



Office of the President

April 2, 2019

Dear Hollins community,

Recently, photos have surfaced from yearbooks at a number of colleges and universities across the Commonwealth and elsewhere showing students made up in “blackface.” Stereotyping or otherwise misappropriating cultural traits or personal characteristics on the basis of race is never acceptable; “blackface” was and is a disgraceful attempt at entertainment that serves no other purpose than to insult and denigrate.

In an effort to understand what might have occurred in our past, Hollins University has undertaken its own internal research. We have found published in past editions of *The Spinster*, our school’s yearbook, images of some of our former students in blackface and similar makeup, along with racially insensitive cartoon drawings and other materials.

Regardless of the year and time, the intent, or the context, these materials are hurtful and disturbing, and they do not embody the values of our community. We unequivocally reject what these images symbolize and do not condone such conduct. The offensive depictions are limited to a few yearbooks; however, each issue of *The Spinster* that is housed in the Wyndham Robertson Library and Cromer Bergman Alumnae House will carry a [statement](#) acknowledging these racist portrayals of African Americans.

After careful consideration, and in an effort to limit the damage and pain those depictions might cause in our community, I have decided that for the time being, we will not exhibit the entire collection of *The Spinster* digitally on our website via Hollins Digital Commons. Digital access will be fully restored as soon as we develop and post educational information, which we expect to happen in the next few weeks, regarding the history and practice of blackface to help all of us understand why it is a racist and prejudicial practice.

Some members of our community will support this move while others will find this action excessive. I would never be so presumptuous as to believe that I have the only answer to this very delicate issue. But the one thing I *do* know is that small acts of injustice engender greater acts of injustice, just as small acts of compassion are the seeds of great ones. With that spirit in mind, I ask for your understanding and your support of Hollins.

Grappling with such issues from the past is difficult. But, if we are to evolve as a society and an institution of higher learning, we cannot ignore or hide from our past. Indeed, we must learn from it. To that end, in 2018, Hollins created the [Working Group on Slavery and Its Contemporary Legacies](#), which signifies our commitment to an open and honest dialogue about history, race, and diversity. Additionally, Hollins is a member of *Universities Studying Slavery*, a national coalition of colleges and universities working together to “address both historical and contemporary issues dealing with race and inequality in higher education....”

We must acknowledge how distressing such acts as “blackface” or racial misappropriations can be, and we must do the reparative work to continue to heal our community. We are confident in Hollins’ ability to learn and grow from honest reflection on race and racism on our campus and in the larger society in which we all live. Thank you all for being part of the solution to create a better future together.

Sincerely,

Pareena G. Lawrence
President