

FORGET ME NOT
A MEMORIAL ORGANIZED AND WRITTEN FOR THE ENSLAVED
WOMEN, MEN, AND CHILDREN OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE

An ensemble work created by the students of
Art History 347 Forget Me Not: Visual Culture of Memorials
Washington and Lee University
Spring 2022

In front of the memorial garden

[Student] Robinson's will. The neatly typed transcript of this document would have been easier to read, but I opted to read the original handwritten copy—closely following the intricacies of Robinson's handwriting, the push and pull of his stylus on that very paper. I found it so ironic how I was appreciating Robinson's script, his human trace on paper, his words—arched and looped—beautiful yet cruel.
Lyrically written words sharply cutting me to my core.
Bequeathing 87 human beings—women, men, and children to Washington College.
Coldly denying so many their own humanity and freedom
Despicable.
I will struggle with this for the rest of my life.

[Student] A memorial.
A plaque.
A marker.
A list.
An excuse?

Tucked away, out of sight, out of mind.
How can we better pay tribute to these human beings:
mothers, fathers, children, brothers, sisters

[Students] Sold, rented, abused, raped, forgotten.

[Student] Some will insist that there were good slave owners—kind and just to their slaves,
that slavery is a human institution softened, warmed by human relations.

All: No.

As students say this section each speaker moves from the audience to the front of the memorial area

[Student] Slavery is not an institution of choice or benevolence.
[Student] Slavery always involves violence
[Student] degradation
[Student] exploitation
[Student] cruelty
[Student] control
[Student] force for the enslaved.
[Student] While we cannot change what happened,
[Student] While we cannot change how these human beings were treated,
[Student] We can remember

All: Their names, humanity, and dignity.

[Student] Yet sympathizing is not enough to ever comprehend the pain of those who have
Vanished, disappeared, have been forgotten.
People who were worth everything, and yet listed as “worth nothing.”
People who were not seen as deserving of happiness, but were given
to others “for their own happiness” and their own gain.
People who were put under price tags and labels of worth

Words are not enough to express the heartache that comes with such revelation,
Words are not enough to show the pain of outsiders like me,

All: like us

[Student] who can never understand fully

[Student] who can never console the pain of 20-year-old Charlotte and her 8- or 9-year-old son, John.
(*Offerings of daisies begins*)

[Student] Or of Ben her husband, who was not sold with them.

[Student] Or of Landon, 41 years old and nearly blind,
but he can still be used
to beat out corn.

[Student] Stephen, Daniel.

[Student] And Milly, who was just 19 years old. It was only a few months ago that I was 19 and my
worries were/are nothing compared to what Milly was burdened with. She had a two-year-
old daughter, Rachel. They were not sold together as a family.

Milly was never given the opportunity to be a young girl.
She deserved so much more. And for that Milly, I will be forever sorry.

Milly made me realize that it doesn't matter if I'm not an American, it doesn't matter if her
story isn't part of the history I claim.

The fact that it happened is enough.
Enough for me to know your name,
Enough for action to be taken to memorialize you and your daughter in some way,
Enough for you to be recognized as an individual.

I know that Milly is not defined by her choiceless enslavement.
I know that Milly was a girl who had hopes and dreams, who suffered beyond
comprehension.

She was a girl, a mother.
Her name is Milly.

[Student] Rachel, her daughter, was two years old at the time the Robinson contract was written. In
total there are 25 children under the age of 10 in this will—several of whom are hired out to
strangers for a year at a time.

25 children under ten.
The youngest is 3 months. His name is Simeon.
He's listed at 40 dollars, a 3-month-old child.

[Student] It is not clear who his parents were, but he is grouped with
Dick, 2
Celia, 6

[Students take turns reciting names]
There are so many others whose stories, whose losses, pain, we can only imagine
Ben, 9
Tempe, 7
Chapman, 2
Stephen, 1
Isaac, 8
Silvia, 6
James, 2
Martha, 1
John, 3
Daniel, 1
Amorilla, 9
Claibourne, 7
Pompey, 6
Eda, 3
Matilda, 8
Tom, 2
Staples, son of Nancy, 1
Robert, son of Suckey, 3
Jefferson, son of Suckey, 1
Eliza of Nancy, 3

[Student] I wonder how the person felt who wrote this cold inventory of people. What did he feel
when he wrote the words "worth nothing" next to Creasy's name, who was 68
or Suckey, 57, also "worth nothing,"
and Nero, who has a clubbed foot, and "worth nothing."

Did the enslavers ever imagine what it would like to be:
auctioned, sold, rented, traded, given?

[Students] Charles, Daniel, Robin, Barney, Tom, Isaac, Keziah, Barbara, Edmund, Tom Bowyer, Moses
Miller, Adam, Jerry Quarles, Stephen, James, Mary, Henry 16 years old, Eliza 14 years,
Louisa 12, Mary Ann 10, Frank, 30
Rowland, Gabriel, Ben (son of Dave), Moses (son of Dave), Andy (son of Dave)

[Student] What happened to Dave, their father? He is nowhere in these records or documents.
[Student] There are not enough words on this earth to explain the anger when learning how humanity
was stolen because of the color of their skin.

There are no words, there are only names.

[Students] Suckey, Ben McCluer, Rachel (wife of Ben), John, Nancy (wife of John), Sarah Ann (child of Nancy), Jerry, Elsey, blind, Edmund, Dick, Albert, Caroline, Peter *sold to Nicholas Jones for \$400*
Polly (Peter's wife), Stephen (their son) 12 years, Dick McCollum, Hannah, Sam, Dick Philips, Sally (his wife)
Jack, Reuben, Billy, George Eubank, George, Charlotte (Ben's wife), Robert, Peter Porter

[Student] And what of other enslaved laborers not part of Robinson's will? There were others, many others, but we do not know how many. Enslaved individuals of faculty members, trustees, and students were on this campus as were those who the college "rented." The stain of slavery is far beyond this one contract.

[Student] During the fall, I would sit on these benches every day after my 9:45 class to call my mom. This marker, this memorial-that isn't a memorial-in the center of my vision and yet, unseen. The truth is I never really thought about it, I never considered it-- until now.

Becoming aware of all these people, their names, their lives, the layers of suffering and loss that each individual symbolizes is a beginning to acknowledging and healing. I am motivated to rewrite the narrative of how these individuals' lives--through labor or sale--built so much of this university.

How is it possible I did not know?

[Student] But now I know, I sleep on grounds where there were human rights violations. I'm angry.
But I believe this anger can be used and turned into something positive.

The truth is, we all know now, we are all aware and we know their names. I can almost feel the snowball effect beginning, and just being a freshman is exciting because I have 3 more years to contribute to a positive history.

[Student] Meaningful change can happen. And it starts with caring and remembering.

(all move forward to the front—look out to audience)

[Student] While we cannot change what happened
While we cannot change how these human beings were treated,
We can remember

All: Their names, humanity, and dignity.

[Student] Here, at this place,
Let this become hallowed ground.
Let their memories be sacred.

Students: Jackson Flower '25, Valentina Giraldo Lozano '25, Sherman Golden '23, Jack Hardage '22, Ana Hauser '25, Cross Kennedy '24, Caroline Linen '25, Alyssah McGuire '25, Elyssa McMaster '22, Thomas Pangburn '25, Lindsey Price '25, Janie Spedale '25, Bruce Tickner '22, Haleigh Tomlin '22, Gus Wise '22, Ann Wolter '23, Manuela Zapata '24, Quinlin Zunk '25