

The Archives, Law and Us

(April 2025)

WE IN THE SOCIETY FOR TEXTUAL SCHOLARSHIP CONCERN OURSELVES daily with both the minutiae and the large questions of our disciplines, from textual variants to transnational and historical trends that span centuries. Though we would greatly prefer to remain at work in the archives and at our desks, today conscience summons us to speak out against the illegitimate and profoundly damaging acts of a US administration that puts our work and the very principles that govern and drive it — the preservation and interpretation of the documentary record of the past and the safeguarding of this record for the future — in peril.

On 7 February 2025, for the first time in the history of the National Archives, its director, Colleen J. Shogan, was fired without cause. Donald Trump's summary dismissal of Dr. Shogan appears to have been the product of his personal resentment and vengeance against the National Archives for providing, as required by law, evidence of his theft and illegal retention of highly classified documents, a case which — unlike his 34 felony convictions — never even went to trial. Dr. Shogan's firing created an aporia at the center of the vast archive that cannot be filled by Marco Rubio, Acting Incumbent Director since February 16, 2025. We call upon the US Administration to reverse the illegitimate firing of Dr. Shogan and to reinstate her and her staff immediately. While it is responsible for preserving government and founding documents from the Declaration of Independence to Acts of Congress and presidential records, the National Archive is more than just a passive repository: organizing and sheltering literally billions of records belonging ultimately to the American people, the National Archives has been rightly described as “the Nation's memory”. Today, these records — this memory — is in danger not, as Archivists and Textual Scholars so often find, from unconscious fluctuations in the elements — changes in temperature and humidity, exposure to light, air pollution, and water damage — or even from biological agents such as mold or insects — but rather from their abuse and mishandling by the President of our nation and his willing collaborators.

In the wake of Dr. Shogan's firing, the Trump administration continued its destructive efforts, illegally abolishing seven Congressionally approved agencies, two of which directly affect scholars: the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for

Scholars in the Smithsonian Institution. More egregiously, in its quest to root out any presence that is not white and non-dissenting, the Trump administration has violently harassed our colleagues, deporting lawful permanent residents and visa holders, usually of Muslim faith or descent. The cases of Dr. Mahmoud Khalil at Columbia University and Dr. Rasha Alawieh, the latter a kidney transplant specialist and professor at Brown University, have now demonstrated the Trump administration's brazen willingness to defy orders of federal district courts, negating the very rule of law. Border czar Tom Homan has declared "I don't care what the judges think". Subsequent deportations and threats of deportation — even of American citizens — conducted without constitutionally guaranteed legal due process have put every one of us at risk if we do not abide by what the Administration has called "proper ideology".

As this issue of *Textual Cultures* was in the final stages of being typeset, on May 9, Trump fired Dr. Carla D. Hayden, the Librarian of Congress. Confirmed by the United States Senate in 2016 and a highly qualified professional in her field, Dr. Hayden was the first woman and African American to serve in the role of Librarian of this venerable institution. Dismissed without cause in a two-sentence email, Dr. Hayden's only 'infractions' seem to have been her race, her professional commitment to public service, and her devotion to making America's oldest government-run cultural institution and the largest library in the world work better on behalf of all the American people. Her expertise in library science will be substituted by an attorney whose sole 'expertise' is in his loyalty and servitude to Trump's legal defense. By the time this issue of *Textual Cultures* sees the light of print, we will likely have borne witness to still additional heart-breaking dismissals designed to demoralize scholarly communities and degrade the American public's access to the truth and reliable information.

Acts such as these reveal a President hell-bent on making the conditions in which we and our colleagues try to work and live reduced to the suffocating environment of an authoritarian state. Although we put ourselves at risk by speaking now, the risk of not speaking is exponentially greater. We vehemently denounce the lawlessness of these acts and their perpetrator, and we stand with those colleagues and students whose intellectual freedoms have been abrogated and whose personal liberties threatened.

We pledge that The Society of Textual Scholarship and our journal *Textual Cultures* are and will be places of opposition to authoritarian policies and actions and without fear provide sanctuary for the work and

views of scholars at risk and dissenting voices. And we fervently call upon all our colleagues, readers, and contributors to bear witness to the plight of those affected by the illegal acts of an illegitimate administration and to fight alongside us to restore and preserve the freedoms that promote open access to information and open research and debate from all quarters of our societies regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age.

In solidarity,

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