, lorax-looking image.” She added, “In my lifetime as a student and an alumna, there have been at least four logos; we have gone from three divisions to four; the school separated from the Society for Ethical Culture; and hardly a day goes by that someone doesn’t tell me that our official school colors are orange and blue. I promise, they are orange and white. The history of this school is to be in motion, to evolve — our very reason for being was to disrupt the

status quo of the 1870s.” All of the aforementioned logos have been trees.

When asked whether the administration had considered consulting the student body, Ms. Simon responded by praising Ms. Bagby’s leadership of the school. “Since Ms. Bagby became head of school, we are proud of her authentic engagement with students, families, and colleagues,” she said. “That is incredibly important to us, and I think we have had more transparency than ever about institutional matters from principal searches to our finances to Ms. Bagby’s genuine, powerful and pointed talks in Upper School assemblies about the tensions and challenges we face in fostering a communal culture that dignifies every student and teacher. Students also routinely seek her out to share their perspectives on their experiences and the school culture.”

The Editors have made clear that the purpose of the petition and community mobilization around the old logo was to protest the process through which the new logo was created, not the engagement of the dedicated and mission-driven administrators at the school. Purportedly, the 2017 audit involved upwards of 50 interviews, some in group settings, more than 100 people and additional admissions surveys. However, a conspicuous detail omitted from this claim was the absence of student input — the current point of contention in the school community.

Gus Aronson ‘16, class alumni representative, wrote in an email to Ms. Bagby that “the tree logo represented a school that worked with students, teaching them, letting them grow into the people and community members they wanted to be; The new logo feels like the opposite — a school that manufactures students instead of letting them grow organically. The new logo looks corporate, indistinguishable from not only less unique and less empowering schools, but from companies and corporations. The old logo had its imperfections. Its geometry was beautiful, each little component of the tree representing a different facet of personhood that a student could grow into, not conforming the students to the same manufactured straight lines radiating from one absent core.” He added, “In the new logo I see infinite sameness.”

Ms. Bagby responded in to Aronson with an email that echoed her original announcement of the change, copying many sentences verbatim. Ms. Simon, in her response, also used much of the same prose. Ms. Bagby wrote, “At a time when we are trying to anchor the school more than ever in its founding mission, using an icon from our founding seemed right to us.” She added, “We’re tackling this on a number of fronts: adapting our admissions process, changing our editorial approach to news and stories, building new ways to talk more frequently and transparently with our current families and alumni. And, yes, updating our visuals. All of these efforts are informed by hundreds of meetings and interviews involving many people throughout our community.” The statement that “hundreds of meetings and interviews” seems to conflict with what Ms. Simon and Mr. Frost shared with the community. In response to Aronson’s statement about an “absent outreach process,” Ms. Bagby wrote, “That’s something that surely gives me pause. In a school as complex as ECFS, and with a community as large as ours, it’s impossible to bring every person into every conversation. Yet we want to engage those who are invested in our future; we want to draw on the immense experiences and perspectives of our community.”

Commenters on the petition ranged from current Ethical Culture and Fieldston Lower students to alums from the class of 1961. Peter Meyer, an alum, wrote “Class of ‘61 — and proud supporter of the broccoli.” Benjamin Hort, an alum, wrote, “As a graphic communications professional I do not like how the new logo looks. I did like the old one. I also feel it was a big waste of \$\$\$ to change it, especially since there was no discussion about it or good reason cited for the change.”

“Fieldston is built on community engagement,” said Alie Brussel Faria ‘17. “The process by which this logo came to be undermined the institution’s stated values. As well as, of course, the sun is ugly and corporate. It is saddening to see what Fieldston has become in the short time since I graduated. A school that I was so proud to go to now boasts of a fence and a corporate logo; it’s shameful.”

## The Fieldston News

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# Note from The Editors

Since publishing the editorial critical of the process through which the new logo was developed, we have received feedback regarding the means through which we've been voicing our opinion. We wanted to take this opportunity to respond to some of the feedback we've been given, and outline our intentions both in printing the article originally and sharing the petition with the community.

1) We have been encouraged to be highly respectful of Ms. Bagby as she helps steer our school to a bright future. We have nothing but respect for Ms. Bagby. Her dedication to our school and its mission is undeniable, and we don't view our actions as in any way contrary to her work. Ms. Bagby has created a space where students feel comfortable taking action and sharing their opinions. That is precisely what we are doing.

2) Staying respectful and clear has been our top priority, but we also have a voice as students and a right to use a student-run newspaper to voice our opinion. We have been told that "smart people put time into" developing the logo. However, we don't think that well-intentioned smart people are enough.

3) The Fieldston community was excluded. In a school that prides itself on debate, discussion, compromise, inclusion, transparency, equity and collaboration, we were left in the dark.

4) The school betrayed what we actively strive to teach. Fieldston prides itself on its community engagement, with students contributing to much of the curricula, hence why the logo coming out of nowhere was a shock.

5) The case against the tree was based on it being too childish. We are a child centered institution. The whole child is at the center of a Fieldston education. We watch children grow up to become mature young adults ready for the responsibility of citizenship. There is nothing childish about it.

6) If the tree was too childish, how is the sun not too corporate?

7) We weren't given a space to share these ideas. The process was flawed and the production was held from the community. This is not what we seek to achieve. This is not Fieldston.

## Opinion: Why the New Logo Should be Embraced

By ELIZA KELLY

On August 30, 2018, Head of School Jessica Bagby sent out an email to all ECFS families announcing a new school logo.

Although many changes have recently been made to the Upper School including a new principal, Nigel Furlonge, the installation of air conditioning in many classrooms, a freshly renovated Tate Library, and a new website in the works, all of the controversy has landed on the logo.

This disparity begs the questions: is it really the logo that people are upset about? Or, is it the newness, unfamiliarity, and change that comes with it?

Due to the general response the new logo has received, it seems as though no one knows the reasoning or meaning behind the change. The logo depicts several lines of different lengths forming together to form a sun-like circle which Bagby explained as a reference to the school's motto.

"As we looked for inspiration, we turned to our school seal and our motto, fiat lux, or let there be light," Bagby wrote. I love this motto for myriad reasons: not only does light enable us to see clearly, this dictum implies action — creating enlightenment through intellectual endeavor, contemplation, and moral will."

In addition, part of the design inspiration was a prior Fieldston logo.

What not many people may realize is that the new logo is simply a modernized version of one of the school's original logos. As a community, I believe we should embrace the new logo as we are embracing all of the other changes and be excited to be a part of this significant time in Fieldston's history.

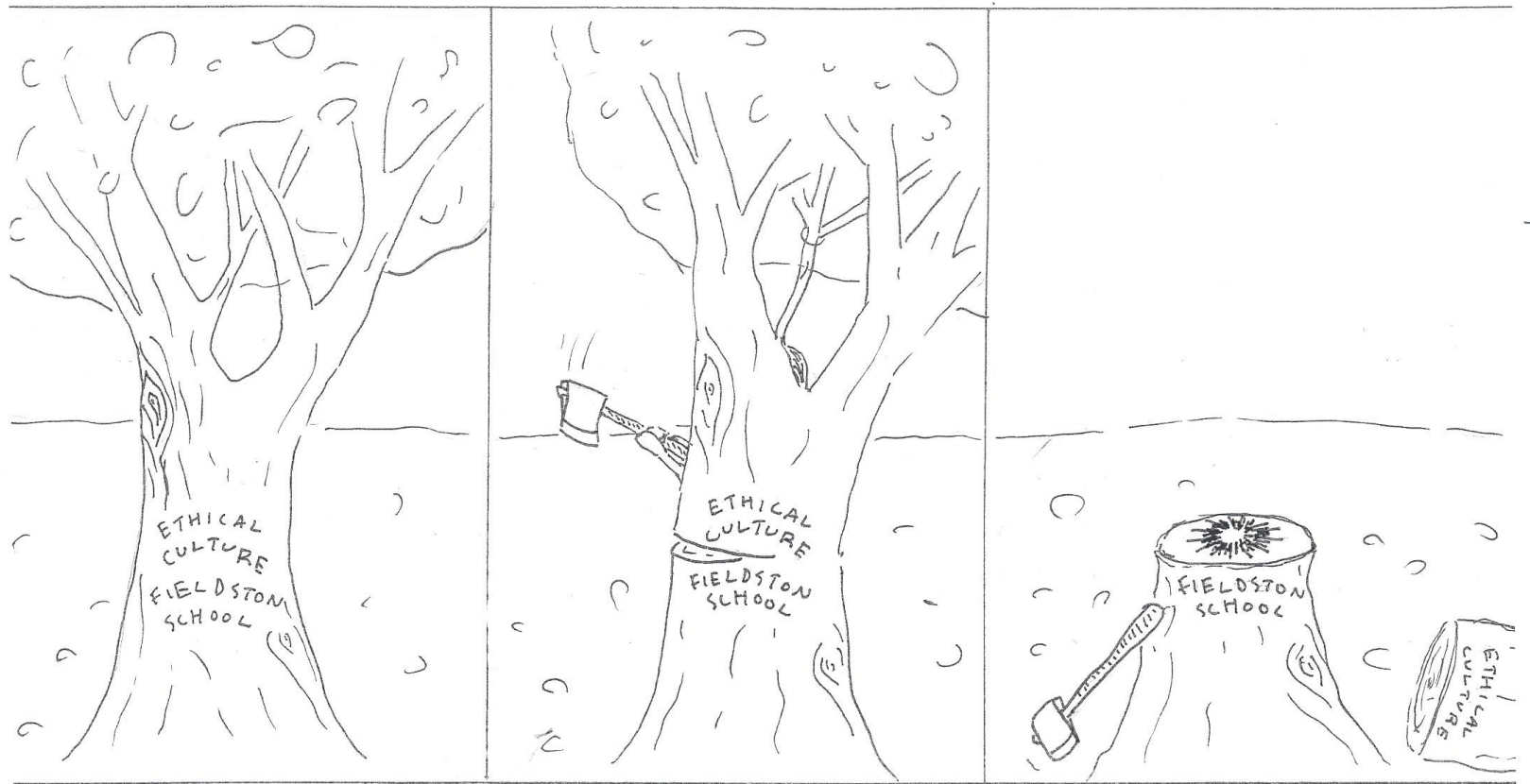
"The earliest depictions of the school seal feature fiat lux alongside a radiant sun and an open book," Bagby said. "We have taken that sun and redrawn it in a more



modern style — one that better matches the sophistication of our academic program. The individual lines of the sun come together to form one element, a reminder that we can be both many and one."

Let's play devil's advocate for a second, or just assume good intentions. The world around us is changing and developing, so our community is advancing with it. In

the end, it's really not the logo that people dislike so much; it's the fact that it is a change from what we are accustomed to seeing. Although it came as a shock to many students, generations of Fieldston students to come will see the sun as a representation of Fieldston in the same way we saw the tree.



CARTOON BY TEMA ZELDES-ROTH

## EDITORIAL: Save The Tree

By SAM CAPLAN FOR THE EDITORIAL BOARD

More suited for a biomedical supplements company or Sunset Home for the Elderly and Infirm than the Ethical Culture Fieldston School, our school's new logo is more than just a visual disgrace — its development runs contrary to our shared values and collective history. There was no indication of a problem with the traditional logo, no advertisement of the presence of a committee to reconsider our school's brand and no survey or proactive outreach to the community. The forced imposition of the logo was blunt, careless and condescending. It didn't have to be this way.

The development of a new school logo (had it been determined to be necessary) should have been an opportunity for community building. It should have brought the school together around what is only now being sold to the community as a recentering on our traditional slogan, *fiat lux* (let there be light), from the time of our founder, Felix Adler. We will not argue that the tree symbol is as important to the school as Adler; however, the tree is arguably more present and relevant to Fieldston community today than is the social reformer and educational leader.

Visually, more so than the "tree," this logo is elementary. The logo is *corporate*, perhaps an even more significant insult from within the Fieldston community. The logo

is said to be based on Fieldston's official seal, an open book with a sun above it. However, perhaps the reason the school moved away from the seal in the 20th century and towards the tree symbol may be its similarity to the seals of many higher educational institutions. The original seal is almost identical to those of Clark University and Bucknell University and similar to those of the University of Delaware, Middlebury College and Lehigh University. The sun, on the other hand, looks like an inverted PSEG logo, a Long Island and New Jersey utility company. In addition, the notion that the tree has been our symbol for only two decades is demonstrably false. An early iteration of the tree logo was present in a 1911 issue of *Inklings*, and a modernist tree logo represented the school through the mid 1990s. While the tree was affectionately known as the "broccoli," the new logo quickly gained a vulgar moniker that crudely refers to a well-concealed human orifice. To put it simply and more politely, no one likes it. *For fear of combining two controversies, the new logo appears to be the Fieldston Fence stretched around the circumference of a circle.*

The process has been anything but transparent, fair or ethical. The absence of any discussion proves that the logo development was done secretly, as to hide the change and

any discussion from the Fieldston community. At Fieldston, we have committees for committees. It took years to develop the Academic Integrity Board (AIB), a committee that ensures student commitment to honest work. At Fieldston, committees choose the summer reading book, plan Modified Awareness Days (MADs) and interview and recommend administrative leaders. Had the school developed the new logo in a process imbued with openness, student, faculty and alumni input would have been integral. This input was, in fact, integral for the selection of new chairs for the renovated Tate Library. For weeks, multiple chair, study carrel and table options were displayed in the Student Commons for community feedback. Our input mattered for these chairs, yet somehow not for the logo, which is the one image that represents our school. Instead, this purposeful subterfuge runs contrary to our values of integrity, inclusivity and dialogue.

This could have been done differently. In the absence of a timeline for this logo's development, we suggest what could have been a different path. In the Fall of the 2017-2018 school year, the administration could have sent out an email to the community describing its desire to have a conversation about our school's identity (or brand, image and marketing). Had we decided to refocus on the school's official

motto, *fiat lux*, we could have held a discussion regarding the ways in which we could reevaluate our mission, including reevaluating the logo. The school could have held a student design contest across divisions, with each division voting on its favorite. After, a final product could have been offered to the community as a whole and compared to the tree. A decision made in this manner would be one that reflects the desires of the school.

Instead, we are now left to pick up the pieces. A lot will change: the website has been updated with the new logo and design, every newly updated piece of signage will be replaced and all stationery, letterheads, materials and novelty PopSockets will be trashed. The rhetoric of a community-wide rededication to what are supposedly the original values of the school raises its own questions. If we needed to recommit ourselves to these values, where did we go wrong? Was it when the tree was selected as our logo? If not, isn't a cosmetic change to our branding merely a Band-Aid on a systemic problem that plagues the school? *If we truly want to recenter ourselves on the values evoked by "fiat lux," we suggest actually investing in their application rather than forcefully compelling the adoption of disingenuous ones.*