

April 3, 2019

Reconciling an institution's past with its present and desired future is never an easy task. Though all parties may share a desire for education and growth, disagreements about how best to engage with 175-plus years of history are inevitable. We at Hollins University are in the midst of such a disagreement, in regards to President Pareena Lawrence's decision to temporarily remove online access to some issues of *The Spinster*, the Hollins yearbook.

The [Hollins University Working Group on Slavery and Its Contemporary Legacies](#) and the [Wyndham Robertson Library](#) at Hollins strongly objected to President Lawrence's decision. While respecting her right to make this decision, the Working Group and Library both have, as foundational parts of their mission statements, a commitment to openness and accessibility. The following is an explanation of their objections.

The Working Group evolved in 2018 from the Hollins Heritage Committee (created in 2016) and is charged with "continuing to research and educate the public about Hollins University's historical connections to enslavement and the contemporary legacies of slavery on campus."

The library is the home of the institutional archive and is committed to "preserve and share the valuable materials entrusted to us to ensure their accessibility for future generations." This includes both the parts of that history we are proud of, such as the long-standing focus on women's education, and the parts we are not, which include such abhorrent acts as blackface.

While we support President Lawrence's goals of sharing educational information about the history and practice of blackface, learning from this history, and evolving as an institution and society, **we cannot and do not support any erasure of institutional history, even if only temporarily.**

The Library adheres to the American Library Association's Code of Ethics, in which we pledge to "uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources."

Hollins is a member of the organization [Universities Studying Slavery](#), and the Working Group has spearheaded Hollins University's efforts to work together with other institutions to "address both historical and contemporary issues dealing with race and inequality in higher education and in university communities." The Working Group greatly regrets that Hollins has not chosen to follow the lead of other institutions (examples include [Elon](#), [Emory](#), and [Baylor](#), among many others), in maintaining online access to racially hurtful yearbook photos while developing educational materials to accompany those images. Though cited in President Lawrence's memo, the Working Group did not advise or support the President's decision.

The Working Group and Library, though in disagreement with the course of action Hollins has taken as an institution, will continue to strive to serve their principles and the Hollins University mission to foster "independent inquiry and the free exchange of ideas."

As part of this commitment, the Working Group and the Library are currently engaged in collaborative work to develop the “educational information regarding the history and practice of blackface to help all of us understand why it is a racist and prejudicial practice,” as requested by President Lawrence.

Further, we recommend that the affected *Spinsters* promptly be made electronically accessible again. We also recommend that a statement appear on the electronic access page of *The Spinsters* archive, stating:

Hollins University has no intention of erasing or hiding from our institutional history. It is from this commitment to acknowledging and learning from painful, uncomfortable, and repugnant moments that we make all archival materials available. Images contained in the below digital content and original copies of University records include instances of blackface, depictions of racial or cultural appropriation, and other offensive images that are not condoned by the University. The Library and Working Group are engaged in and continuing the direct, collaborative, transparent, and on-going process of reconciliation and education, in coordination with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and administrators. Further material will be forthcoming.

On behalf of the Wyndham Robertson Library and the Working Group on Slavery and its Contemporary Legacies:

Jon Bohland, Associate Professor of International Studies and Co-Chair of the Working Group

Idella Glenn, Special Advisor on Inclusivity and Diversity and Co-Chair of the Working Group

Luke Vilelle, University Librarian

Maryke Barber, Public Services and Liaison Librarian and member of the Working Group

Karen Callaway, Hollins Store Supervisor and member of the Working Group

Courtney Chenette, Visiting Lecturer and member of the Working Group

Jenine Culligan, Director of the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum and member of the Working Group

Amy Duncan, Student and member of the Working Group

Beth Harris, Archivist and Special Collections Librarian and member of the Working Group

Coleman Holth, Library Technical Services Assistant

Maria Jdid, Student and member of the Working Group

Taylor Kenkel, Technical Services and Metadata Librarian

William Krause, Associate Professor of Music and member of the Working Group

James Miller, IT and Liaison Librarian

Lee Rose, Acquisitions Coordinator and Assistant to the University Librarian

Karen Ryan, Library Circulation Coordinator

Rebecca Seipp, Outreach and Liaison Librarian

Lilla Thompson, Library Interlibrary Services Coordinator