



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

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Dear Students, Faculty and Staff,

As we work toward fostering a more diverse and inclusive learning community, I want to share an important update regarding the Gish Film Theater.

For more than 40 years, the theater, named in honor of actresses Dorothy and Lillian Gish, was located in Hanna Hall. In 2017, the decision was made to move the theater to the Bowen-Thompson Student Union in preparation for renovations to accommodate the new home of the College of Business. Much of the work on the signage and display space for Gish memorabilia was recently completed at its new location.

As noted in the display outside the theater, Lillian Gish starred in *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915. Directed by D.W. Griffith, the film portrays the United States in the Civil War and Reconstruction era, and is widely recognized as racist and discriminatory, advancing and inflaming the prejudicial stereotypes of the time period. The controversial film and its commercial success is believed to have helped revive the Ku Klux Klan.

Last week, the leaders of our Black Student Union, as well as other individuals, expressed their concerns about the propriety of the naming.

I sincerely thank them for raising this issue.

I can unequivocally affirm that the values and the views expressed in the film do not align with those of Bowling Green State University.

Building a just learning community requires effort and commitment by each of us. Many regard Ms. Gish as the greatest actress of the silent film era and may also argue that she should be judged by the totality of her work according to the values of the time in which she lived.

However, I believe her close ties to Griffith and her involvement in *The Birth of a Nation* requires us to reassess the naming of the Gish Film Theater.

I believe we should embrace the ideals of what we expect of our strong learning community — one that has evolved, grown together and intentionally chooses every day to be better. In these tough circumstances, we are called to engage in dialogue, reflect and work to understand the historical complexities of this naming.

To broaden the conversation, our Black Student Union will host a town hall at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow, February 21, in 210 Mathematical Sciences Building. I hope you attend and join this critical discussion.

In addition, I have asked Dr. Ray Craig, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, to lead a task force of students, faculty, staff and other University stakeholders to deliver a recommendation regarding this issue prior to the Board of Trustees meeting in May. It is the charge of this group to address not only the Gish Film Theater naming, but also how we use this opportunity to better position our university to face similar issues. I plan to update you regarding outcomes at the conclusion of this process.

This is an educational opportunity for us. We will be more thoughtful as we conduct our due diligence in naming our facilities and programs.

Together, we are meeting this moment head on and holding fast to our values. As a 21st-century public university, we must help create the type of society that we wish for all members of our learning community.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rodney K. Rogers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Rodney K. Rogers, Ph.D.
President