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Opinion

UGA: Article misrepresents university's actions concerning reinterment of remains

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Profoundly disappointed. That is our reaction to a March 21 *Athens Banner-Herald* article that misrepresents the facts about the reinterment of remains discovered during the expansion of Baldwin Hall and the University of Georgia's efforts to treat these individuals with respect and dignity more than one year ago.

The article reports on an effort by some in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate to label the University's decisions in this process as unilateral, irresponsible and unethical. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I will not rehash all of the events of a year ago, but I will hit the most important points in this summary — much of which was omitted in the story.

- Upon discovery of the remains in November 2015, the University immediately halted construction and contacted law enforcement authorities. When it was determined no crime had been committed, the project then fell under the jurisdiction of the State Archaeologist's Office for oversight.

- The University of Georgia followed the guidance of the State Archaeologist's Office every step of the way, from discovery to reinterment. The head of the office even wrote a letter to the University affirming that the University had acted properly and fully complied with all requirements — a letter that was provided to the *Athens Banner-Herald* one year ago.

- The State Archaeologist's Office provided three key instructions as guidance for reinterment:

- That the cemetery be close to the original burial site. Oconee Hill is the closest cemetery to Old Athens Cemetery and was its successor in the 1800s.

- That the remains be reburied individually. Each of the remains was carefully catalogued and placed in an individual funeral box.

- And that the remains be arranged as closely as possible to the original burial configuration so as not to inadvertently separate family members. This was done.

- The University consulted with several elected leaders of the local African-American community about this process. The *Athens Banner-Herald* included letters and quotes by some of these individuals, expressing appreciation for the University's handling of this matter, in its ongoing coverage of the story last year.

- On March 20, 2017, we facilitated a service of reinterment. Two prominent members of the local Athens community, U.S. District Court Judge Steve Jones and Reverend Winfred Hope, joined President Morehead and spoke at this solemn and respectful service. More than 200 individuals joined us for this remembrance.

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